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From Carnism to Veganism: “once I knew, I didn’t want to have *any* part in it whatsoever”

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Abstract

Widespread and intensive animal agriculture practices generate extreme suffering and have devastating environmental consequences; thus, veganism is a significant and timely social justice movement. On an individual level, becoming and being vegan can have far-reaching emotional and social consequences. This research aims to explore the experiences of the transition to veganism and of being vegan in a hegemonic meat culture. Assuming a Critical Animal Studies standpoint, personal narrative analysis was used to explore the stories of 12 vegans. Apparent was that the transition to veganism consists of various pathways involving a disruption in some form, critical awareness, engagement in moral reflexivity, and ultimately a determination made on the basis of core beliefs. The characteristic of openness and the personal value of justice appear to be critical in facilitating this process. Once vegan, experiences are generally different to participants' previous expectations of veganism. They report hoping that the sharing of their practice on an individual level can lead to broader social transformation by offering examples of new ways of living and counter-discourses to the norm of carnism.

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To the animal victims of carnism: We see you, we care, we are trying, we are sorry.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

"Let us use our brain to move toward compassion and away from cruelty, to feel empathy rather than cold indifference, to feel animals' pain in our hearts."

(Bekoff, 2012, p. 193)

Yost's (2009) illustrated comic "Roadtrip", tells the story of two journeys. One taken by a young girl and the other, a young calf. Juxtaposed against the story of a pleasant family day-trip for the girl, is the story of the calf. Humans separate the calf from her mother shortly after she is born, and she ultimately suffers a horrifying and violent death. The two protagonists eventually encounter each other through a children's fast-food meal. This story illuminates the cruelty we are perhaps unknowingly passively complicit in through our everyday choices and challenges how anthropocentric perspectives obscure unpleasant realities. It reminds us that food does not arrive on our plates innocuously; instead, it is a consequence of numerous processes of power and oppression which make the animals we are surrounded by invisible.

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) assert that values and underlying assumptions are impossible to separate from research and researcher. Values, like words, can be nuanced and hold diverse meanings to different people, or groups of people. For non-vegans, the following research invites a peek through a vegan lens. The concept of the generation of knowledge from within a particular identity ties fundamentally to feminist theory, particularly that of standpoint methodologies (Smith, 1987). Feminists have championed research emphasising women's experiences as a source of expertise, with consideration for their perspectives from within political and social frameworks (DeVault, 1990). This research applies those principles to those who self-identify as being vegan.

Despite growing numbers of vegans (The Vegan Society, 2019), there continues to be strong cultural and social resistance to veganism, and vegans remain an underrepresented and marginalised group. Thus, as will become vivid, becoming and being vegan has significant personal, social, and cultural impacts. As an understanding of veganism is impossible to separate from individual vegan experience, this research seeks to respond to two key questions. Firstly, what leads some individuals to transition from carnism to veganism? Secondly, what are the experiences of being vegan in a non-vegan world?

This chapter sets out the rationale for the importance and timeliness of this research by situating the areas of interest within relevant commercial, historical, social, and cultural contexts. Included is a brief introduction to veganism and the system it challenges, which is carnism. The alternatives offered by veganism are critical to consider against present-day human use of non-human animals and some consequences of this. Finally, a brief explanation of each chapter outlines the structure of the research.

1.1. Carnism: A Brief Introduction

Veganism is notable not least because of the dominance, power, and scale of the system it openly rejects. According to Joy (2010), vegans are often considered by non-vegans to be the only group that brings their belief system "to the table". This claim fails to recognise that non-vegans too have a belief system. Carnism is a term coined by Joy (2010) to describe the ideology most people are born into. Carnism is the ideology which conditions and endorses the eating of some animals and not others. According to Joy (2010), carnism has not been named until recently because it is easier to recognise belief systems that fall outside of mainstream, dominant belief systems. Carnism is so pervasive that the practices underlying it are considered common sense, rather than a set of shared beliefs, whose invisibility as belief represents the function of ideology at its finest. However, carnism is a violent ideology, which sanctions widespread, intensive, and unnecessary harm towards animals. It enables unjust practices of oppression and power (Joy, 2010). The next chapter investigates, in further detail, the ideology of carnism and the mechanisms which underlie it.

Animal welfare and treatment are receiving considerable attention as farming practices become increasingly intensified to meet population and diet demands. Current meat production is almost five times higher than in the early 1980s. This ever-growing demand is primarily due to population growth, rising incomes, and increasingly meat centred diets (Weis, 2013). Animal agriculture is also largely subsidised and endorsed by many governments (Simon, 2013). Bar-On et al. (2018) estimated biomass components on Earth, discovering that farmed poultry make up some 70% of birds, with only 30% thus representing wild birds. "Livestock" overall, make up 60% of all mammals, where the remaining 36% are humans, with wild animals making up only four percent. Humans kill around 65 billion land animals annually worldwide (Ritchie & Roser, 2019), as well as trillions of marine animals, including unintentional bycatch of animals such as dolphins, turtles, and whales. That means land animals are killed by humans at a rate of around 179 million each day (Ritchie & Roser, 2019).

Animals are now mainly bred and raised in ways that manipulate and exploit their reproductive systems and bodies, generating profound suffering in pursuit of profit. Dairy cows currently produce up to 12 times the volume of milk than they would naturally produce to feed their calf, putting enormous stress on their bodies (Lyons et al., 1991). They often experience painful conditions as a result, such as mastitis (Steeneveld et al., 2008). Chickens naturally lay about 10 to 15 eggs per year. However, selective breeding means “laying chickens” now lay more than 300 each year, depleting them of vital nutrients and resulting in various painful conditions such as impacted eggs which typically go untreated (Rodriguez, 2011). Similarly, “broiler” or “meat” chickens have been selectively bred for large-scale, efficient meat production (Turner et al., 2005).

Chickens are the most frequently killed animals for consumption (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016). Although chicken cognition and sentience are under-examined areas of research, the available literature indicates that chickens are likely to be much more intelligent than commonly assumed. They display complex social structures, communication, learning, behavioural flexibility, empathy, planning ability, and self-control (Nicol, 2015). Chickens outperform human toddlers, dogs, and cats in various cognitive and behavioural assessments (Friedrich, 2013). As with other animals, chicken farming has mainly become industrialised and, as a result, these sensitive, intelligent individuals are bred into lives of abject suffering. According to an ASPCA white paper (2015), broiler chickens are to be “bred to suffer” (p. 2). “Breeders” are subjected to forced ejaculation and impregnation repeatedly until their young bodies pass peak profitability. Mothers are deprived of nesting on a clutch of eggs, nurturing, and teaching offspring, who are taken from them, artificially incubated and hatched. These chicks experience psychological pain as a result of the deprivation of the emotional comfort of sheltering in their mothers' wings (Panksepp et al., 1980). Like many “farmed animals”, their separation cries for their mothers go unmet.

Chickens in natural conditions live up to fifteen years of age (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016). Broilers reach slaughter size at around 56 days old (Turner et al., 2005). Selective breeding and feed management results in enormous stress on their undeveloped bodies. They are typically housed in large, over-crowded concrete sheds with no access to the outdoors, earth, or sunlight (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016). Broiler chickens often die from heart failure (Bessei, 2006), experience skeletal dysfunction due to oversized bodies being too heavy for their juvenile legs (Vestergaard & Sonatra, 1999), ocular dysfunction from artificial light, dim or continuous darkness (Lauber & Kinnear, 1979), foot lesions,

breast blisters, and soiled plumage from immobility, crowded, and unsanitary conditions (Bessei, 2006). Research suggests that most broilers find walking painful (McGeown et al., 1999). Commonly lameness results in the inability to access food and protracted, painful deaths (Turner et al., 2005). The process of roughly hand catching, packing, and transporting chickens for slaughter can result in severe stress, injury, and death from suffocation or thermal stress from overcrowding (Turner et al., 2005). At the slaughterhouse, survivors are "aggressively slammed into shackles, upside down" (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016, p. 111). This rough handling of their frequently deformed bodies is undoubtedly terrifying and extremely painful, often resulting in broken and dislocated limbs (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016). Research using electroencephalograms (EEGs) finds that electric paralysing generally does not render poultry unconscious or insensible to pain (Shields & Raj, 2010), resulting in traumatic, excruciating, and prolonged deaths. They are shackled by the feet, dragged to often unsuccessful electrocution, and eventual throat-cutting while they are often still conscious. Their blood then drains out of their mouths (Eisnitz, 2009). They are then boiled to facilitate wing plucking. This process assumes that slaughter is managed correctly.

> More often than not, it is done haphazardly … animals that are flapping around or improperly hung in the shackles, as they often are, and miss the waterbath paralyzer. When that happens, the animals will end up getting sliced someplace other than their neck – their check cavity may be ripped open or a wing or leg sliced off while the animal is still completely conscious. Then, they are boiled alive. (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016, p. 114)

As well as breeding billions of individuals into lives of intense and needless suffering, the continuation and growth of the exploitation of animals have vast environmental, health, social, political, and economic consequences. Poore and Nemecek's (2018) undertook a five-year analysis on the relationship between farming and the environment, analysing data from almost 40,000 farms in 119 countries. This study is the most comprehensive on the topic to date. They found that although animal agriculture provides only 18% of calories, it takes up 83% of farmland. Poore, who led the research, reportedly stated that a vegan diet is likely to be the single most significant way to reduce one's impact on Earth (Petter, 2018). Impacts include greenhouse gas emissions, global acidification, eutrophication, land, and water use. A large body of literature also links animal exploitation with the growing threat of climate change (Springmann et al., 2018; Springmann et al., 2016; Willett et al., 2019). Wilcox et al. (2016) found that approximately 46% of the ocean plastic in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch comprises of fishing nets.

They state: “When compared to other consumer items discarded in the ocean, fishing gear clearly poses the greatest ecological threat.” (p. 112). This 46% does not include other abandoned fishing gear such as pots, lines, traps, and buoys which also pose a substantial threat to marine animals such as sea turtles.

Consumer habits of wealthy nations deplete and damage environmental and economic resources often in the poorest of countries. Of the world's starving children, 82% live in countries where crop food is sold and fed to animals eaten by Western countries (Oppenlader, 2011). Animal flesh consumption is incredibly inefficient, for example, poultry, the most resource-efficient source of meat, wastes approximately ten calories for every calorie produced (Friedrich & Wilson, 2016). Grain produced globally is enough to feed twice the current human population, however currently half, including 77% of coarse grains (corn, oats, barley, and sorghum), and over 90% of all soy, is fed to animals in the dairy and meat industries (Oppenlader, 2013). However, it is not then an issue of supply; it is more complicated than a simple redistribution of food, but rather, relates to entrenched cycles of farming the poorest of countries. For example, in Ethiopia, more than 40% of the population suffers from hunger or starvation, and fresh water is scarce, yet they have one of the largest cattle herds globally, who consume food, water, and increasingly require land, accessed through deforestation (Oppenlader, 2013).

From a nutrition perspective, mainstream health organisations are moving more towards recommending and endorsing the health-supporting benefits of plant-based diets. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Health's (2019) report on Sustainability and the Health Sector also endorses these benefits. Extensive research links animal product consumption with health problems, including the most prolific causes of ill-health and early death: heart disease and cancer (Chao et al., 2005; Sinha et al., 2009; Wang & Beydoun, 2009). The position statement of the world’s largest organisation of and nutrition professionals, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, representing over 100,000 credentialed practitioners is that:

> appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes. (Melina et al., 2016, p. 1970).

1.2. Veganism: A Brief Introduction

Philosophers have long questioned the ways humans treat non-human animals and what the consequences of this are for humanity (Linzey & Clarke, 2005). There is evidence of people choosing to avoid the consumption of animals as far back as over 2,000 years ago. It is important to note that modern dairy and egg farming did not develop until the 1900s, so historic "vegetarian" diets would have resembled modern veganism. Around 500 BCE, Greek philosopher Pythagoras promoted compassion amongst all species and followed a vegetarian diet (Ryder, 1983), and Siddhārtha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, was discussing vegetarian diets with his followers. In the sixth century BCE, Jainism advocated non-violence ('Ahimsa') towards animals (Rankin, 2018). Christian theologians like Tolstoy have concluded that the Bible endorses abstinence from animal products using biblical hermeneutics. By 1806 CE, Dr William Lambe and Percy Bysshe Shelley were amongst the first Europeans to openly object to eggs and dairy on ethical grounds. This historical context counters mainstream narratives which suggest that concern for animals is a recent, Western, atheistic phenomenon.

In 1944, Donald Watson, a Vegan Society founder, called a meeting with five other non-dairy vegetarians. The group felt a concise new word was needed, and they settled on 'vegan', the first three and last two letters of 'vegetarian'. In 1949, Leslie J Cross suggested a definition of veganism: "[t]he principle of the emancipation of animals from exploitation by man". The definition has altered slightly over the years, and from 1988 has been:

> a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. (The Vegan Society, 2019).

Veganism is often associated with diet; however, diet is only one aspect of the ideology. For vegans, the primary motivation is the avoidance of harm, or non-maleficence, to non-human animals and potentially, but not necessarily, secondary motivations of reduced environmental impact and health benefits. Veganism denotes opposition to oppression, exploitation, and violence against non-human animals. However, with rising awareness and the increasing popularity of veganism, there have been some uses of the term "vegan" which fall outside of the definition outlined by The Vegan Society. Thus, some people who self-identify as "vegan" do not meet this definition. Greenebaum (2012) discusses

various groups of vegans, distinguishing between “health vegans”, “environmental vegans”, and “ethical vegans”. A health vegan is someone who follows a plant-based diet to improve physical health, and an environmental vegan is someone who is opposed to the environmental impact of animal agriculture. These groups of vegans, however, are not primarily concerned with animal rights and do not necessarily incorporate veganism into other areas of their lives. For example, they may purchase products made from animal skin or cosmetics tested on animals. Therefore, “plant-based" is a more accurate description that relates primarily to dietary choice. Ethical vegans are said by Greenebaum (2012) to follow a lifestyle structured around the philosophy of animal rights, of which the diet only forms a part, and have stronger convictions to remaining vegan (Menzies & Sheeshka, 2012).

These differentiations are value-laden and are a source of much debate within the vegan community. Some argue that any reduction in animal suffering is positive and should be encouraged (Ball, 2006; Dawn, 2008; Torres & Torres, 2010) and that the assumptions of veganism as an ethical decision silences the experience those who identify as vegan for other reasons (Wright, 2015). Others argue that veganism is inextricably linked with animal rights (Francione, 2009). The current research aligns the term “vegan” to the definition created by The Vegan Society who also conceptualised the term. Therefore, the term “vegan” in the current research assumes “ethical vegan”, with animal rights as a primary motivation unless otherwise specified.

1.2.1. A Growing Social Justice Movement

Despite industry often working to conceal certain practices, growing awareness of environmental, health concerns, and the cruelty involved in animal agriculture, is being aided through the work of activists, increasing social media, and internet use. Ethical consumerism is growing in popularity with increasing awareness of the environmental and health impacts of animal products, helping to aid the mainstreaming of veganism (Pendergrast, 2016). Global economies, markets and industries are set to be impacted by changing food demands. It has been estimated by AT Kearney, that by 2040, only 40% of people worldwide will be consuming meat from killed non-human animals. They predict that 35% consuming lab meat and 25% consuming vegan meat replacements (AT Kearney, 2019). Companies like Sainsbury’s and America’s largest meat producer, Tyson Foods, are heavily investing in plant-based meat replacements and alternatives (Purdy, 2017). Google search trends show a marked global increase in vegan searches between 2004 and 2018, with top regions including Australia and New Zealand (*Google Trends*, 2019).

In the last three years, there has been a 600% increase in people who identify as vegan in the United States and a 350% increase in the United Kingdom compared to a decade ago (The Vegan Society, 2019). Young people appear to be driving this phenomenon. In the United Kingdom, people aged 15-34 made up 42% of vegans, suggesting a dramatic generational shift in consumer attitudes and behaviours, which could lead to significant changes in the types and variety of products available (The Vegan Society, 2019). Increasingly convenient and accessible choices, and the presence of more vegans, make previously unconsidered practices more visible, potentially facilitating greater awareness around purchasing decisions.

1.2.2. A Misunderstood Social Justice Movement

As will be detailed in the next chapter, despite the growth, increased visibility, and compelling reasons for a decision to adopt veganism, vegans remain a stigmatised, misrepresented, and marginalised group (Aavik, 2019; Bryant, 2019; Cole & Morgan, 2011). Vegan coverage, by media and academia alike, is often conveyed through non-vegan perspectives. This practice inevitably results in the filtering of the non-dominant group message through the dominant group lens, bolstering of the dominant group position, including industry interests, and invalidation of the non-dominant group position. As such, commentary of vegans and veganism itself is often obfuscated and misleading (Cole, 2008). This inaccuracy results in the silencing of vegan perspectives and a distortion of a social justice movement that is more relevant and urgent than any other time in history.

1.3. Research Objectives

Although the definition of veganism may appear to be straight forward, it does not account for the complex cultural, geographical, social, and relational dynamics resulting from the choice to become vegan. Vegans operate within specific cultural, personal, social, and political contexts, which impact on, and interact with the experience of becoming and being vegan. Given the current context and exponential growth in veganism, it is timely to explore the experiences of those who have gone through this ideological shift to discover more about what prompted their shift to veganism, as well as their experiences of being vegan in a hegemonic meat orientated culture. The aim of conducting this research is to gain insight, collect, and produce rich understandings of how vegans construct the stories of their lived experiences of moving from being non-vegan to vegan and of being vegan in a non-vegan world.

1.4. Outline of Chapters

This research comprises five main chapters, an Introduction (the current chapter), Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion, and Conclusion. Each of these chapters contains multiple subtopics. As such, I have outlined some of the critical aspects and purpose for each chapter below. The Literature Review chapter further develops the argument for this area of research and provides context for the rest of the current research. Despite growing awareness, the scale of the exploitation of animals by humans remains largely unproblematised for multiple reasons. Thus, I begin by expanding on the interconnecting concepts of carnism and speciesism, including underlying mechanisms. I then examine the ways "food animals" are constructed, extend on the discussion of the disturbing realities surrounding the ways humans exploit animals, and discuss some of the subsequent impacts on humans. I explore the literature related to veganism to date, including the ways vegans are framed and constructed in media and academic discourse. Following this is an examination of the literature surrounding vegan/non-vegan relationships and the experience of being vegan in a hegemonic meat culture.

The methodology chapter situates the project through transparency about my epistemological position by sharing my story and motivations for this research. I then position the research within the field of Critical Animal Studies, social constructionism, and the narrative theoretical frameworks. The methodology chapter also covers relevant practical methodological considerations. The findings and discussion chapter aim to convey key themes relevant to the research questions emergent through participants' narratives. Intersecting themes are highlighted as the narratives build. Particular areas of focus include the transition to veganism, experiences before and after becoming vegan, and the experiences of being vegan in a non-vegan world. It also includes a brief discussion around personal advocacy and public activism and explores interpersonal relationships between vegans and non-vegans. The discussion section then focuses on the issues most immediately relating to the original research questions. The conclusion chapter highlights core insights alongside a synopsis of concepts emerging from the findings. Following this are some of the reflexive insights I have observed through the research process. I also discuss further the limitations of the current research and then suggest some areas for future research that are most immediately related to the current research.

Chapter 2: Making the Case: Carnism and Veganism

Following on from the Introduction, I begin this chapter by expanding on the ideology of carnism, introducing the related concept of speciesism, and explaining how these concepts interrelate. After examining how carnism operates and how it has been measured, I further frame the motivations of vegans by critically examining how non-human animals, particularly "food animals", are viewed and constructed, and then discuss factory farming and some standard slaughter practices. This level of discussion is crucial as an awareness of these practices is critical to understanding veganism. This decentring of the human experience also aims to counter dominant discourses and challenge vegan stereotypes. I look at some of the consequences of carnism for humans, including both at individual and broader social levels. The literature around veganism is subsequently examined, including the transition to veganism and how this impacts self-identity. The ways vegans are constructed are then considered, particularly in media and academic discourse. After this I explore common relationship issues between vegans and non-vegans and the experience of being vegan. I was surprised by the breadth and richness I encountered in the literature, and as such, have aimed to include only those issues most closely related to the research questions.

2.1. Carnism and Speciesism

As stated in the first chapter, carnism refers to a dominant ideology which makes animal consumption permissible (Joy, 2010). Entrenched ideologies, such as patriarchy and carnism, are at their most effective when invisible; and thus, treated as natural, ordinary, the way things are. The decision to eat animal products is however not a "freely made choice" since most people are born and conditioned into carnism from a young age and are surrounded by carnistic messaging. Thus, carnistic beliefs and practices are continuously socially sanctioned and reinforced. Media representations and powerful political and economic interests also endorse and perpetuate carnism (Griffin, 2017).

Most people are unaware of the hidden practices that their purchasing decisions support or the ideology that underlies carnism (Joy, 2010). These carnistic beliefs may directly contradict an individual's professed beliefs, for example, believing oneself to be an animal lover who would never want to be the cause of non-human animal suffering. Indeed, most people are disturbed by animal suffering and find it morally repugnant (Plous, 1993). While on the one hand, we accept that animals are sentient subjects-of-a-life (Nocella et al., 2014) capable of complex emotional experiences (Irvine, 2012), on the other, the vast scale of exploitation of non-human animals is typically accepted (Griffin, 2017). Loughnan, Bastian,

and Haslam (2014) have called this “the meat paradox”. Despite this apparent contradiction, carnism is widespread. According to Monteiroa et al. (2017), carnism is a vital area of research, not because of its deviance from norms, but rather, due to its prevalence, taken for granted assumptions, and attitudes.

Carnism endorses the eating of some animals, considered to be lower in the speciesist hierarchy. Various factors, including the "human supremacism" position condition people to eat certain animals while simultaneously loving others, which is a form of speciesism (Joy, 2010). In 1970 Richard Ryder first conceptualised the term speciesism to describe the prejudice against non-human animals, drawing attention to the parallels between the way animals are viewed and other forms of unjustified discrimination. Speciesism is analogous to other “isms”, such as sexism and racism. These prejudices “overlook or underestimate the similarities between the discriminator and those discriminated against” and this discrimination results in “a selfish disregard for the interests of others, and for their sufferings” (Ryder, 1983, p. 5).

Speciesism and carnism are interlinked; however, there are also differences. Speciesism is an ideology that values some animals over others, with humans most highly valued based on species alone. Whereas, carnism is a sub-ideology of speciesism, analogous to anti-Semitism being a sub-ideology of racism. Like anti-Semitism, carnism is a particular expression of a broader ideology (Joy, 2010). The way some animals are regarded, viewed, kept, and killed, exemplifies the speciesist attitudes and beliefs which enable carnism. The treatment of animals links to Phelan, Link, and Dovidio’s (2008) findings that prejudice and stigma relate to exploitation and domination (keeping down), norm enforcement (keeping in), and disease avoidance (keeping away).

The assignment of moral worth based on species membership results in discrimination between species of non-human animals (Caviola et al., 2019). For example, treating pigs, who are social, playful animals, more intelligent than dogs (Mendl et al., 2010) with no moral concern, yet acknowledging dogs’ wellbeing and lives as very important (Loughnan et al., 2014). Speciesism is interwoven through legal regulations protecting the fundamental rights and interests of some animals but not others. For example, in New Zealand, puppies and kittens cannot legally be separated from their mothers before eight weeks of age, whereas it is standard practice for humans to separate many farmed animals from their mothers shortly after birth.

Caviola et al. (2019) note the incongruity in our categorisations and inconsistency of moral worth we apply to non-human animals. According to Caviola et al. (2019), the devaluing of animals by humans occurs through three claims. The first is that animals are less cognitively capable than humans. This argument fails to recognise discrimination between non-human animals, for example, treating pigs and dogs differently. Also, it fails to recognise that the devaluation and mistreatment of mentally disabled humans or young children are not acceptable on this basis. Secondly, some claim that animals cannot be moral agents, are unable to provide moral reciprocity, and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions. Caviola et al. (2019) dispute this again by observing we would not apply this logic to children or humans with intellectual disabilities and asserting that their vulnerability perhaps grants especially enhanced moral status and protection. The third claim is that animals are less sentient or unable to experience or feel less than humans. However, empirical data (Low et al., 2012), concludes that many animals, including pigs, cows, and dogs, are capable of an extent of suffering analogous to humans. Furthermore, there is less evidence for the sentience of human infants; however, people typically do not doubt their right to protection from harm.

2.1.1. How Carnism Operates

Joy (2010) describes carnism as a violent, oppressive system, which like other oppressive systems, uses a set of defence mechanisms, including denial, justification, and cognitive distortions. Carnism is maintained using primary defences, which act to strengthen, validate, and legitimise it, and secondary defences, which act to weaken and invalidate the system that challenges it, which is veganism. Carnism works and interacts at institutional, social, and individual levels.

Carnistic bias is built into society's institutional and social foundations. Food practices occur due to interplays between nutritional, economic, sociological, cultural, and psychological factors (Blades, 2001). However, often meanings are reproduced that situate meat culture as part of "an imagined fixed natural order, rather than a political, economic and social norm" (Twine, 2014, p. 632). For example, education around nutrition, often with economic ties to animal agriculture, has traditionally presented meat, dairy, and eggs as a necessary part of a healthy diet (Rothegerber, 2012). Thus, we are continuously conditioned to accept eating animals and their secretions.

According to Joy (2010), carnism primarily relies on the interplay between hidden practices and the wilful ignorance of consumers, noting that most people do not want to think about or witness animal

suffering or consider the possibility that their actions may support it. Bandura (1999) found that harming others is easier when the suffering is not visible. The meat industry works to keep certain practices out of mainstream view (Cole & Stewart, 2009), and since people are unaware of cruel practices, their animal consumption is not problematised. Additionally, as Joy (2010) states "we generally skip the part of the perceptual process that makes the mental connection between meat and the living animal" (p. 15). We skip the connection to the animal and the suffering involved, which blocks our empathy and disgust, and we fail to recognise the incongruence between our professed values and actual behaviours towards animals.

Moral disengagement is likely to play a critical role in allowing people to view cruel practices as innocuous by disengaging one's role in supporting and tolerating these practices (Bandura, 1999). Rothgerber (2014) discuss three fundamental ways problematic behaviour is enabled: "1. Hiding or avoiding the injury, possibly by making the victim invisible; 2. Denying one's role/responsibility in causing the harm; and 3. Denigrating the victim" (p. 33). Mechanisms underlying this include the use of euphemistic language, displacement of responsibility, moral justifications, and disregarding the suffering of the victims. Further discussion around euphemistic language and justifications will follow later, however briefly, displacement of responsibility refers to claiming one's actions to not be immoral due to reasons beyond one's control. For example, believing that it is the responsibility of the government to protect animals, rather than individual consumer responsibility not to fund cruel practices. People disregard the suffering of victims through claims that animals do not experience pain, at least in the way that humans do and claiming that those opposed to their consumption overstate the pain experienced by animals (Rothegerber, 2012). This is known as "dementalisation" (Bastian et al., 2012), which is also discussed further in this chapter looking at how "food animals" are constructed. Caviola et al. (2019) point out the self-reinforcing bias of carnism since people who have recently eaten or plan to eat meat soon are more likely to perceive animals to be less intelligent, of lower moral value, and less sentient.

The mechanisms that underly carnism link strongly with the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is where the spatial separation between production and consumption makes the underlying exploitative process invisible, creating a detachment, so that all the end consumer sees is the commodity which is perceived simply in terms of its price (Redini, 2018). "False consciousness" is another relevant Marxist concept intended to contrast with the understanding which a subject may have but has not attained due to lack of reflection or having adequate information (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

The false consciousness of carnism is evident through, for example, conscience assuaging marketing labels such as "humane" or "free-range" which discourage consumers from critically considering the practices involved.

2.1.2. Measuring Speciesism and Carnism

Aligning to Joy's (2010) assertion that carnism is an oppressive ideology, several researchers have explored speciesism and carnism as measurable, stable constructs that link to various predictors of prejudice (Caviola et al., 2019; Dhont et al., 2014). Speciesism positively correlates with sexism, racism, homophobia, and other types of human to human prejudice (Caviola et al., 2019; Loughnan et al., 2014; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Carnistic domination includes the belief in the acceptability of the subjection and killing of animals and is related to symbolic sexism and racism (Loughnan et al., 2014). Symbolic sexism and racism are said to be covert forms of discrimination, which develop through socialisation and often without conscious awareness (Harrison et al., 2006).

Other types of prejudice positively correlating with speciesism and carnism are social dominance orientation (SDO), system justification, and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) (Loughnan et al., 2014). SDO is a measure of preference for social hierarchy and belief in the acceptability of inequality. System justification includes the theorised need to defend and justify the status quo, resistance to change, lack of openness to alternatives, and determination to see the status quo as legitimate. RWA is characterised by obedience to authority, racial and ethnic prejudice, willingness to submit to authority, and adhering to societal conventions and established norms. It also includes holding hostile and punitive attitudes towards non-conformists and the belief that control and aggression against subordinates are acceptable (Altemeyer, 1981). Speciesism has also been found to be negatively associated with empathetic concern and actively open-minded thinking (Caviola et al., 2019).

The defence mechanism of justifications is maintained mainly through the unexamined beliefs that eating animal products is normal, natural, and necessary. These beliefs have been used historically to justify other oppressive systems such as slavery, male superiority, and colonialism (Joy, 2010), and have been measured in relation to carnism. Piazza et al.'s (2015) 4N Scale assesses four strategies used to rationalise meat consumption. The "4Ns" are normal, natural, necessary, and nice. "Normal" represents the dominant social and cultural norm of meat and animal product consumption. "Natural" relates to justifying consumption based on historical practices, such as hunting for survival, as well as belief in the

"natural order", or the way things are "supposed" to be. "Necessary" relates to the belief that we need to eat meat to meet nutrition requirements, and "nice" represents taste pleasure. Lea and Worsley (2003) found that the primary motivation for meat eaters was "meat tastes good", falling into the "nice" category.

Other meat consumption measures include Rothegerber's (2012) Meat-Eating Justification Scale and Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira's (2015) Meat Attachment Questionnaire. Strategies enabling meat consumption include denial, hierarchical justification, dissociation, religion, and avoidance. Rothgerber (2014) specifically explored how justifications, including God's supposed intention that humans eat animals, allow people to maintain their self-assessment as moral accords who do not harm animals. Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira's (2016) Moral Disengagement in Meat Questionnaire assesses how people selectively disengage ethical self-regulatory when thinking about how meat is produced using five strategies to detach their moral concern. These include justifying it as a means to higher ends, desensitising oneself to animal death and suffering, denying negative consequences, diffusing personal responsibility, and disbelieving in one's free choice to refrain from eating meat.

2.2. Non-Human Animals

From once being a marginal issue, animals have become an increasingly emergent issue in ethics and multidisciplinary enquiry. We increasingly understand more about non-human animals through a range of research that has revealed the depth and complexity of awareness, sentience and cognitive capabilities of animals (Hatkoff & Pacelle, 2009). Animals' capacity for a complex range of emotional experience has long been supported, including accounts of grief, fear, contentment, love, and joy. There are documented cases of chickens being able to count and respond to their own names, individual and emotionally laden vocalisations of cows, calves recognising their mother's unique call for them, sheep who recognise individual human and sheep faces, and pigs who sing to their piglets as they suckle (Hatkoff & Pacelle, 2009). Joy (2010) asserts that we love cats and dogs, and eat cows, not because they are fundamentally different since cows and other "food animals" are sentient creatures with feelings, consciousness, and individual preferences, but instead because of our perception of them. Due to the denigration of "food animals", people consistently do not seem to make the connection between their caring for and concern for animals and their consumption of animal products (Loughnan et al., 2014).

2.2.1. How "Food Animals" Are Constructed

Childhood is a time where the wonderment of animals is typically encouraged. Ornaments, decorations, toys such as puzzles, stories, movies, television, and playsets often include animals. Children are said to spontaneously empathise with animals, displaying revulsion upon learning the origin of meat (Amato & Partridge, 1989), and are generally encouraged to be kind and respectful towards other living beings. The conditioning to perceive categories of animals differently starts early when young children learn to differentiate between the emotional bond they have for animals while distancing themselves from the animals they eat (Cole & Stewart, 2009). Paul and Podberscek (2000) suggest that children, predisposed toward universal empathy, are socialised out of this gradually.

Learning to draw moral distinctions between species occurs through emulating parents, internalising messages that animals do not suffer for food, and other contradictory and misleading messages (Pallota, 2008). In movies and television, animal characters are often assigned value based on taking on characteristics which separate themselves from their natural states. For example, in the movie "Babe" (Noonan & Miller, 1995), the title character becomes a "sheep pig" and attains a pet like status. Because of his pet status, Babe is saved from the purpose humans bred him for; being killed and having his body eaten. Various other mechanisms are used to create the conceptual separation between the protected and the invisible, for example, selling children's "happy meals" containing the bodies of cows, or chickens, alongside plastic toys of wild animals or animal cartoon characters (Cole & Stewart, 2009).

According to Cole and Stewart (2009) "category memberships" are placed on species of non-human animals based on their perceived utility to humans. Category examples include "pets", "wild animals", "food animals", and "pests". They argue that animals are constructed along intersecting continuums, ranging from subjectivity to objectivity, and invisibility to visibility. For example, "wild" animals are constructed as admired individuals with highly subjective experience; however, they are typically not visible to most people. Pets also treated as individuals; however, are highly visible. "Food animals" are objectified, deindividualised, and often made invisible. Adams (2006) asserts that animals are made invisible in three ways. Firstly, their killing renders them literally absent. Secondly, they are rendered definitionally absent through dissociation, using misnaming euphemisms such as "pork" or "beef". As McGlone et al. (2006) state "we often use euphemisms to tell it like it isn't" (p. 261). Finally, they are metaphorically absent when meat is used to express human suffering or degradation, such as being treated like a piece of meat.

The systems that dictate which animals are edible or inedible protect us from psychological discomfort, by distancing us from our empathy, and subsequently the need to extend moral consideration (Amiot et al., 2019). Joy (2010) argues that the most striking aspect of our categorisations of animals as edible or inedible is the absence of disgust, rather than the presence of it. Loughnan et al. (2014) argue that eating animals becomes morally problematic when animals are perceived as being deserving of moral consideration, since the more worthy we deem an animal of moral consideration, the more immoral it becomes to harm them. Perceived capacity for subjective experience, including the capacity to experience pain and suffering, at least in part underlies the degree to which animals are assessed as worthy of moral consideration (Waytz et al., 2010a). Thus, people tend to dementalise animals that they categorise as food, ascribing them a lower capacity to suffer, but not to others they do not consider to be food. For example, believing dogs, cats and horses to be very capable of suffering, but not pigs, cows, and chickens, despite clear evidence to the contrary. This phenomenon holds across diverse sample groups including Canadian, American, Hong Kong Chinese, and Indian consumers, who report less willingness and more disgust at the thought of eating "mindful" animals (Ruby & Heine, 2012). Simply being categorised as "food" undermines human perceptions of an animal's capacity to suffer and the extent to which they are deemed worthy of moral consideration (Bratanova et al., 2011). Opotow (1995) describes moral exclusion as "the process whereby individuals or groups are perceived to be outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply" (p. 5).

Human categorisations of animals connects with the theory of cognitive dissonance, which describes the discomfort created when we hold two opposing ideas, attitudes or behaviours at once (Loughnan et al., 2014). People work to reduce the discomfort generated when connecting animals with meat (Prunty & Apple, 2013) and resolve the conflict by either choosing to reject meat consumption, or by reducing moral concern through justifications or denial (Bastian et al., 2012; Loughnan et al., 2014). An example of this is the ways animals used for food are often constructed as "happy", "humanely raised", or "free-range". These terms attempt to assuage discomfort in consumers; however, often offer very little in the way of real benefit for animals (Joy, 2010). Loughnan et al. (2014) suggest that non-vegans also use the justification of "humane slaughter" or believing that animals do not suffer when "humanely" killed. "Humane" means "having or showing compassion or benevolence" ("Humane," 2020).

2.2.2. Factory Farms and "Humane Slaughter"

Animal interests are often silenced completely in academic discourse (Cole, 2008), media representations (Cole & Morgan, 2001), and social discourse (Joy, 2010; Mann, 2018). One cannot understand veganism without understanding the dominant context and vegans' self-identified motivations for refusal to participate in carnism. To ignore or minimise animal interests and vegan motivations would be to misrepresent the vegan point of view and fail to counter dominant discourse and stereotypes. Thus, this discussion follows on from the first chapter's example of the exploitation of broiler chickens. This coverage is by no means comprehensive in terms of human exploitation of animals. The focus is on legal standard practice in industrialised nations rather than illegal, but not uncommon, forms of abuse.

According to Joy (2010), the primary defence of the system of carnism is invisibility, which interacts with the personal defence mechanisms of denial and avoidance. Carnism is primarily maintained through denial, which keeps the system invisible and therefore, unquestioned. The denial includes avoiding acknowledging animal individuality and denying the violence used to produce animal products. Cognitive distortions allow us to feel comfortable enough to consume animal products without thinking about the violence involved. According to Joy (2010), these distortions include objectification, deindividualisation, and dichotomisation. Dichotomisation means we distinctly categorise animals, for example, we learn to see farmed animals as things, or objects and abstractions, viewing all those in the category "pig" as the same, rather than individuals, each with a unique personality and subjective experience of the world.

Joy (2010) points out that most of the animals we consume are out of sight, confined to industrialised farms located in remote areas. These "farms" are designed to maximise profit; thus, animals are viewed and treated as units of production. Animals are bred into existence, usually using artificial insemination. Humans obtain semen from male animals, and impregnate females, using a range of methods that involve physical restraint and manipulation of their sexual organs. Separation of mothers from young and new-born offspring is common practice, resulting in emotional distress for both (Flower & Weary, 2003). New-born and young animals are mutilated as a matter of standard practice, including, and certainly not limited to castration, cutting ears, teeth and tails, debeaking, and horn de-budding, typically without any pain relief (Edwards et al., 2014; Vannini, 2006). A standard method of castration is to hold a piglet in place and use a knife to slit the scrotum exposing the testicles. The person then yanks

each testicle to break the chord that attaches it. Piglets emit distressed, urgent, and pained squeals (Patterson, 2002) and can die of shock upon having their teeth, testicles, and tails removed (Foer, 2010).

Animals are often kept in barren, overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, without access to sunlight or any source of novelty, and deprived of the ability to engage in natural behaviours, resulting in extreme distress observable through disturbed behaviour (Shea, 2014). The billions of animals who die before reaching slaughter, considered wastage, are built into production costs. Animal welfare is a barrier to profit due to the comparatively lower production cost of discarding the bodies of those who die prematurely, rather than providing them with adequate care (Joy, 2010). The US, Canada, and Australia have all seen attempts, of varying effectiveness, by lobbyists to have "ag-gag" laws put in place to prevent whistle-blowers from exposing the mistreatment of animals, overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions of factory farms (Shea, 2014).

Animals are most profitable when they reach maturity, and hence, slaughter age, as early as possible, often enabled by selective breeding and hormone supplements (Joy, 2010). Animals are less profitable the longer they live, so they are slaughtered young. Some typical slaughter ages, followed by natural life span are: pigs, killed at 5-6 months, naturally live 10-12 years, cows 18 months/15-20 years, "meat" chickens 5-7 weeks/10 years, lambs 6-8 months/12-14 years (*Age of animals slaughtered*, 2017). Gregory (1996) investigated the many ways in which welfare is compromised before slaughter, documenting death during transportation, dehydration, exhaustion, emotional and temperature stress from extreme heat or cold, physical trauma including bruising, torn skin, disease, and sickness, including vomiting and diarrhoea.

Gradnin (2013) found four main types of animals "extremely difficult to move through a slaughter plant in a low-stress, humane manner" (p. 495), including new-born calves, spent dairy cows, and weak or lame animals. New-born calves are unable to stand and walk easily on their own, Gradnin (2013) observed calves being thrown, dragged by the ears, and abused in various other ways. Gradnin's (2013) research recommends reducing the use of electric prods, which are primarily used for unloading and moving groups, however, suggests that a total ban may be detrimental due to "stubborn" animals being "handled abusively by beating, hard tail twisting, or poking sensitive areas such as the anus" (p. 497).

"Stunning", used in most industrialised countries, is intended to render animals' unconscious before they are strung up, their throats are slit, they are bled out, dismembered and skinned, or in some cases, submerged in boiling water to remove hair and loosen feathers. Stunning methods include captive bolt gun, CO2, and electrical stunning. Various research and first-hand accounts document that "inadequate stunning" is common-place and industry standards accept that not all animals are rendered insensible on first and subsequent attempts, resulting in extreme pain and distress (Atkinson et al., 2013). Atkinson et al. (2013) noted that voluntary industry standard for captive bolt guns was 95%. Their research found on average across the bulls, cattle, and calves they observed that 12% were stunned inadequately.

For pigs, highly intelligent, sensitive, and sociable animals (Hatkoff & Pacelle, 2009), CO2 is often used. CO2 stunning requires pigs, typically easier to handle in groups due to their strong social bonds, to be moved into a gondola, sometimes "gondolas may be overloaded by forcing the pigs in on top of each other with electric prods" (Gradnin, 2013, p. 502) and lowered into a pit containing CO2 gas. CO2 gas does not induce immediate unconsciousness, and some pigs "struggled violently and attempted to climb out" (Gradnin, 2013, p. 502). Rodriguez et al. (2008) have reported that it is extremely aversive, and pigs suffer intense fear, pain, and stress, as evidenced by their violent attempts to escape and vocalisations. Collection pits underneath the gas chambers have been reported to be full of hooves from pigs so frantic and terrified that they have ripped their own feet off (Carbstrong, 2020).

The conditions, including working with often large, powerful, and panicked animals, ultimately result in frustration and invite cruel practices. Consequently, workers need to emotionally divorce themselves from the reality of the work they are undertaking. Eisnitz (2009) collected first-hand accounts from slaughterhouse workers in the US, detailing that the pressure created by the scale, speed, and sheer numbers of animals killed and "processed", often results in stressed workers, undertaking physically hazardous work.

> I've seen live animals shackled, hoisted, stuck, and skinned. Too many to count, too many to remember. It's just a process that's continually there. I've seen shackled beef looking around before they've been stuck. I've seen hogs [that are supposed to be lying down] on the bleeding conveyor get up after they've been stuck. I've seen hogs in the scalding tub trying to swim.

> When one of the lads cut into a freshly killed cow to gut her - and out fell the foetus of a calf. She was pregnant. He immediately started shouting and throwing his arms about. I took him into a meeting room to calm him down - and all he could say was, "It's just not right, it's not right," over and over again. These were hard men, and they rarely showed any emotion.

Scurr (2020) shares the story of a person raised on a dairy farm in New Zealand. For them, farming was very normalised. After watching the movie “Earthlings” (Monson, 2005), they became curious about whether the atrocities they had witnessed could be taking place in New Zealand. They went to local chicken and pig factory farms, documenting desolation, deprivation, squalor, and suffering. They also went to the kill floor of a slaughterhouse and describe some of what they witnessed in the following way:

> what I saw there was truly a vision of hell. What has stayed with me the most is … the smell of warm hot death. Not only do you smell death, you smell the cattle’s fear … they fight against death with every fibre of their being … The countless victims I saw gasping for air and thrashing in agony while being dismembered on the slaughter line was truly unimaginable. Many of the killings were so awful, the cattle would sometimes get up before being raised and run around the kill floor with their throats sliced open, attempting to escape. We humans are meant to be caring and nurturing towards our fellow beings. Yet to these animals we are the living devil.

2.2.3. The Human Toll of Carnism

As discussed in the introductory chapter, mass exploitation of animals exacerbates poverty and exploitation of the poorest nations, significantly contributes to environmental destruction, and has detrimental health impacts for consumers. As well as these broader factors, the acts necessitated in breeding, raising, transporting, and slaughtering animals can create psychological stress and trauma to the people most directly involved (MacNair, 2002; Scurr, 2020; Victor & Barnard, 2016). A study on the wellbeing of New Zealand dairy farmers found that the nature of the work can lead to depression, anxiety, and burnout (Botha & White, 2013). Comparing farmers to non-farmers, Sanne et al. (2004) identified farmers’ higher workloads, long work hours, lower-income, less decision latitude, higher psychological job demands, and lower levels of education as contributing factors to poorer psychological outcomes.

Slaughterhouse workers are often low-skilled, socio-economically vulnerable people, such as migrant workers, exposed to physically demanding, often dangerous and psychologically damaging work (Dillard, 2008). Adding to the physical aspects of the work, Iulietto et al. (2018) documented workers being instructed to wear ear protection in order to protect their hearing from the thrashing, and screams of animals, which were found to be especially loud "at stunning stage". Research by Leibler et al. (2017) found a high prevalence of severe psychological distress in slaughterhouse workers.

Fitzgerald et al. (2009) found disproportionate increases in crime in areas surrounding slaughterhouses, particularly violent and sexual crimes. The researchers suggest that in order to function within these working environments, workers need to become desensitised to violence. Research into mortality in cancer incidence undertaken on meat workers in New Zealand found that excess risks for mortality were observed from all causes, including cancers, suggesting a link between exposure to biological material in animal faeces, urine and blood, and lung cancers in particular (McLean et al., 2004).

2.3. Veganism

As stated in the first chapter, "The Vegan Society" defines veganism as: "a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose." Table 1 is intended to provide some clarity on the differences between vegetarians and vegans. I feel this is important to clarify, especially considering that much of the literature places vegans and vegetarians in the same category or presents veganism as a sort of "strict vegetarianism", which can be misrepresentative. Table 1 is a general indicator of vegan practice and is not necessarily representative of all vegans, or all vegetarians, all of the time. For example, some vegetarians may also avoid purchasing products tested on animals and although vegans avoid using products tested on animals, will usually use them when necessary, such as taking certain medications.

Table 1.
Comparing vegetarians and vegans

Practice	Vegetarian	Vegan
Consumes meat (including fish)	×	×
Consumes dairy	✓	×
Consumes eggs	✓	×
Consumes honey	✓	×
Buys products containing animal products, such as gelatin	✓	×
Buys products tested on animals or containing animal products	✓	×
Buys animal products, including leather, silk and wool	✓	×
Would attend entertainment and shows that use animals	✓	×

The Vegan Society's inclusion of "as far as practicable and possible" acknowledges it is difficult, and at times impossible, to avoid all use of animals within our current systems. Inevitably animals are killed in crop production, although plant-based diets do require far fewer crops (Poore, 2018). Animal products are also so integrated into our social and economic systems that total avoidance in modern living is virtually impossible. For example, items such as car tyres, computers, and cell phones often contain animal products. It is useful to acknowledge this and acknowledge that veganism is not a claim of being completely free from the use of, or harm to, animals. Despite this, veganism rejects arguments which appeal to futility, leading to passive complicity in avoidable, unnecessary, large-scale suffering and strives toward least possible harm instead. It also champions future progress towards "animal-free alternatives".

2.3.1. Transitioning from Carnism to Veganism

People become vegan for a variety of reasons (Joy, 2010) often beginning with adopting a vegetarian diet and with increased awareness move to veganism. Research on vegetarianism has shown that moral concern regarding the raising and slaughter of animals is a primary motivation for stopping meat consumption (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Ruby, 2012). In contrast to those with pro-meat tendencies being most likely to be politically conservative and male, vegans are more likely to be educated, middle-class, and female (Ruby, 2012). Research involving non-vegans, vegetarians and vegans, using functional MRI, found that the vegetarians and vegans had consistently higher engagement in empathy-related brain regions when viewing scenes of both animal and human suffering, likely reflecting stronger empathic responses (Filippi et al., 2010). Non-vegans were found to have increased amygdala activation, associated with the fight or flight response when viewing images of animal suffering. Filippi et al. (2010) suggest that the indicators of empathy they investigated may reflect the different motivators and beliefs between the groups.

Research has attempted to gain insights into the process of transitioning from carnism to veganism. McDonald (2000) examines the process of transitioning to veganism using a phenomenological perspective. The transition is conceptualised as "learning to become vegan" (p. 2), including catalytic experiences, learning orientation, learning about veganism, and moving to a vegan world view. McDonald (2000) suggests that cognitive changes need to be accompanied by an emotional response, in order for behavioural change to occur. Denzin (2001) looks at "turning point moments" as a way of analysing data, which recognises significant moments which commonly form part of the life narrative.

These moments are said to produce shifts in outlook and behaviour, which may be useful in conceptualising the transition to veganism. The transtheoretical model of behaviour change was used by Mendes (2013) to conceptualise this process. Change is said to be a process involving progression through a series of stages. The stages are precontemplation (unaware of an issue/not ready), contemplation (aware of an issue/getting ready), preparation (ready, taking steps toward change), action (behaviour change), maintenance (working to keep the change), and termination (no temptation to return to old behaviours). Mendes (2013) focused mainly on the health motivations for a shift to a vegan diet, which potentially changes the application, for example, relating increased self-efficacy to temptation.

With consideration to the animal rights perspective, others argue that it is instead about having made a strong connection between animal products and animal suffering to the point where animal products are no longer regarded as food (Joy, 2010). For example, Twine's (2014) narrative research reveals a paradigm shift from carnism to veganism, where euphemisms like "meat" and "bacon" became renamed as "dripping carcasses" and "dead animals". These examples illustrate the transition from the view that some animals are edible food, to resistance against the commodification and violence present in animal consumption. Greenebaum (2012) report that participants did not stop consuming animal products because they did not enjoy the taste, instead that it was easy to do so because consuming the products was a violation of their core values.

Becoming vegan is often described as "making the connection". This connection results in a complete paradigm shift, where the once invisible becomes visible. Previously perceived as innocuous items, daily experiences, and happy events may take on disturbing new meanings and associations (Mann, 2018). Everyday moral decisions are negotiated through the interplay of emotions (such as disgust, pleasure, guilt), cognitions (such as categorisations, justifications, attributions), and personality characteristics (such as beliefs and value identities) (Loughnan et al., 2014). According to Cherry (2006), vegans "represent a new form of social movement that is not based on legislation or identity politics, but instead is based on everyday practices in one's lifestyle" (p. 156).

2.3.2. Self-Identity and Practising Veganism

The issue of values is tied to morality and notions of the self (Shadnam, 2020). Moral reflexivity is a process of assessing and potentially changing one's self narrative (Foucault, 1989). "Reflexivity" relates

to a sense of critical awareness relating to an assumed idea, practice, or situation. Moral norms are often adopted in a taken-for-granted manner, however, when a person challenges a moral norm (Schwalbe, 1991), they also challenge their self-narrative and, in this way, moral reflexivity is concerned with the authentic self (Shadnam, 2020).

According to Wade (1998), personal transformation is a dynamic process where people become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate their altered views into a new self-definition. This transformation can lead to the world being seen in a new way, with individuals achieving a clearer and broader perspective of the world around them. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2012) suggest that intense affective experiences can lead people to review the ways they think of themselves, the world, and their place in it. The life narrative binds together various assumptions and beliefs, which can be revised when fundamental beliefs are challenged, resulting in revisions of the narrative.

Wright (2015) suggests that veganism represents both a practice and an identity category. Additional to vegans being defined through their practice, veganism should also be defined in terms of how vegans see themselves, how others view them, and how they are more broadly represented within cultural representation and discursive practice. According to Greenebaum (2012), "identifying as vegan is a public declaration of one's identity, morals and lifestyle." (p. 129). Identity is an essential factor in social relationships as it provides a basis for interaction (Irvine, 2012). Wright (2015) coined the term "Vegan Studies", which emphasises the need to attempt to try and understand veganism within cultural representations, providing a more complete picture of this identity, lifestyle, and social justice movement.

2.3.3. Vegaphobia: Constructing the Deviant Other

This section covers how dominant discourses work to invalidate animals, vegans, and veganism and why this is problematic. Invalidation occurs through media representations, cultural context and national identity, and academia. Veganism offers counter-narratives and accessible practices to challenge the violent ideology of carnism (Joy, 2010). Violence against animals is deeply problematic to most people, hence the need for "vegaphobic discourse" (Lukes, 2007). While primary carnistic defences, such as those previously discussed (denial, justifications, and cognitive distortions) validate and legitimise carnism, secondary defences act to invalidate veganism (Joy, 2010). Although resistance to veganism has

been physically enacted through violence directed at vegans (Griffin, 2017), it is most often enacted discursively.

According to Foucault (1989, p. 56) “language becomes the primary instrument through which ideology is transmitted, enacted and reproduced”. Analysis of linguistic process and discursive strategies can expose ideologies (Teo, 2000). Discourse is used to justify, explain, excuse, and defend dominant ideologies, presenting them in a positive light, whilst marginalising, blaming, and excluding other ideologies (Duncan, 2003; Qualye & Sonn, 2009). Carnism and speciesism, like other “isms”, such as racism and sexism, are located within the discursive practices of society. These practices reproduce and legitimise the acts of power, domination, and exploitation (Augoustinos et al., 2005). Harvey (1999) characterises everyday oppression in daily life as “civilised oppression”.

The media plays a significant role in developing and maintaining dominant discourses and social narratives which legitimise and naturalise carnism and obfuscate veganism (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Cole and Morgan (2011) argue that although audiences are not passive consumers of information, news reports are interpreted and reinforced through frameworks that assume, at least in part, a consensual process. As news stories often lie outside audiences’ direct personal experiences, the media has a role in interpreting and translating them into the realm of understanding, making them appear natural. Counter discourses can be challenging to translate and position because they compete against accepted terms of reference, so it is harder for those with non-dominant viewpoints to access media representation (Danelian, 1992). Veganism is presented as contravening common sense due to being outside dominant, and easily understood meat-eating discourses and tends to be presented as very difficult or impossible to practically maintain (Cole & Morgan, 2011).

Vegaphobic discourse oppresses both vegans and animals. Vegans are mainly represented through four central stereotypes: abstainers (the “strict vegan”), trend followers, sentimentalists, or as hostile extremists (Cole, 2008). Where anti-Muslim discourses construct the “other” as criminal, misogynistic, and inassimilable, anti-vegan discourses construct vegans as weird, extreme, militant, and antisocial. Animals are positioned as unintelligent and unimportant. The vegan body is also a target of institutionalised discrimination and devaluation through discursive practices, such as accusations of pale skin and gauntness (Aavik, 2019). Animals’ bodies are fetishised as “tasty”, for example, caricature pigs in chefs’ hats advertising bacon and their interests are severely misrepresented through presentations

as the “happy exploited”. For example, caricature cows smiling on packets of cheese and news coverage of pasture-fed cows, which ignore realities, such as annual forcible impregnations, frightened and bewildered new-born calves being taken from frantic, bellowing mothers, and their horrific deaths for cheap meat at a fraction of their natural life span. Twine (2014) raises the comparison between constructions used by other exploitive ideologies of the “happy oppressed”, for example, the “happy housewife” constructed by patriarchal ideologies, or the “happy slave”. These derogatory discourses evidence the cultural reproduction of speciesism.

Culturally entrenched speciesism is also observable through portrayals of veganism which dissociate or avoid the exploitation of animals altogether. Cole and Morgan (2011) found that animals themselves are often missing entirely from media representations of veganism, which are far more likely to comment on the health and environmental aspects of veganism. The discursive divorce of animals from veganism, especially given vegans’ self-defined core motivations, denotes a serious distortion in how veganism is represented. Excluding animals from the dialogue also acts to silence the interests of the animals themselves (Sayers, 2016).

The ideological struggle between animal activists and the meat industry is often framed in simplistic binary oppositional terms between emotion, enacted by vegans, and reason, enacted by non-vegans (Stibbe, 2001). Twine (2014) compared Ahmed’s (2010) figure of the feminist killjoy against that of the vegan killjoy. Vegans risk the same stereotypes faced by feminists, including being humourless, ugly, over-sensitive, incapable of objective reasoning or inclusion in serious debate or conversation, and therefore deserving of exclusion and ridicule. Cole and Morgan (2011) argue that in the same way that, for example, anti-feminist discourses legitimate and perpetuate patriarchal practices, anti-vegan discourses legitimate and perpetuate speciesist practices.

The effects of cultural context and national identity, including those that are economically tied to animal agriculture provide a foundation for moral indignation towards vegans. Glasgow (2008) suggests criticism of farming practices in Australian society can be “interpreted as an attack on the moral integrity of farmers, amounting to cultural blasphemy” (p. 200), a claim that could easily be extended to a New Zealand context. Kiwi farmers have traditionally held a highly regarded place within New Zealand’s cultural character, such as romanticising narratives of rural life and nostalgia over the “number 8 wire” identity. Farmers and people living in rural places are depicted as hard-working, self-sufficient, and stoic,

and people living in urban centres as bland, coddled, and snobbish, and thus disconnected from the "hard realities" of life. Therefore, vegans living in New Zealand may be viewed as particularly deviant, even unpatriotic (Potts & White, 2008). However, Potts and White (2008) assert that despite feeling marginalised by a historically farming orientated culture, some vegans view their resistance to oppressive norms as linking them to a Kiwi history of other social justice movements, such as the suffragettes, anti-nuclear, and whaling protestors.

Vilifying discourses feed moral indignation, outrage, and fear, and paint the other as acting in a fundamentally unacceptable way. Vegan parents are typically constructed negatively, with repeated headlines declaring infant deaths as a result of a vegan diet. However, when innumerable numbers of non-vegan parents' babies die from malnutrition, it is reported as the result of neglectful parenting (Cole & Morgan, 2011). As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is that well-planned vegan diets are "appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes." (Melina et al., 2016, p. 1970).

As well as media representations and traditional social discourse reinforcing stigmatising practices, academia also plays a role in misrepresenting vegans and veganism. Cole's (2008) research examines how veganism is problematised and hegemonic understandings, particularly focusing on how academia has reproduced 'othering' social discourse. Literature in this area has tended to frame veganism as an "ascetic" practice, that is, particularly difficult, undesirable, limiting, and restrictive. This prejudice contributes to the normalisation of carnism, which is presented as a healthy, neutral, and unproblematic practice, while simultaneously perpetuating pathologising assumptions about vegans.

Vegaphobic discourses denote a grave moral injury to vegans, non-vegans, and animals alike. Cole and Morgan (2011) suggest three interrelated reasons for this. Firstly, veganism is empirically misrepresented, which marginalises vegans. Secondly, non-vegans are not given an opportunity to understand veganism properly. Thirdly, these discourses obfuscate veganism and in doing so conceal the oppression, exploitation, and violence committed against animals, allowing it to continue unproblematised. Vegaphobic discourses act to marginalise vegans and reassure non-vegan audiences of their normality. It is a way of keeping veganism "at arm's length … acknowledging its existence without ever having the really think about the challenges it offers." (Cole & Morgan, 2011, p. 142).

People therefore, do not have to think too deeply beyond readily available and easily digestible discourses which misrepresent veganism.

2.3.4. Vegan/Non-Vegan Relationships

MacInnis and Hodson (2017) researched bias towards vegans and vegetarians, concluding that vegans, particularly those motivated by animal rights concerns, were evaluated more negatively than vegetarians, and more negatively than several other stigmatised groups. They found that vegans are viewed as more self-disciplined, create envy in others, and are perceived as a threat to the dominant social norm. They also found that, unlike other marginalised groups, prejudice towards vegans is largely seen as socially acceptable. Figure 1 provides an example of this; a public, printed document, which demonstrates the impunity with which people feel entitled to engage in anti-vegan discourse.

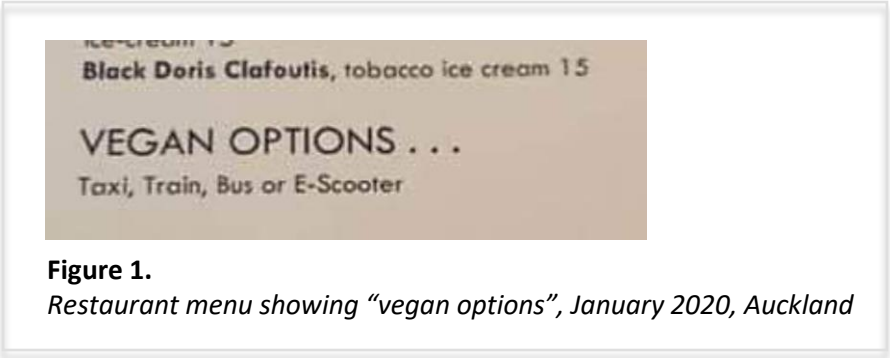

Figure 1.
Restaurant menu showing "vegan options", January 2020, Auckland

Markowski and Roxburgh (2019) found that non-vegans anticipate the stigma associated with veganism, so utilise social and behavioural distancing in an attempt to avoid stigmatisation themselves. Social distancing acts in multiple ways to reinforce socially accepted norms (Phelan et al., 2008) by further encouraging conformity to normative behaviours and identification with the dominant group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Hertel & Kerr, 2001; cited in; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019).

Despite the stigma and negative social evaluation, Bryant's (2019) research surveying 1,000 people found that non-vegan respondents saw veganism as ethical and a positive step for the environment. Specifically, 73% of respondents considered veganism to be ethical, and 70% considered it to be good for the environment. The research found that the barriers that prevent people from becoming vegan are perceptions around taste, convenience, and price, with 83% saying that it would not be easy, and 61% believing a vegan diet would not be enjoyable. This links to Lea and Worsley's (2003) finding that "meat tastes good" was the primary motivation for eating animals. Other potential barriers investigated

included social stigma and concerns around nutritional requirements; however, these were found to be perceived to be less important, with 60% saying veganism is socially acceptable, and more than half, that it is healthy. The social acceptability findings contrast to the conclusions drawn by Markowski and Roxburgh (2019). Their research may reflect the anticipated stigma within closer personal relationships, whereas Bryant's (2019) relates to broader social acceptability, or other research factors, for example, their respective findings may reflect attitudes within their sample groups.

Food is imbued with symbolism and meaning, which relates to the ways we construct self and group identity (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993). According to Rothgerber (2014), vegans are perceived to have a unique philosophical outlook that rejects traditional values. As such, vegans may present a symbolic threat to the status quo according to Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2017), or an existential threat to those who see vegans as undermining the current way of life, including cultural, economic, and social norms (Newman, 2019). Further, vegans may be perceived as threatening social stability by challenging the normative moral order about the status of non-human animals (Judge & Wilson, 2019). These perceptions of vegans as threatening in various ways inevitably impacts interpersonal relationships.

The preparing, eating and sharing of food serves a range of social functions, including reinforcing relationship closeness and passing on cultural traditions, values and beliefs (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). These are usually framed in anthropocentric terms, for example, Christmas is a time when billions of young animals are violently slaughtered for a meal celebrating "Peace on Earth". As panicked Ferdinand, the duck in the movie Babe declares, "Christmas is carnage" (Cole & Stewart, 2009). Thus, veganism is a direct challenge to dominant narratives around food and affective experience that celebrates the consumption of animals (Twine, 2014). As such, vegans can be characterised as deviant due to openly rejecting and challenging social convention and cherished normative traditions (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019).

Vegans are often framed as "awkward" in terms of both affective discomfort they generate in others as well as practical difficulty due to a lack of competency in non-vegans preparing vegan meals (Twine, 2014). Twine (2014) found that some vegans were reluctant to speak out, not wanting to cause a fuss or be seen as difficult. Twine (2014) also found friends and family often resistant, labelling the vegan as "extreme", as illustrated in the Figure 2 to the right. Parents may perceive their child's veganism as a rejection of their upbringing (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993; Jabs et al., 2000). There is often confusion, misunderstanding or baffled responses from older relatives, for example, grandparents who do not have "vegan" within their sphere of reference at all (Twine, 2014), and attempts to dissuade against veganism through being antagonistic and confrontational (Jabs et al., 2000).

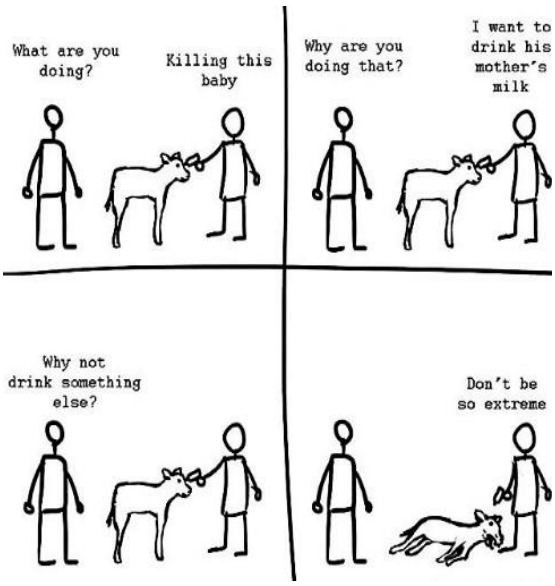

Figure 2.
Challenging the "extreme" trope.

Reprinted from Vegan Sidekick, 2019, Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1raSwPaLl1ImPMsp0irgTrdSSgHHpVQHB. Copyright n.d. by Richard Watts.

The rejection of animal products for consumption by vegans, and perceived or actual criticism of non-vegans' consumption of animal products as unethical and immoral, can foster negative emotions in non-vegans, such as anger and discomfort (Bresnahan et al., 2016). The presence of a vegan and their implicit or explicit raising of the prospect of cruel commensality often leads to defensive discursive practices on the part of non-vegans. Since carnism is maintained through systemic invisibility and personal defence mechanisms of denial and avoidance (Joy, 2010), the animal products and the violence intrinsically involved are not usually an overt presence; however, the vegan's mere presence makes it overt by bringing it to awareness. The acts of just existing as a known vegan or identifying as vegan may provoke difficult emotions in others. Vegans risk exclusion for challenging the status quo by willing to go against a protected social and moral order and taking others to an uncomfortable space with them by default (Rothgerber, 2014). The "bad feeling" is then often attributed by the presence of the "killjoy", which is often acted out through "quickly dispensed punishment" (Twine, 2014, p. 625), for example, swift dismissal of veganism through labelling the vegan. Non-vegan discomfort may also be reduced by criticism, as well as attempts to uncover inconsistencies in the vegan's behaviour (Rothgerber, 2014).

Some research has found difficulties within vegan/non-vegan relationships tend to dissipate over time as relationships are renegotiated. Renegotiation often accompanied learning the "how-to" of vegan practice, such as cooking and gaining greater nutritional knowledge (Twine, 2014). McDonald (2000), on the other hand, found that participants report experiencing a lack of support and hurt feelings. Reported issues involved arguments and not being accepted, sometimes ending with an agreement not to discuss veganism. Participants, however, also report that it was easier to discuss veganism with people more open-minded and sympathetic to the vegan position.

2.3.5. The Personal Experience of Being Vegan in a Non-Vegan World

Vegans are characterised in mostly negative terms, and as a homogenous group, however, there are many in-group variations (Saltmarsh & Short, 2019). As touched upon earlier, the discrimination faced by vegans is not generally problematised and is widely accepted as routine. Vegans are often openly invalidated, marginalised, labelled, stigmatised, stereotyped, and often aggressively opposed (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). This open discrimination is distinctive amongst other types of bias, such as racism and sexism (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). It is also distinctive in that the threat vegans pose is through a decision not to engage in normative behaviour. This passive rejection may be perceived in a uniquely threatening way. Additionally, non-vegans can become vegan if they so choose, which differentiates vegaphobia from homophobia, for example.

Horta (2018) discusses discrimination against vegans, suggesting that it remains socially invisible, despite vegans recognising it as discrimination. The reasons vegans may not campaign against this is because vegans consider the discrimination against them to be a consequence of a more important form of discrimination, which is speciesism against animals, so choose to prioritise defending animals instead. Horta (2018) suggests that discrimination against vegans can be characterised as second-order discrimination, which is directed against those who oppose the first-order discrimination (speciesism). The types of discrimination Horta (2018) points to includes forced funding of animal agriculture industries, through tax subsidies and industry bailouts, for example. Another example is the provision of dairy milk in workplaces and the exclusion of non-dairy alternatives.

Although it is an area that is underrepresented in the academic literature, being a vegan can be challenging in a world saturated with carnistic ideology. Becoming aware of, and empathically connecting to the scale and extent of constant unnecessary suffering of animals, as well as one's

previous participation in it, can lead to painful emotions. Typically these feelings include guilt, grief, and sadness for the animals, anger at the deception and injustice involved, despair at the scale of the issue, and helplessness at not being able to effect change (Joy, 2010). Vegans may view carnism as a relentless, global atrocity that most of the population is not only oblivious to but are actively participating in (Joy, 2010). Vegans are often surrounded by non-vegans who make daily decisions to directly support and even celebrate, the very practices the vegan is distressed by (Joy, 2010). Mann (2018) describes this experience as "the burden of knowing" and living in "vystopia".

The hidden nature of carnism and wish to end the unnecessary suffering of countless animals are reasons vegans typically want to share what they have learned (McDonald, 2000). However, in attempting to educate others, they are often met with a great deal of resistance, including being accused of "pushing their views". This unwillingness to listen can then lead to frustration for the vegan who is unable to communicate what they have learned, and disillusionment with other people and the world in general (Mann, 2018). Additionally, there is also often relational failed empathic reciprocity over the affective experiences of vegans, including minimising and mocking the vegan's emotional responses, for example, to dead animals on the table.

2.4. Where This Research Fits

Although becoming increasingly relevant, studies of vegans are rare (Cole & Morgan, 2011; McDonald, 2000), and vegans in research are generally viewed as subsets of vegetarians, where their veganism is often viewed as dietary asceticism, a lifestyle practice that involves abstaining from pleasure to pursue spiritual goals, involving strenuous and exceptional efforts (Cole, 2008). Related literature has focused on carnism and vegetarianism (Loughnan et al., 2014; Rosenfeld, 2018), institutional resistance to veganism (Aavik, 2019), and marginalisation within the vegan community (Greenebaum, 2018; Wrenn, 2017). Animal rights is a primary motivation for vegans, though this is underexplored (McDonald, 2000). The misrepresentation of veganism as a restrictive diet perpetuates the idea of veganism as deviant and diet-related rather than an animal protection focused ideology. However, food forms a considerable portion of the human experience, and therefore the vegan experience.

Unlike other marginalised groups, vegans who were previously non-vegan hold a unique position of having been a dominant group member before moving to a non-dominant group. Accordingly, this research seeks to:

- Explore the “carnistic disconnection” participants previously experienced
- Examine the perceptions and feelings participants have about various topics salient to veganism, comparing the cognitive and emotional elements of these perceptions both before and after becoming vegan
- Gain insight into the experiences of “making the connection” and transitioning to veganism
- Increase understanding around the experience of being vegan, a non-dominant and marginalised group member, in a world saturated with carnistic ideology and practices. Bearing in mind that vegans who were once non-vegan are in a position to have insights into, not only, their previous carnism, but also the carnistic defences of dominant group members.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Relatively recent research developments have highlighted the importance of making researcher assumptions as transparent as possible (Willig, 2001), including those which inform epistemological theory and methodology. The choices made, in the process of the research, including the aims, methods used, and the research findings inevitably have consequences. Given that the research is impossible to separate from the researcher, it is essential to make explicit how my presence shapes the research. I begin by sharing my story, journey to veganism, and motivations for this research. Following on from my epistemological position, I cover the theoretical framework of the research, including the Critical Animal Studies standpoint, social constructionism, touching on Foucauldian theory, which then leads into narrative inquiry. Methodological considerations then discussed include sample, recruitment, participants, interview procedures, data collection and analysis, quality assurance, evaluation criteria, and finally, ethical considerations.

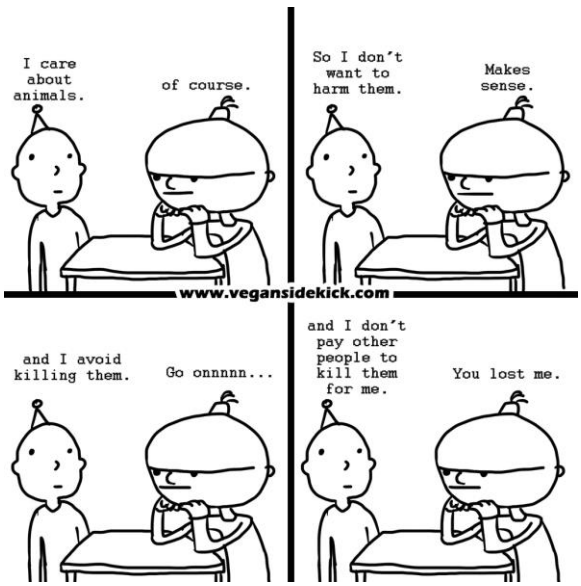

Figure 3.
Challenging the logic of carnism.

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3.2. My Position Informed by My Story

I grew up believing myself to be an animal lover, witnessing and admiring my father's sweet interactions with animals. We had a fluffy grey cat with yellow eyes named Sammy, whom I loved. Sammy had an operation on his lip to remove skin cancer, and so would dribble when he was happily purring. At night he would sometimes sleep right up close to my face, purring away, and dribbling down my neck. I remember lying ever so still so as not to interrupt his very contented state, despite being very uncomfortable myself.

I look back with deep sadness and regret at some of the ways “our” animals were regarded and kept, like having a cockatiel’s wings clipped. The vet assured me it did not hurt him, but they bled terribly and stopped him from flying. Growing up I made many attempts at saving baby birds who had dropped from their nests in the bush out the back of our house, all while tucking into an evening meal containing dead animals, utterly oblivious to any connection between the two.

I had always felt uncomfortable about the thought of animals being killed for food. I remember thinking “I like meat, so I’m glad I don’t have to do the killing myself”. I tried not to think about it too much. My mum grew up in Te Aroha in the Waikato and during car trips to visit my grandparents, I vividly remember driving past farm gates with wooden pens at the bottom of long driveways. I remember my parents telling me that these were for the bobby calves to be picked up and taken away, and my mother telling me how the mother cows would cry for days for their babies. I felt sad and sick about the fate of these helpless animals and their mothers, reaching a sort of sad acceptance that it was just the way things were. There was no connection made at all to the milk, ice cream, or cheese I frequently consumed and very much enjoyed.

It was not until as a married adult, a dog, Alfie, joined our family after a misguided promise to my stepdaughter, that I finally had a thought that felt like a “click”. I have fallen in love with this little being, undeniably an individual. It has been so important for us to ensure that he has a happy, full, and enriched life. One day I thought “there is no way I would eat Alfie, so how can I justify eating other animals?”. I started looking for and consuming locally sourced, free-range, “humane” meat, an oxymoron and justification that makes me cringe now. It was not long before my conscience weighed on me. I switched to a pescatarian diet. I knew a bit about the dairy industry but tried to put it out of my mind because I was addicted to cheese. I was less aware of the suffering, violence, and environmental destruction involved in the egg and “seafood” industries.

Eventually, again, my conscience was not able to leave it alone, and I began to do some research about the animal agriculture industry and standard practice, which led to looking into the vegan philosophy. I watched YouTube clips of prominent vegan activists doing street outreach with non-vegans often using Socratic questioning, watched documentaries, disturbing slaughterhouse and animal agriculture footage documenting standard practice, and read about veganism from a vegan perspective. I had not given vegans much thought beyond thinking they were probably a bit “out there” and believing I could *never*

be one. It did not take long before I could see the logic and ethics involved in a movement that at its core is about justice, especially when considering the potential for the abuse of power humans have over the, most often gentle and defenceless, non-human animals we exploit. As Gandhi (1983) expressed "I hold that the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man". I could no longer in good conscience take part in what I suddenly realised were cruel practices through my habits and consumption. It was not so much that I wanted to become *vegan*; I just did not want to contribute directly to animal suffering any longer. Of course, that is precisely what veganism is. I felt compelled, much to my surprise, to become vegan myself at the age of 38, with no current vegan friends or family. It was a daunting prospect.

For me, becoming vegan has been bittersweet. The aspect I thought would be the hardest, the food, has been a joy. Despite not being much of a "foodie", I have loved exploring new recipes and ingredients and finding new restaurants. The food is delicious, satisfying, and easy to find. I do not feel deprived, and I no longer see animal products as innocuous items or even as food at all. I now feel saddened and repulsed by them. For me, the most challenging part of becoming and being vegan has been, and continues to be, the paradigm shift that I have experienced which Mann (2018) calls "the burden of knowing". Gaining more awareness of the scale and extent of suffering we humans inflict on vulnerable and innocent non-human animals, both throughout their short, often miserable lives, and at their violent deaths, has been gut-wrenching. So much of what I had previously taken for granted suddenly became products of violence and oppression. Being surrounded by the rest of the world carrying on as if this were all perfectly fine and I was irrational for seeing the intensely obvious, yet hidden, extreme, and large-scale violence toward the sentient others with whom we share this planet has been a strange, paradigm-shifting experience.

The relationship aspect has been a mixed bag, with some friends and family being very open-minded, enquiring, supportive, and accepting, and others being immediately defensive, even hostile, and accusatory. I have found that over time it has become easier, and my approach to others has shifted too. To find myself in a world surrounded by people whom I know to be compassionate and thoughtful, yet who are actively participating in the suffering of some of the world's most vulnerable inhabitants, has been devastating. I have felt so frustratingly unable to help in a meaningful way, which brings me to this thesis. I heard an activist recently say that activism can come in many forms, and we can use our talents and skills to bring light to this cause. Through this exploration, I hope to be able to add to

increasing literature that helps to demystify veganism and the vegan experience, and ultimately draw attention to the plight of non-human animals, who are at the centre of veganism.

As Holtby (2015) points out, marginalised group members who deal with stigmatisation, stereotyping, and limited visibility, enter research knowing that the research is never only about one's own experience. The burden of representation may be multi-layered for vegans, who as Joy (2010) points out, may feel a tremendous sense of responsibility towards helping to end the unnecessary suffering of innocent others. Non-human animals do not have the advantage of having their voices in the conversation.

There are parameters placed around what is possible to discuss and what is omitted (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). Although I am perhaps hyper-conscious of how this research might be perceived, the reality of the harrowing lives and deaths of the animals we use is a brutal, bloody, violent truth that cannot be overstated in my opinion. It is suffering on an incomprehensible scale and therefore becomes an abstract idea, yet it is individual sentient beings, each at the centre of their own subjective experience of the world, bred for a single purpose: to have their body used, or discarded as waste by-products by humans. Since for most people it is no longer a survival necessity; I believe that future generations will look back on our current exploitation of non-human animals with bewilderment and horror in the same way we struggle now to comprehend complicit bystanders and active participants in other historical injustices.

Placing this thesis within the context of my history and perspective and being open about my veganism as essential in striving for a degree of researcher reflexivity (Delamont, 2009). I do not wish to, and cannot, make claims of neutrality or dispassionate objectivity in the face of what I view as an immeasurable injustice. However, it is equally problematic to suggest that neutrality or objectivity is always possible within research. Previously long-held assumptions about the neutrality of the sciences have been thoroughly critiqued in the social sciences often due to the ways they privilege patriarchal, white, and classist values, which are treated as natural and obvious, rather than ideological. Assumptions that explanations immersed in values are untrustworthy have also been challenged (Gergen, 1994). Scientific establishments have often lent themselves to and their efforts towards enhancing the technologies of aggression. This too is the case for agricultural technologies and the

exploitation of animals. There are clear ideological biases present in what was previously conceived of as neutral and positivist.

Groups concerned with injustice and oppression must question the taken-for-granted realities informing invisible ideologies that underlie claims of truth and reason present in the sciences (Gergen, 1994). Scientific texts, for example, have been criticised for the ways women's bodies have been positioned as a form of a factory, with reproduction as the primary purpose. These descriptions and linguistic framing are anything but neutral. In the same way, the language used to reference non-human animals could be similarly critiqued. For example, the mechanisation of animals who are referred to as "livestock" and "units", the ways non-human animals can be legally considered as "property" and are described by industry and academia alike using horticultural terms like "grown", "cultivated", and "harvested". These detached terminologies carry with them moral, political, and social consequences that reinforce disconnection from other sentient beings. Even texts and supposed ethical guidelines in the sciences contain multiple assumptions about the status of non-human animals, including our assumed moral right to use other sentient beings for human purposes, such as in scientific research, and then dispose of (kill) them once they are no longer of use to us. When examining the messages communicated in language, we reveal intent, such as intent to suppress and oppress, or to retain power, wealth, and cultural dominance (Gergen, 1994).

3.3. Theoretical Framework

The overall theoretical approach used is a narrative approach, underpinned by social constructionism, due to its focus on the nature of co-created, often unquestioned and hidden, cultural and social phenomena. This connects with narrative inquiry, which is committed to considering the self as multidimensional and connected to historical, political, social and cultural contexts (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Alongside the social constructionist approach to narrative analysis, drawing on the work of Foucault (1989), Riessman (2001), and Burr (2018), I assume a Critical Animal Studies standpoint.

3.3.1. Critical Animal Studies Standpoint

Critical Animal Studies (CAS) has emerged in as an interdisciplinary field in academia and can be viewed as a theoretical inclusion of animal advocacy within research. It is dedicated to non-human animal, human, and environmental liberty, and explicitly emphasises the ways in which capitalism reinforces various forms of exploitation and oppression (Griffin, 2017; Twine, 2014). Animal standpoint theory

shares commonalities with other standpoint theories in its commitment to represent historically exploited, marginalised and oppressed viewpoints and perspectives. This compatibility with other critical social theories entails a fundamentally intersectional approach. Taylor and Twine (2014) highlight the interconnections between capitalism and its impact on animals, arguing "the corporate globalisation of profit-making practices … especially in agriculture, has played an unmistakable role in radically extending the scale of animal exploiting practices beyond even what might have been expected from human population increases" (p. 9). In other words, the intensification of capitalism results in intensified exploitation of animals. The concept of intersectionality as an anti-capitalist approach is critical to understand through contextualising its emergence historically.

Intersectionality emerged from black feminism, as a term coined by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the ways in which gender and race interact and act upon employment difficulties for black women. The term has since evolved through a process of refining and defining in feminist writings (Kanai, 2020). Intersectionality as an approach to analysis helps in acknowledgement, critical understanding, and ultimately in challenging the interrelated systems of cultural and social categorisations which impact both groups and individuals. CAS seeks to highlight the commonalities, emphasising how various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and speciesism overlap. Rather than contributing to binary notions of animal and human interests as competing with each other, CAS seeks to view all oppression as being inevitably interlinked. Twine (2010) suggests that CAS attempts to decentre the human experience, reconceptualising our understandings of the social world by providing a "posthumanist" view of intersectionality.

3.3.2. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism rejects positivist explanations that some phenomena are universal, natural, unavoidable, and determined by biology (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Burr (1995) outlines four fundamental assumptions of social constructionism. The first is that taken-for-granted understandings should be viewed from a critical stance, that is, we should take a distrustful view of our assumed knowledge. The second is that knowledge is historically and culturally located, including of-the-time political stances, labels and ideologies. Thirdly, the premise that social processes maintain knowledge. These processes include the ways language is used to produce and reproduce meanings, to enact roles within various contexts, and internalising socially constructed ideas such as social identities. These constructed social identities are dependent upon political and historical factors, which tend to privilege

the interests of dominant groups. Through the internalisation of dominant discourses, we may confirm existing bias, whilst ignoring evidence that challenges it. Through the analysis of language and discourse, we can examine the mechanisms of power and control. A fourth assumption is that social action and knowledge are interwoven, for example, changes in the status of women, such as the belief in women's suitability to participate in the workforce, which has led to the normalisation of women in full-time work at all levels.

Social constructionism asserts that reality is not an objective "truth", but rather that co-constructed realities become a worldview, including a set of beliefs that are accepted as truth. These shared beliefs are embedded and reinforced through cultural norms, traditions, language, and may include membership in the dominant group (Andrews, 2012). Knowledge, therefore, is not fixed; instead, it is continuously evolving through cultural and social idea-sharing. Social constructionism can be used to expose and examine taken-for-granted or assumed truths, which are used to produce and maintain certain social and ideological norms (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). That which is considered to be acceptable and normal changes over time as new ideas and beliefs enter cultural space and institutions. This continually evolving co-created cultural context means that previously long-standing ideas, beliefs and norms may, in relatively short spaces of time, be considered to be abhorrent, archaic, and morally objectionable, for example, discrimination towards LGBTQi+ people, the subjugation of women, and human slavery.

Social constructionism is concerned with how knowledge, ideas and beliefs are constructed and how identities are formed and negotiated within social relationship through communication. It is concerned with the ways language and linguistic practices are used, including the ways we make sense of ourselves and others, recognising that the self is in a constant state of flux that must be considered in surrounding contexts, such as experiences, history, culture, and relationships (Crossley, 2011). Language is both constructed, through words being put together to form meanings and constructive, through its own creation of meaning and proliferation of ideas (Tuffin, 2005). Language and words are also context-bound and carry meanings that vary according to group membership and ideology.

Typically, normative and dominant positions are maintained through empowering the voices of dominant groups, and by minimising, marginalising, pathologising, and trivialising the views and beliefs of non-dominant groups. Social constructionism addresses the use of discourse to construct and

reinforce norms, empower and legitimise dominant voices, whilst disempowering, minimising and silencing non-dominant voices or those who challenge social norms. Foucault (1989) proposed that discourse is more than "just language"; it is the ways that social and power relations are manifested in the physical world. Power relationships can empower and create possibilities or limit actions and interactions. Discourses are concurrently figurative, material, and active. In social constructionism, as well as seeking knowledge that "works", we also ask *whom* it works for. This highlights the ways that knowledge is inevitably tied to power since constructions often marginalise some and benefit others (Burr, 2018).

Normalisation is a social process, particularly associated with the work of Foucault (1989). Normalisation is particularly relevant to carnism as it emphasises how certain practices, ideas, and identities become recognised as "normal", and as a result, neutral and taken-for-granted. As a consequence, ideas, and practices, such as veganism, become abnormal and problematised. According to Foucault (1989), conduct is judged then reinforced or punished according to how one's conduct is measured against social norms. Foucault asserts that the production of knowledge is intrinsically tied to society's power dynamics and that "every society produces its own truths which have a normalising and regulatory function" (McNay, 1992, p. 25).

Normalisation can be resisted through self-transformation on an individual level (McLaren, 2002). This can, in turn, lead to broader social transformation through the development of new ways of living, and counter-discourses to established norms. The social constructionist perspective releases us from the binds of history and traditions, as we are invited to raise questions, listen to new perspectives, ponder new ways of being and doing, and co-create new realities. Sustaining traditional ways of being and doing requires continuous processes of constructing and regenerating meaning, so new ways of existing require us to do more than simply reject or refuse current meanings, for example, simply refusing to engage in racist language. Creating new ways to live requires us to generate discourses that challenge existing taken-for-granted practices and worldviews, and in doing so, offer new courses of action (Gergen, 2009). Joy's (2010) conception of the term "carnism" is one such example of this. In being able to name the dominant (and assumed "normal") ideology, we are able to identify and thus challenge the beliefs and mechanisms underlying it.

Social constructionism has also been criticised due to its emphasis on nurture over nature, or social and cultural forces, over biological, and that it fundamentally denies objective morality (Burr, 2018). This criticism may be particularly relevant to this topic, as the biological foundation for consuming animals, is an area of heated debate, and a common argument against veganism, falling into the "natural" category. Anthropocentric bias is also present in positivist assumptions about the natural world. For example, humans might view a tree as something to be used for shade or shelter, to be cut down to build houses and so on, to a dog with olfactory senses far more powerful than humans, a tree might be a way to understand other dogs and animals in the area, to a bird it might be a place to build a home. As Burr (2018) points out, social constructionism does not contradict that a material reality exists; however, our distinctions and perceptions of the world are products of our human perspectives. In this sense, the world we occupy as humans is both real and constructed, and our constructions have real effects. Further, Burr (2018) argues that taking a social constructionist theoretical stance does not mean that all moral choices can be viewed as subjective and therefore equally justifiable; instead, it means the opposite. We are in-fact obligated to make moral choices through the availability of alternative constructions. The availability of other ways of viewing the world means that constructions and subsequent moral choices arising from them need to be justified.

With this said, I am especially conscious of my language use in this research. Words can be powerful enablers or challengers of norms (Foucault, 1989), and I do seek to challenge through this research. However, I am also mindful of attempting to make this work accessible within the current cultural and social context. This is an example of the kind of dilemma vegans must negotiate in their representations. Certain words and terms have been quite deliberately chosen, for example, the use of the terms "slaughterhouse", rather than the more euphemistic and obfuscating "abattoir", and "killing", rather than "processing", which is a commonly used sanitising industry term. Animal killing would never be described as an "execution", whilst "put to sleep" would never be used to describe killing a human. "All of these terms serve as linguistic means of alleviating the unease humans feel at the killing of animals" (Jepson, 2008, p. 144). "Non-vegan" has been used, rather than omnivore or carnist. "Omnivore" refers to the physiological ability to metabolise both plants and animal products (which vegans can also do). The term "carnist" in my opinion, implies a level of conscious awareness or a chosen belief system, whereas, I would suggest that most non-vegans are unaware of the beliefs and practices underlying carnism. Using the terms "meat" and "animal products" potentially reinforces dominant positions. "Meat" is a distancing euphemism compared to the arguably more accurate "flesh", and the term

"animal *products*" potentially legitimises the commodification of animals, and the taking, selling, purchasing, and consumption of their bodily secretions. These terms serve to objectify animals, thus reducing the moral concern we place on them. According to Lucas and Fyke (2014) euphemisms "can change the very meaning attached to the phenomenon it is meant to signify" and "has the power to background, conceal, and mask a variety of different deeds and behaviours" (p. 554). So, euphemisms can impact the visibility and meaning of a phenomenon. The euphemism itself has been described as an "injurious weapon" and a "form of violence" (Lucas & Fyke, 2014, p. 556). For these reasons, decisions to include or exclude specific terms have been made cautiously and with ongoing hesitancy.

3.3.3. Narrative Approach

The narrative psychology approach is concerned with issues of self, identity, and morality, using narrative inquiry as a way of understanding the meanings people construct in their lives through their stories. It asserts that we have a need to feel that our sense of self, and what we deem to be morally right, are in harmony (Crossley, 2011). During times of transition, people tend to make sense out of events, past to present, through the use of stories or narratives. Narrative analysis is concerned with events significant to the individual's life that form a crucial feature of their narrative (Crossley, 2011). Riessman (2001) asserts that narrative analysis is equally concerned with disruptive life events, as well as social movements and political change.

Narrative inquiry makes the story the object of investigation, thus, connects political change and social movements with disruptive life events at an individual level. This can provide insight into broader social phenomena through personal, individual perspectives (Riessman, 2001). The narratives of historically relegated and defiled groups (such as members of the LGBTQi+ community and rape victims) illustrate and expose movement and changing language, attitudes, and politics over time (Riessman, 2001). For example, personal narratives of gay people told at different points in time reveal a lot about contemporary and shifting attitudes through the "personal issues" faced by the individuals. What we might call "personal narratives" are, in fact, historically and socially located, so are as personal as they are social and cultural (Riessman, 2001).

Due to the relational nature of storytelling, it is essential to emphasise the role of interviewers as active participants and to assume that tellers and listeners are interacting with particular cultural milieus (Riessman, 2001). It is essential then that the story itself is investigated in terms of not only *what* was

said, but *why* the story was told in a particular way, as well as to question *how* wider social and cultural contexts, as well as research relationship, shaped the account (Riessman, 2001). As storytelling is relational, it can invite those from outside the group or community in question to listen, question their assumptions, biases and judgement, and empathise.

The ways language is used is an important consideration, not only in terms of the ways in which individuals position themselves and others but also in regard to other aspects of the narrative construction, such as what is not said (Riessman, 2001). The ways in which the data is formed through the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, as in what the researcher probes further into, as well as the assumptions embedded in the interview questions, is also essential to consider and question. Thus, critical engagement by the researcher and reflexivity are vital aspects of the narrative approach. Reflexivity stresses the need to consider the circumstances and contexts surrounding the research. As such, it is essential that I have acknowledged my own veganism as central to this project and have been open with participants as to my "insider" vegan perspective.

3.4. Method

The method used has been informed by my personal experiences in transitioning to veganism and living as a vegan in a non-vegan world. I wanted to use my experiences in a way that can enhance the understanding of others' experiences of veganism. As well as personal researcher experience, the existing literature on social stigma informed the narrative inquiry approach and some of the questions used in the research. Despite having interview questions as a guide, a flexible approach to questioning was used in order to reflect the diversity of individual subjective experience and honour each account.

3.4.1. Recruitment

Recruitment of participants was not anticipated to be difficult due to the research giving voice to an engaged, yet marginalised, oft stereotyped, and silenced group. Participants were sought and obtained through three avenues. One was an invitation posted to a prominent New Zealand vegan Facebook group, which I am already a member of, asking for expressions of interest. The second avenue was through a public talk on veganism which I attended as an audience member. After the talk, I approached several people asking for expressions of interest. These were people I did not know previously. One participant was recruited this way. Finally, there was one associate, a member of a volunteer group I belong to, who happens to be vegan, and expressed interest after I was asked about this project. These

recruitment methods to some extent may have covered the gaining entry, access, and rapport building aspects of initial data gathering from groups, however, it is also important to consider that gathering data is an ongoing relational, reflexive process, including both participants and researcher (Suzuki et al., 2016).

Once potential participants had expressed their initial interests, an email was sent to each person with an attached PDF Information Sheet (Appendix A). The email included a message that provided a period of at least seven days to respond before it would be followed up. For those who continued to express interest, a further email was sent requesting demographic information including age, location (town/city), and ethnicity, as well as when and where participants could meet. Participants wishing to continue were sent an invitation to meet. Shenton (2004) raised the issue of whether purposive sampling, rather than random sampling, may be problematic due to researcher bias in participant selection. All of those who continued to express an interest in participating were interviewed, except for two who responded later, after sufficient information power was achieved.

The criteria of reaching "information power" in order to determine when the data collected was sufficient was used as a loose guide, with consideration of difficult to predict criteria including diversity within the group and quality of dialogue (Malterud et al., 2016). Malterud et al. (2016) propose that a sample holding more information is more relevant and therefore, a lower number of participants are required. Their suggested criteria for reaching information power includes; the aim of the study, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy.

3.4.2. Participants

Participant inclusion criteria was based on three factors: identifying as vegan aligning to The Vegan Society's definition, being at least 18 years of age, and having been vegan for at least three years. The criteria of having been vegan for at least three years was designed to increase the likelihood of interviewing people who are committed to veganism, have well-formed vegan identities, and a range of experiences being vegan. The exclusion of people who have been vegan for less than three years may have limited the depth of exploration of previously non-vegan, transition from non-vegan to vegan, as well as the fullness of newly vegan experiences, thoughts and feelings unless those who have been vegan for longer are able to recall these details accurately. This was expressed by one participant in a previous study, a vegan of just over one year, who expressed that vegans who have been in the

movement for longer typically have more connections and a stronger support system, and tend to forget how painful it can be at the beginning (McDonald, 2000). Equally, persons under the age of 18 years old may have unique and valuable experiences of interest in this type of research, which would be excluded by these criteria.

Demographic information obtained was used to attempt to ensure those interviewed covered a range of ages, geographical locations (such as urban and rural), experiences, and ethnicities. The convenience sampling, fortunately, resulted in a range of ages, some diversity regarding ethnicity, and geographical locations. Participant ages range from 28 to 60 years old, with a mean average age of 39.5 years, and they have been vegan for between three and 14 years, with an average having been vegan for seven years. Further detail on ethnicity, ages, locations, time vegan, and whether or not they were vegetarian first are indicated in Table 2. Admittedly, some diversity was limited, potentially at the expense of credibility and diversity of experience (Malterud et al., 2016; Suzuki et al., 2016). However, as this is an exploratory study seeking to identify themes across experiences, it is crucial to recognise the diversity within groups and as such the implausibility of capturing the complete range of vegan experiences (Suzuki et al., 2016).

Table 2.
Participant information (n = 12)

Name (pseudonym)	M/F	Age	Vegan for (years)	Province	Ethnicity	Vegetarian first
Keira	f	35	7	Auckland	Italian	no
Isabelle	f	37	6	Auckland	NZ European/Maori	yes
Dean	m	49	5	Auckland	NZ European/Pakeha	yes
Eli	m	44	8	Bay of Plenty	NZ European/Pakeha	pescatarian
Gavin	m	30	3.5	Auckland	German	no
Harvey	m	31	3	Bay of Plenty	NZ European/ Maori	no
Frank	m	33	12	Bay of Plenty	NZ European/Pakeha	yes
Jacqui	f	38	4	Wellington	Filipino	no
Clara	f	60	9	Bay of Plenty	NZ European/Pakeha	no
Lucy	f	41	3.5	Waikato	Half Western European and half Indian	yes
Brian	m	49	9	Otago	NZ European/Pakeha	no
Andrea	f	28	14	Auckland	NZ European/Pakeha	no
Age range	28 – 60 years					
Average age	39.5 years					
Average time vegan	7 years					

3.4.3. Interview Locations

The in-person interviews took place in public-private spaces, which included meeting rooms at a public library, and universities. For interviewees unable to meet in person, for reasons including geographical distance, meetings took place online, over Zoom via a link emailed to participants. The initial preference was for face-to-face, in-person interviews due to being more able to read and interpret non-verbal cues, and promoting intimacy and honesty (Suzuki et al., 2016). However, this needed to be considered in light of obtaining diverse perspectives and experiences that could be influenced by geographical location. As it happened, only three of the interviews were conducted in person, with the remaining nine taking place through Zoom.

3.4.4. Data Collection

Due to the exploratory aims of this study, data were produced through flexible and semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The interviews were designed to allow participants to describe their own stories and experiences, as well as how they perceive these experiences in the broader social contexts that inevitably interact with their personal account. Interviews as a method of data collection acknowledges the individual as an important source of knowledge, with the ability to offer meaningful descriptions, as experts on their own experience. The interview itself cannot be viewed as a neutral mechanism through which data is extracted; it must be considered and contextualised regarding "its structure, interactional dynamics, situational responsiveness, and discursive dimensions" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2018, p. 27). The narratives produced are unavoidably tied to the circumstances of the interview itself, including researcher identity. The interview can be viewed as a social encounter where knowledge is shaped, and stories can be constructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2018).

My "insider" vegan position was disclosed to participants at the recruitment stage. Suzuki et al. (2016) discuss the potential challenges and benefits to the insider-outsider dichotomy. On the one hand, some insist that an outsider status and interpersonal distance is required to achieve objectivity. On the other hand, others have challenged this, suggesting that familiarity with vocabularies, customs and ideas may facilitate access to communities. Particularly with consideration to the social stigma and misrepresentation often attached to veganism, as well as the ideology of carnism, it would be problematic to suggest that a non-vegan would be capable of achieving a "neutral" stance. The "insider" position may act as a way to facilitate trust between researcher and participant. Another consideration is the multiplicity of identities, regarding aspects like gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and socio-

economic status. Thus, care must be taken not to categorise identities in ways that lead to simplistic discourses that distort complex realities. This is particularly key when considering intersectionality.

Prior to in-person meetings, I provided each participant with a hard copy of the same information sheet (Appendix A) previously emailed to them and a consent form, to obtain written consent. For online meetings, consent forms were emailed, which participants signed and sent back prior to each interview. There were a few times people were unable to print, scan, and email consent forms back; in these cases, I was able to video record their verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. I used a set of questions (Appendix D), to serve as a guide. To enable an environment where the participant felt safe to share their experiences openly, I "broke the ice" by beginning with closed questions and moving towards more broad, open questions. Interview questions were designed to invite participants to describe the story of their transition to veganism, spanning the "before", "during", and "after" or current states, as well as their experiences as being vegan. Probing questions included asking about challenges, relationship issues, how participants cope emotionally with living in a non-vegan world, with negative stereotyping, stigmatisation, and marginalisation, and how their thoughts and perceptions have changed over time.

The semi-structured approach and flexible structure were used to guide participants into relevant discussions whilst allowing them to respond in ways representative of their individual experiences. Care was taken not to take tangents that deviated too far beyond the aims of the research, while keeping in mind that a key aim of this research was to obtain rich narratives. Riessman (2001) argues that some "digressions" can be productive and challenge researcher assumptions, and I found this to be the case. Some of the more vibrant narratives obtained were when participants were enabled to delve more deeply into their own stories and issues relevant to them personally. The potential interactional biases of interviewing are important to acknowledge. Whilst traditional literature generally stresses the importance of controlling for bias, the primary priority in this data collection is to maximise the stream of rich, reliable, and valid information and minimise potential distortions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2018). Instead of viewing subjectivity as interfering bias, Coffey (1999) argues for engaging with the emotional and personal characteristics of research in order to reflect on how both researcher and participant identities influence knowledge production. Lippke and Tanggaard (2014) encourage "leaning in to 'muddy' interviews", "inhabited by embodied, emotional, physical selves." (Coffey, 1999, p. 8).

In-person interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone, with the participant's permission, in order to ensure interviews could be transcribed verbatim. The phone was set to "airplane mode" to ensure there were not any interruptions. Zoom interviews were video-recorded, with each participant's consent, and prior to transcription, each video was reviewed in its entirety. This process enabled rich information and ground for reflection, as I was able to review some of my own responses over the course of the interviews and alter my approach to allow for interviews to flow, as well as improve my interviewing to allow for more relaxed and candid responses from participants. I was able to gently challenge and build on responses using information obtained from earlier interviews. The video recordings also had the advantage of enabling review of the conversation alongside information-rich body language and facial expression, which added depth and nuance to the accounts. My supervisor and I reviewed sections of several video recorded interviews together in person. During the interviews, I took notes of key words, or important points, in order to use these for follow up questions, dig deeper for further information on a particular topic or experience, and provide further context for later use during transcription. Interviews typically ranged from one hour to one hour and 30 minutes in length, with the longest being two hours and 15 minutes. Interviews took place over several months, from September to November 2019.

At the end of each interview, I explained the next steps to each participant, including the potential of follow-up interviews, if necessary. I informed participants that the information was to be transcribed and main themes extracted, then asked if they would be happy to be contacted in the future. All agreed. Each participant was thanked for their involvement (Suzuki et al., 2016) and given a gift certificate. I set aside some time at the close of, or shortly following each interview, to reflect, review and record key information about what was learned, including the emotional quality and content of the interview, as well as reflections on interpersonal interaction between participants and myself.

I transcribed each interview orthographically, acknowledging that some information and nuance is lost when oral data is transcribed into writing (Polknghorne, 2005). Given the emotional aspects of the data, details including intonation, pauses, utterances, and other emotional expression were included, as far as practicably possible (Kvale, 1996), aiming to record not just what was said, but how it was said (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I took care to honour the individual's narrative and be aware of biases, distortions, and errors, resisting the temptation to "clean up" "messy" data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Transcripts were provided to each participant to review and add information, either in writing or using brief follow-up interviews. None of the participants provided any updates to their transcription, and there were no follow-up interviews. As Riessman (2001) asserts, the process of transcribing, analysing and retelling continues to construct and make meaning during the process of shifting fluid verbal speech to text and carries on beyond the interview to the transcription and analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

Analysis of Personal Narratives was used, following on from the social constructionist theoretical framework and narrative inquiry data collection method, and research aims. Laslett (1999, p. 392) states the analysis of personal narratives can serve to illumine "individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed". Narrative analysis allows shifts and changes in individual ideological, group identification, and subjective experience, allowing multiple discourses, rather than a fixed identity (Richardson, 2000). The research aimed to bear witness to each individual's subjective experience, considering the narrative as contextualised within culture, history and being time-bound (Bleakley, 2005).

Several steps were undertaken in conducting the analysis. Crossley (2011) outlines specific steps: first, reading and familiarising, which involved listening to the audio recording or viewing the video recording, followed by reading the entire transcript five or six times. Secondly, identifying important concepts (tone, imagery and themes). Narrative tone includes determining what is conveyed both through content and tone; imagery is used to make sense of who we are, including symbols, images and metaphors, and themes involves what is particularly important within the story, such as driving forces for decisions made, or the tensions that exist between morality and normative pro-social behaviour. This last point was especially pertinent to the findings. Thirdly, weaving all of this together into a coherent story. And finally, writing up.

Despite these general guidelines, Crossley (2011) contests that narrative analysis cannot and should not be reduced to such guidelines in an attempt to fit into inconsistent quantitative models and methodologies. He describes the process of creatively building up narratives as closer to an art than a science, and encourages students and researchers to push boundaries, rather than conform to traditional methodological schemas.

3.5.1. Quality Assurance and Evaluation Criteria

Boundary pushing, however innovative, does raise the question of validity (Crossley, 2011). Qualitative research trustworthiness, reliability and validity are often criticised when considered through the lens of the positivist paradigm (Shenton, 2004). The differing underlying assumptions of social constructionism versus positivism make comparisons regarding academic rigour complicated. Academic rigour suggests rigidity and inflexibility, and Thomas and Magilvy (2011) contend that this is an oxymoron in qualitative research since qualitative investigation is "a journey of explanation and discovery that does not lend [itself] to stiff boundaries" (p. 151).

In order to prevent unproductive comparisons, many naturalistic researchers use different terminology, such as those suggested by Guba (1981). To ensure the findings are of high quality and have value, I have followed the suggestions as outlined by Shenton (2004), for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, definitions of which are in Table 3, as well as Findlay's (2006) 5C's.

Table 3.
Quality assurance definitions

Credibility	establishing that results are believable
Transferability	the degree to which the results can be generalised or transferred
Dependability	the need to account for continuously evolving contexts within which research takes place and consider the impacts of this
Confirmability	the degree to which the research results can be confirmed by others

Credibility provisions include: the adoption of an appropriate and well-recognised research method, familiarity with the community of interest, random sampling, obtaining consent, and frequent debriefing between myself and my supervisor. I also make use of reflexive commentary, disclose background information about myself and my position, member checks or verification of transcripts were offered to participants, I provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated, and relate findings to existing literature.

The degree to which transferability is possible in naturalistic inquiries is debatable since observations are tied specific contexts, however, since each unique narrative offers an example, the possibility of transferability should not be hastily discounted (Shenton, 2004). Given this, the research aims for "thick descriptions" since Polkinghorne (1983) asserts that rich, accurate, elegant, and vivid descriptions

enable readers to discern trustworthiness, allowing them to emotionally enter the narrative. Furthermore, Findlay (2006) emphasises emotional and communicative power that unsettles, disturbs and challenges the readers' taken-for-granted assumptions and unconsidered complacency. Dependability has been attended to through attempts to ensure the detail of research is clearly described, including research design and implementation (what was planned and what was executed), operational detail and reflective appraisal of the research in question (Shenton, 2004). This attempts to ensure it is logical, coherent, with evidence of systematic processes, and ethically sound practice (Findlay, 2006). Boundaries to be conveyed to the reader have included the number and length of interviews and the time period taken to collect data.

Confirmability has been considered through admission of researcher assumptions and personal beliefs, recognising the limitations of methods used, and using tables as visual representations of the data. Shenton (2004) stresses the importance of researcher triangulation to a study's confirmability, in order to mitigate researcher bias, this has been attempted through critiques and guidance from my supervisor. Ongoing reflexivity is essential, through maintaining my awareness around my emotions, which are inevitably tied to verbal and non-verbal communication, and may subsequently impact participant responses (Baillie, 2015). Throughout the research, I have kept a diary of my thought development, as well as my emotional responses throughout the process, particularly during the interview and analysis stages.

3.6. Research Ethics

The project was evaluated by peer review using criteria provided by Massey Human Ethics Committee and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

A voluntary consent form was given to each participant prior to interviews (Appendix B), alongside an Information Sheet (Appendix A). Participants were informed both in writing, and verbally, that participation was voluntary, and they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were given a small gift, in the form of a voucher, as a thank you gift for participation. Massey University funded these gifts. No participants communicated any concerns or distress following their interviews.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In constructing this chapter, I have attempted to build the narratives reflecting the order and flow of the interview questions, which were designed to develop a chronological narrative. I discuss findings and insights initially at a descriptive level. As the narratives build and themes begin to intersect, I attempt to illuminate these connections through my commentary. The narratives often began in early childhood and moved on to how participants constructed their accounts of becoming vegan, including the transition to veganism itself. I then contrast their reported experiences before and after becoming vegan. I focus mainly on their described cognitive and emotional responses to meat and animal products, vegans and veganism, and their self-identity. Following this, I examine the experiences of being vegan in a non-vegan world, including the aspects people highlighted as most joyful and most challenging. I conclude with a brief discussion of participants' thoughts and experiences around advocacy, particularly in the context of interpersonal relationships, and briefly examine some salient themes emerging around the topical issue of vegan activism. The discussion includes a selection of some of the key themes emerging from the interrelated dynamics at play highlighted through the narratives.

4.1. Early Years

Many participants constructed their narratives beginning with stories involving early life and childhood years. Participants framed their early years as being "normal" concerning the use of animal products. Aligning to Joy's (2010) observations, most unquestioningly followed the cultural and social environments in which they were raised. Many were raised in urban environments very far removed from close exposure to animal agriculture.

> Well I was raised typical kiwi household, my favourite food was crumbed chicken, we had meat with every meal, um, when I used to get taken to the supermarket as a kid, uh, we, one of my, whichever parent I was with would get, some of that luncheon slice stuff from the deli, at Pak n Save … it was the normal, the normal kiwi life. (Frank)

Others growing up in countries outside New Zealand offered perspectives which mirrored those raised in New Zealand in some ways but also differed in some respects. Jacqui discussed her recollections of growing up in the Philippines, including the hegemonic meat culture. The Philippines is a predominantly collectivist culture (Evans, 2016), where food is of central importance. Similar to others, she discussed the general lack of reflection regarding using animals for food:

> our food and our culture really revolves around food, and we love eating lots of meat … no one ever questioned what we were doing, how we were doing it and or why we were doing it, it was just, that's how we've always done it.

Although participants were mostly unaware of the practices involved in animal agriculture in childhood, some were raised in farming or rural communities. Brian talked about an interaction with his father before visiting an acquaintance and how this impacted his thinking at the time:

> 'he's a *vegetarian*' and just the way he said it, it was like, ya know, it was an alien from another planet or something and I thought '*wow*, this is something really freaky', so yeah ya know, I just grew up thinking it was all normal.

Alongside the expressed "normalness" of carnism, many participants connected their early years' narratives with animals. These choices to bring animals into the life narrative reflect the clear connections vegans have made between animal products and the animals themselves. Many described having an affinity with non-human animals from an early age; however, not yet having made the connection to the animals they consumed.

> I used to run around and scoop the bugs out of the swimming pool to save them … my dad would take me fishing and I'd try and, keep them alive … I had quite a lot of empathy for animals … never really put the two together about what was on my plate before. (Harvey)

Other participants described not feeling any particular sense of connection or affinity with animals, contrary to stereotypes of vegans being over-sentimental towards animals (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Herzog, 1993). Gavin stated, "I never really felt drawn to animals". He later went on to describe watching slaughterhouse footage in an attempt to connect with his empathy for animals, explaining:

> I probably would not have gone there uh without going vegan first and having that philosophical conviction.

Slaughterhouses and animal killing were discussed by several participants, both in their transition to veganism and early years narratives. Some recalled being raised in environments where killing animals was normalised and where they were encouraged to kill animals themselves. Those who discussed

having personally killed animals did so with a sense of remorse, regret, and shame. Jacqui attended a school camp where the group was required to bring a live chicken:

> I had to be the one to break that chicken's neck and I did not know how … ((becoming tearful)) wh-what I did, with that chicken, and for me it was just terrible … I was being so stupid, and so inconsiderate, and um, how I did not connect the two. (Jacqui)

> my father was a hunter, and, he worked in a slaughterhouse … my earliest childhood memory is actually of a dying animal, I just grew up around dead and dying animals, from day one ((inhales deeply)), um [pause] I just thought it was all normal … we used those hideous leg hold traps, the gin traps, evil evil things [pause] … one right near the end died a *horrible* death, um, over 24 hours, I thought I'd killed the animal, come back the next day and it was still alive, and then it just wouldn't die … it was just horrible. (Brian)

Brian, who himself also worked in a slaughterhouse over a few years also discussed a realisation he had watching slaughterhouse footage, expressing his shock and disbelief at his previous disconnection, and the regret he now feels:

> he had this compressed air gun thing in his hand, and he grabbed the sheep's feet and cachonk cachonk ((makes noises)) these big jaws just chop the feet off like that, and um, ooooh it just *hit* me, I used to do that job, that *exact* job … and I used to enjoy it … it was kind of almost fun, cause I was so sick of the gut trays … what I used to do and think was funny and fun was actually *horrific* … it all kind of came flooding back and I was like wow, ya know, maybe this stuff affected me more than I realised … I feel pretty shit about some of the stuff that I did.

Contrasting others who accepted animal killing and eating, Lucy recalled being very disturbed by animal killing from an early age:

> they were, they were my little friends when I was young … it was so so traumatising … my father was Islamic and he butchered animals where we lived, and that from a young age, I really bonded with the animals, and ah, that was excruciatingly difficult.

Like the children identified by Pallota (2008), despite socialisation, Lucy resisted dominant consumption norms and engaged in acts of resistance, choosing not to eat meat as soon as she was allowed to and "kind of picked around it before then". Her refusal to eat meat resulted in her being socially ostracised. She situates this within the context of Islamic culture, suggesting possible reasons for this:

> the Islamic culture that I was brought up in … not eating meat was, it was simply not something you did. Ah, it was, it was so severely looked down upon, ah I was ostracised at every major event because, I just, I I couldn't do it … I didn't understand why it made people so angry, I think they felt that I was being disrespectful by not eating what they had cooked … they were offended on *such a deep* level that I wasn't eating what they'd cooked.

As Newman (2019) discusses, refused consumption can spark rage in others by the vegan presenting a threat through their perceived undermining of cultural and social norms. Although no religion mandates the consumption of animal products, those who refuse consumption may pose a symbolic threat to the status quo (Stephan & Stephan, 2017), in particular threatening the moral order and status of non-human animals (Judge & Wilson, 2018). Pallota (2008) touches on the paradox of childhood socialisation toward different types of animals and how this frames potential future practice, stating "Childhood socialization provides both the foundation for conformity to dominant ideals about human-animal relationships and the seeds of dissent and resistance" (p. 150).

4.2. Becoming Vegan

In this section, I discuss the ways participants constructed their narratives, which included recollections of moments, ideas and experiences now recognised as significant in the journey towards veganism. These appear to have paved the way for later connecting experiences. I then discuss the transition experiences relayed by participants, comparing these with the existing literature. Finally, I suggest some of the shared personal characteristics emergent across accounts, which seem to facilitate the transition to veganism.

4.2.1. Seeds Planted

Participants recalled seminal moments alongside their current understandings, discussing animals, nutrition, and ethical considerations. McDonald (2000) considered the idea of repression. This psychoanalytic notion has been theorised many ways to explain what may occur when people see or

hear information but then repress it so they can continue to consume animal products. The emotional content expressed by participants includes shame, regret, a sense of disbelief at not making the connection earlier, and frustration at having had a "peek behind the curtain" yet then not reflecting more deeply and making the connection. Aligning with McDonald's (2000) research findings, most interviewees were "animal people" previously and are amazed that they had not made the connection earlier. Eli discussed having a friend who had shared some of what he had seen working in the slaughterhouse:

> I don't kind consciously recall [pause] anything to do with thinking, actually, thinking of the animals, and what animals might have to go through ... it's interesting and a bit sad for me to look back, I try not to be guilty and regret things ... I just have to tell myself I had no idea really … the horror stories of working in a, slaughterhouse, I just remember goin, like ya know 'wow' and all that stuff lightbulbs, but really quickly just, letting it, slide ... I like to think I was quite an open-minded person and um, a compassionate person, but I just let it go almost immediately.

4.2.2. The Transition

The majority of participants went straight from carnism to veganism, rather than transitioning through reducetarian diet phases like vegetarianism. Although only a small sample group, this is contrary to what some of the literature suggests (Joy, 2010). Four of the participants described their transition to veganism as something that happened overnight or within a very short timeframe, due to having an epiphany or powerful affective experience. The remaining eight described more gradual progress, including pivotal moments, or a series of epiphanies, yet not making the full commitment to becoming vegan. A critical part of the process leading to the shift in core beliefs appears to be discovering more information through self-motivated research, including being exposed to material through social justice, animal rights, and environmental groups.

The transtheoretical model of behaviour change and its stages of precontemplation (unaware of an issue/not ready), contemplation (aware of an issue/getting ready), preparation (ready, taking steps toward change), action (behaviour change), maintenance (working to keep the change), and termination (no temptation to return to old behaviours), was applied by Mendes (2013) to the vegan experience. The pre-contemplation stage is carnism in this context. It may include lack of awareness, denial of any

problem or issue and justifications to continue the behaviours, for example, Dean recalls his previously defiant stance:

> I was … the typical testosterone [pause] thug … 'you'll never get me eating vegetables, and I eat cows so that makes me a vegetarian'.

Participants discussed various reasons for the shift from pre-contemplation to embracing veganism. Several people changed to plant-based diets initially and then subsequently made the connection with the ethical aspects of animal use, expanding their practice to veganism. Gavin discussed how changing to plant-based eating can lead people to become more open to veganism:

> it can be more useful to have people come on board with plant-based living first and then try and get them to swallow the ethics pill, because that's usually not something a lot of people spend a lot of time thinking about. (Gavin)

Other research (Devine et al., 1998; Stiles, 1998) has found this to be likely also, noting that motivations for adopting a vegan or vegetarian diet probably adapt over time. Despite this, the majority of participants made a cognitive and emotional connection before behavioural change through exposure to new information. Unlike most others, Gavin did not connect with the animal suffering aspects of carnism emotionally. He describes his motivation stemming from an argument related to ethics:

> it was such, um, a logical thing, um, I really never liked the emotional argumentation … I was browsing around on YouTube, so I was following this channel … he was really focusing on the philosophy and um, so he brought up an argument that's called Name the Trait, and um, I was always, very strong, uh, strongly convinced uh, of human rights and, uh applying that argument to my conviction of human rights I realised that I really don't have any basis to discriminate against animals. (Gavin)

In order to have dominant narratives around animal agriculture disrupted, there appears to need to be an openness to exploring new information and ideas. For participants, this included viewing documentaries and having exposure to information around sustainability and ethics, such as expos and public talks, and through interaction with others. This awareness facilitates the move from pre-contemplation to the contemplation stage, where the carnistic defences of denial, justification, and

cognitive distortions are interrupted and the "normal", "necessary", "natural", and "nice" strategies used to justify animal consumption are called into question. Clara explains how her openness and curiosity led her to information that immediately shattered any carnistic defences she may have had. Earthlings (Monson, 2005) is a movie, narrated by Joaquin Phoenix, which exposes the horrors involved in animal agriculture:

> I started asking questions cause I'm inquisitive [laughs] 'why are you vegan?' ya know, and uh, that led me, very quickly, to watching Earthlings and once I knew, I didn't want to have *any* part of it whatsoever. So, the question often asked is 'how long did it take you to go vegan?' and I say 'about 45 minutes', ya know, I was about half way through watching it. Ya know, for me it was an absolute no brainer.

Exposure to new information led many participants to experience a strong affective, sometimes physiological responses. McDonald (2000) found there was more likely to be shorter-time between catalytic experience and change if the experience was mostly emotional, involving mostly negative emotions such as shock, guilt, pain, and sadness. Many people discussed their disbelief that they could have gone for decades without knowing about certain practices, as well as their shock and disbelief that they did not know earlier. Jasper and Poulsen (1995) describe the result of viewing graphic images of the violence committed against animals as "moral shock". It also replicates McDonald's (2000) findings where interviewees described watching videos as the curtain is pulled back and suddenly recognising the cruelty involved in animal agriculture.

Clara noted that media portrayals deterred her from considering the vegan perspective earlier, stating: "I might have got there sooner" if it were not for portrayals of vegan activists "as terrorists and quite terrifying". This misrepresentation, alongside Clara's shock and disbelief, once she found out about hidden practices as well as her deep sense of remorse at taking part illustrates the "moral injury" discussed by Cole and Morgan (2011). This example exposes the media's role in maintaining dominant narratives and norms which robbed her of the opportunity to properly understand veganism earlier.

> I oscillated between '((gasp)), I can't believe I didn't know this' and on the other side was 'uh, I'm really sorry', like I was *really genuinely* sorry that I, of what I'd taken part in.

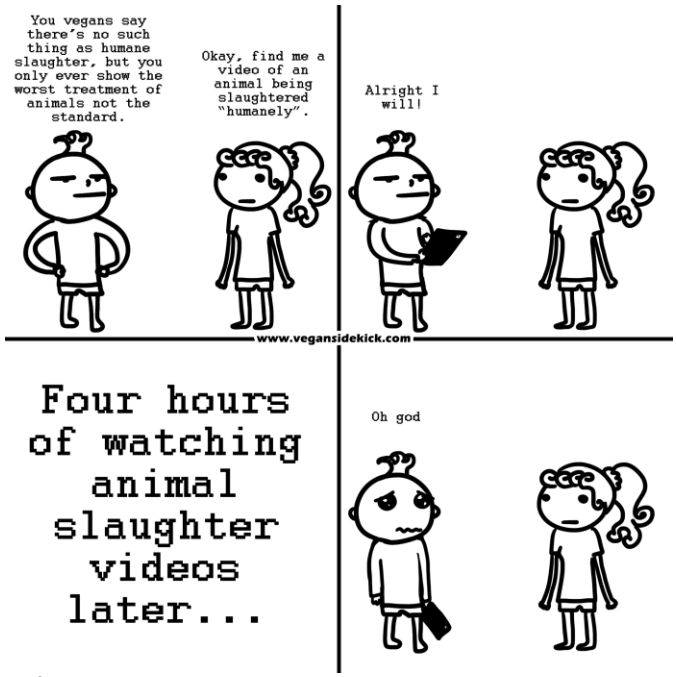

Figure 4.
Challenging the "humane slaughter" myth.

Reprinted from Vegan Sidekick, 2019, Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1raSwPaLI1ImPMsp0irgTrdSSgHHpVQHB. Copyright n.d. by Richard Watts.

As an example of the disruption to dominant norms through counter-narratives; most participants report enjoying eating animals before becoming vegan, and then all having aversive responses to animal eating now. So, the "nice" narrative in terms of taste pleasure is interrupted and overturned. Frank discussed a conversation with his father in which his thinking was challenged and his perception was altered:

> my dad actually went vegetarian, because he read somewhere that it would help with his joint pain, and his arthritis … we were talking about meat and stuff, and, and he said something like, 'eating the flesh of an animal' something like that, something triggered in my head and it was like 'aw yeah' and then I started envisioning like, you know what what meat looks like when it's cooked, it looks like fibre like muscle fibre, I connected that to, like a living thing and I was like 'aw fuck'.

Participants also mentioned their transformed understandings around the necessity for animal products, calling into question the "necessary" justification of carnism. Brian recalled his experience working in a slaughterhouse and supporting beliefs at that time:

> I believed in my naivete at that stage, in my ignorance, that humans needed meat, dairy and eggs to be healthy, somebody had to do the dirty work.

Many people referred to how the damaging environmental consequences of animal agriculture, current understandings of animals, and knowledge about nutritional needs has informed their thinking.

> I believe that, if we can eat, and be healthy and survive, without having to cause harm … why wouldn't you do it? There's no reason not to. It's pretty much that simple. (Frank)

> I'm an environmental scientist, and, I I fully understand the impacts of eating animal-based diets and how incredibly unsustainable that is … even though that has been happening for centuries and millennia, now we have a better understanding of how animals think and feel, also we have new technologies and supplements and, um, lots of different ways we can meet our nutritional needs, so we're not so dependent on eating animals anymore, and if we don't need to, then the ethical, the ethical thing is not do it. (Keira)

Openness to, and engagement with, new information appears to then need to be complemented by the willingness to deeply and personally question dominant narratives through engaging in "moral reflexivity". Reflexivity refers to increased awareness, conscious questioning, and heightened sensitivity about an accepted norm (Cunliffe, 2009). Shadnam (2020) used the term "moral reflexivity" when the object of the reflexivity is related to an assumed moral norm. For example, assuming that it is moral to use animals for human purposes. Clara's story illustrates that she had been open to discovering new information (openness to learn/curiosity), had a strong affective experience concerning it, which led to determining her stance in relation to the norm of animal consumption (moral reflexivity), and the decision to change her behaviours on this basis (openness to change).

Moral reflexivity and openness to change also appear to be facilitated through a combination of firmly held values, ethical convictions, and a willingness to act in ways counter to the status quo. Earlier Gavin had described his philosophical convictions. He describes as his primary guiding principle as "utilitarian"

in that "suffering is bad, and we should try to minimise that as much as we can". Participants revealed their deeply held values and principles throughout their narratives, which ultimately took the form of aligning their actions to their values, especially justice. This behaviour/values alignment could be described as behavioural integrity, which was frequently expressed by participants as "doing the right thing":

> I went 'okay, this is, this is the right thing to be doing' … I was grounded, my beliefs were grounded, my understanding, I had that hallelujah moment. (Dean)

> okay, this is, so the right thing to do, probably should of done it sooner, ya, yeah. (Eli)

> for me it just feels right, like it feels like it's the right thing to do, ya know. (Harvey)

Although not all participants wanted to be perceived as rebellious, there was an acknowledgement that the willingness to practice veganism is in itself an act of motivated resistance:

> I'll take the the rebellious route … I guess it's part anger and it's part passion for wanting things to be different. (Frank)

4.3. Changes: Before and After Going Vegan

This section incorporates the changes in perception observed by participants before and after their transition to veganism. I consider altered perceptions and responses regarding meat and animal products, vegans and veganism, and finally, how self-identity was constructed through recounting transition experiences. My specific focus is on the cognitive and emotional content communicated through the narratives, keeping the principles of social constructionism and how meaning is expressed through language use at the forefront.

4.3.1. From Meat and Animal Products to Flesh and Secretions

In many ways, food is beside the point when it comes to veganism, as it is an ethical stance that happens to extend to diet. However, given that food forms a central part of our lives, it also forms a central role in the vegan experience.

4.3.1.1. Before: Totally Asleep; Meat Was Just Food.

The majority of participants recall enjoying meat and animal products before becoming vegan. This outcome aligns to Greenebaum's (2012) finding that people did not give up animal products because they disliked the taste, but instead that it was a violation of their values. Mirroring Twine's (2014) research, the narratives reveal the paradigm shift; from perceiving some animals to be edible food, to seeing the suffering and violence present. For example, descriptions of former consumption of meat and animal products conveyed no longer using distancing euphemistic language:

> I love the flavour of dead animal carcass, um, and I, and I hate the flavour of vegetables. (Dean)

Several people discussed that before becoming vegan they had believed that it would be complicated and they had perceived vegan food to be lacking in flavour and unsatisfying:

> I thought it was, that was a very difficult … I didn't have an understanding of why would people do it, and and it was more, it was more how, how are they sustaining themselves, I mean vegetables yeah, but, wouldn't that be really bland? (Jacqui)

Many recalled their earlier disconnection between the animals themselves and the food they were consuming:

> totally asleep when it came to that stuff. It was just, meat is just, was just food ... no connection to the animals … sleepwalking and sleep eating through life. (Eli)

The sense of having previously been "asleep" was repeated throughout many of the narratives, with a sense of "waking up" to the horrors involved in animal agriculture and making the connection:

> I didn't care so much, I I wasn't, I wasn't awake enough to care. (Dean)

Echoing the media narratives discussed by Cole and Morgan (2011) in which animals are missing from the dialogue entirely, participants recalled that animals themselves were often missing from their thinking when it came to animal products. This also links to the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism.

Media and marketing representations act to maintain the disconnection from animal suffering and animal products:

> the meat and animal products thoughts that I had were to eat the best cuts of meat … that's where my conversation in my head would go around meat and animal products … there's the cow sitting there all happy, and it *is* brainwashing on such a level … no thoughts about animal cruelty, they were just about the quality of what I was buying. (Clara)

4.3.1.2. After: It Feels Heart-Breaking.

According to Joy (2010), non-vegans typically skip the part of the perceptual process of making the connection between meat and living animals, which blocks the emotions of empathy and disgust. She argues that the most striking feature of our categorisations of animals as edible versus inedible is the absence of disgust, rather than the presence of it. Contrasting this, vegans having made the connection between the meat and living animals, could be considered to have "unblocked" these ordinarily "blocked" emotional aspects. This unblocking was illustrated through the use of non-euphemistic language. For example, "meat" being replaced with "flesh". This framing and new awareness also impacts daily experiences. Dean talks about something that as a non-vegan would not have had an emotional impact:

> walking into a supermarket and seeing all the dead animal bits … It doesn't make me feel good … it grosses me out. (Dean)

When explaining how they feel when other people eat meat and animal products in front of them, many participants expressed feelings of disgust, hurt, and sadness. Lucy explained the sense of sad confusion she experiences as a result of understanding that eating animal products is no longer necessary, the suffering, and violence present and the feelings that accompany witnessing others consume them:

> It feels heart-breaking [pause] I it, I've I've never seen any need for it … we're just not in a place in society where that's necessary anymore, at all. (Lucy)

There was also a repeated expression of seeing "the whole animal" when looking at a piece of meat.

> the smell, makes us wanna throw up really, especially like you could smell it from a mile away [laughs] … it sticks to your clothing, it sticks to your hair, um, to be honest disgusted really … you don't see food ... I really see part of an animal, or I see, the whole picture of an animal and and that bit just so happened to be the one on his plate but I can see the whole, I can see that was someone else, that used to be someone else, um, yeah, um, it's difficult ((becomes tearful)). (Jacqui)

Participants often used terms such as "some*one*", "them", "him" or "her" when discussing animals. This de-objectification and individualisation contrasts to the cognitive distortions, identified by Joy (2010), of objectification and deindividualisation, where terms like "it" and "something" are used. This discourse is a rejection of the dominant human-centred cultural norm, which considers humans as the primary holders of moral standing and treats animals as inanimate objects or property. "Someone" is a recognition that an animal is not a "thing"; instead, they are a "one", a unique individual. This acknowledgement contrasts with the dementalisation used by non-vegans to enable the consumption of "food animals". Unlike the disconnecting cognitive distortions used by non-vegans (Bratanova et al., 2011; Waytz et al., 2010b), vegans report seeing the individual, the suffering involved, and the need to extend moral consideration.

4.3.2. Vegans and Veganism: From Crazy to Next-Level Awesome

4.3.2.1. Before: I thought They Were All Just Crazy.

Prior to becoming vegan, only one of the twelve participants had a favourable view of vegans and veganism. One indicated having had no concept of veganism at all. The remaining majority discussed their impressions of vegans and veganism before becoming vegan themselves using derogatory and dismissive words like "crazy", "weird", "hippyish", "strange", and "extreme". Dean expressed his perceptions of vegans encompassing his lack of understanding, carnistic disconnection, and focus on taste (the "nice" justification). Here discursive divorce meets cognitive distortion, visible through a combination of misunderstanding and stereotyping, which then enables the distancing between meat and animals:

> I viewed vegans as backyard hippies … I thought they were all just crazy, ya know, meat tasted good, why would you not eat it?

Impressions were also impacted by vegans being presented as violent and hostile:

> I've always seen, the worst kind of um, of situations where vegans were shouty and uh, really uh, aggressive and um, I guess it's just cherry-picking from the media too, cause ah, all my time that I've been vegan now I've never seen someone like that in person [laughs]. (Gavin)

These findings were consistent with other research findings highlighting barriers to considering veganism, particularly social acceptability (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019) and perceived difficulty involved (Bryant, 2019):

> I can't go vegan, veganism's *weird*. (Brian)

> I can't do that, ya know, it it would be hard. (Frank)

> I kinda wanted to become vegan, before I was kind of brave enough to do it, it just seemed a bit impossible. (Isabelle)

> I think a sort of friend of a friend was vegan … and thought 'oh my God, that must be so hard and that's so extreme and' and I didn't give any thought, I didn't look into why that someone might make that choice … I'd heard that and I just kinda went, inside my head went 'woah' and maybe said 'woah' to my friend and they may have agreed with me even, 'woah, yeah, it's pretty crazy aye?' (Eli)

4.3.2.2. After: You're in On This, Sort of Wonderful and Horrible Secret.

In contrast to their previously dismissive views of vegans, since becoming vegan themselves, most have explicitly positive impressions of other vegans. Many appeared to have developed relationships with other vegans over time and seem to have strongly aligned and identified themselves with the vegan community, forming what Rosenwein (2006) calls an "emotional community". Brian described vegans as "next-level awesome" in comparing vegan activists to environmental activists. One participant expressed a strong dislike of other vegans, calling some vegans "judgmental jerks" (Andrea). Unlike others who had developed relationships with other vegans, Andrea does not associate with other vegans feeling that she does not fit into the vegan community. A few participants were more hesitant when discussing other vegans: "depends on the vegan [laughs]" (Clara). Overall, most very much like other vegans:

> I assume they are super loving, super friendly, very touchy-feely compassionate people. (Dean)

> I love them [laughs] um, no I do, I I love the vegan community, they're, the majority of them are really beautiful people. (Harvey)

> not to say I have never met a vegan I didn't like ... But for the most part I just love, I just love vegans…. There's that common ground, there's a, l there's solidarity there ... someone who, who's chosen to engage with the information and to engage with the truth, and not, bullshit ... but is actually like 'no, I'm just in and I'm gonna do the right thing'. I love it. It inspires the hell out of me. You're in on this, sort of wonderful and horrible secret ... you've taken the red pill in the Matrix. (Eli)

Eli referred to "taking the red pill in the Matrix" repeatedly in his narrative. This is derived from a scene in the (1999) film which represents a choice between taking a "red pill", and being able to see the unpleasant, cruel realities of life, or taking a "blue pill" and remaining wilfully ignorant about a troublesome truth. This speaks to the invisible, yet ubiquitous, presence of carnism, the elements of openness and underlying values exhibited by participants, as well as the behavioural integrity discussed earlier. As Eli explained:

> there's a cavernous gulf between 'it's just food and what's your problem just eat it, it's normal' and 'ah that's right, it's a consequence'.

4.3.3. Personal Identity: I Just Think "You Didn't Know"

Self-identity, which links to values and personality, is an area of debate within the literature, for example, there has been discussion about the creation of a "new vegan identity" (McDonald, 2000). However, I found that participants typically spoke about their "former selves" as if their adoption of veganism did not result in a new self-identity. Instead, they typically perceived their pre-vegan selves as a "good person", who was either unaware or oblivious to cruel practices in animal agriculture or disconnected through indoctrination. Like most people (vegans and non-vegans), they believed themselves to never want to be the cause of animal suffering (Plous, 1993). Thus, upon discovering new information, for example, being exposed to the cruelty involved, they simply re-aligned their practice with their already existing values and beliefs. Greenebaum (2012) discussed that a vegan identity, rather than a set of traits of characteristics, is better described as a way of *being*. This links self-identity to values and action through behavioural integrity:

> I think it always probably has been my truth or my, um, yeah, I've always been empathetic towards animals … cows and pigs and chickens are just as emotionally intelligent and they just wanna live just as much as ah, dogs and cats do so, ya know, for me not to have that violence on my plate anyway, it's it just sort of reiterates that you are doing the right thing. (Harvey)

> I wouldn't wanna be living against my morals, I wouldn't wanna be in denial, I would hate that. (Frank)

> I try not to be guilty and regret things, I try not to live my life that way but looking back to, I just have to tell myself I had no idea really. (Eli)

> it hits you quite hard … the more you learn you're sorta like 'oh shit' … I don't look back and be like 'what an asshole you were for eating, for eating meat' … I just think 'you didn't know' and I uh, um, I appreciate me for being open to the idea of looking into it in the first place. (Harvey)

Contrasting this, two of the participants experienced an enormous shift in self-perception. Both narratives revealed links between meat and masculinity. Aligning to theories of intersectionality, Derrida's term Carnophallogocentrism describes "the ways that meat-eating, masculinity and language intertwine to silence animals" (Sayers, 2016, p. 371). Dominant social discourses reinforce power structures, linking into the intersections between carnistic domination, speciesism, and social dominance orientation (Caviola et al., 2019; Dhont et al., 2014). These social discourses emphasise meat consumption, particularly linking it to traditional ideas of power, superiority, and masculinity. Dean who described his younger self as a "testosterone thug" stating:

> I wasn't a nice person at all … now I, I cry talking about my chickens or my cats ya know, what the fuck? I dunno, something, something snapped, something went pop.

Brian talked about the emotional separation required during his time working in a slaughterhouse:

> meat inspectors would be, they'd get laughing and joking and just get slack and lazy, and a whole lot of stuff would go past, including these cysts often to the A grade rail [laughs] and I *knew* this and *knew* that some hideous stuff was going through and I would still eat mutton pies at smoko [pause], ya think it would put a person off, but it didn't, I just 'uf, whatever', and it, and I was I was almost

> proud that I, that it didn't faze me, it didn't bother me, I could see all this horrible gross stuff and it didn't bother me … you just have to harden up, you have to, you can't be sensitive.

Brian and I discussed the ease of disconnection being possibly enabled by living in urban environments. For example, seeing meat in plastic wrapping on supermarket shelves as neutral objects and linking to the notion of commodity fetishism (Redini, 2018), being totally disconnected from the actual animal. Given this, I asked how he made sense of having had first-hand, visceral experiences of the realities involved, yet still experiencing disconnection:

> Just repeated exposure to horrors from an early age … it's just normal, blood and guts and skinned bodies and headless bodies … there was some part of me that didn't like it, um [pause] but yeah, you just get so normalised, it just becomes normal … I've seen farmers and hunters and things take their kids and deliberately immerse them in the experience, almost to hard, to try and harden them up and and get them used to the idea, this is reality, 'this is what we do, this is what our family does' um, and they have like those, those kind of school fairs in these rural places, they have possum tossing competitions and wrestling pig competitions … the kids get indoctrinated, ya know, they say vegans brainwash their kids, well fucks sake, you're brainwashing your kids ... And I think that's what happens, when you see endless ads for Burger King and McDonald's and KFC and Fonterra on television and the trucks go past with the eggs with ya know, the picture of an egg and 'farm fresh' and, you just, it becomes normal … we just get so exposed, it it's all about messages, there's messages all round us … that maintains the disconnect. The language we use … and we just come to accept it, it becomes our normal, and it's only a few shocking experiences that push you outside of normal … and help you connect … early on in the piece, I, I told myself 'Brian at that stage in your life, you were ignorant, you were socially conditioned, you didn't know any better, there's no point beating yourself up and hating yourself, that's who you were then, this is who you are now', and *thank God* and now I'm doing *good* things.

4.4. Living as a Vegan in a Non-Vegan World

This segment covers some of the key emergent themes relating to the experiences of being vegan in a non-vegan world. I discuss the aspects of veganism reported by participants as being very enjoyable, followed by those identified as most difficult. Considered alongside the challenges are intersectional complexities. I then begin to unpack the many layers arising from the divergences in perception and practice evident in relationships between vegans and non-vegans.

4.4.1. The Joys

4.4.1.1. The Elimination of Cognition Dissonance.

Many participants cited a clearer conscience and a sense of alignment between their values, beliefs, and behaviour as being a joy or the best part about being vegan. Vannini (2006) states "The basic precept of authenticity is that when individuals feel congruent with their values, goals, emotions, and meanings, they experience positive emotion" (p. 237).

> I feel good about who I am and what I'm doing. (Dean)

> The best part? The elimination of cognitive dissonance [laughs] so, partially obviously, I'm not completely immune to that, because animals get killed by just existing, like driving my car, so I'm aware of that, but um, yeah like, knowing that as much as I can, my actions are in line with my beliefs. (Keira)

4.4.1.2. It's Actually Really Easy.

Together with the elimination of cognitive dissonance, the ease of vegan practice, especially relating to food, was often discussed. This frequency is indicative of the central role and multiple ways in which food is used in our daily lives. Not consuming animals or their secretions is the most recurring way veganism is lived. We are surrounded by food in our homes, workplaces, and out in the world. Food sharing is also central to many social interactions and so decisions to abstain or participate impact social and relational dynamics (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). Participants discussed how different their expectations had been to their lived experience:

> I thought it was going to be so difficult, and I've found that to be incredibly easy, it's just a different, a different set of things that I cook. (Lucy)

> I honestly thought I was gonna have to get books out of the library and almost have a degree in human nutrition just to stay alive … then I realised 'oh actually, no, it's quite easy'. (Brian)

> it's actually really easy, it took me a couple of months to get used to substitute my nutritional needs. (Kiera)

4.4.1.3. I Enjoy Food Now So Much More Than I Ever Did.

Contrary to veganism being an act of deprivation, a discipline, and hardship, Twine (2014) noted that within the vegan community "practitioners are noticeably joyous, especially about food" (p. 637), challenging the stereotype of vegans being miserable or abstemious regarding food (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Resonating with this, many participants identified their amplified enjoyment of food, flavour, and ingredient repertoires as being one of the most surprising and joyful aspects of veganism. This challenges assumptions that vegans have a lack of concern about gustatory pleasure (Cole, 2008).

> I think there's a positive culture around that in veganism because we love like cooking and making beautiful dishes for people to know that it's not just grass [laughs]. (Jacqui)

> I enjoy food now so much more than I ever did, I I do my best to try and convey that to non-vegans, I enjoy food so much [laughs] it's crazy, ya know, if someone had told me I'd a been like 'you're insane' but I'm so, I'm so into food, and I find food soo enjoyable and soo satisfying, I love it … it was such a pleasant surprise like, yeah … it's kind of almost, one of those more, uh, surface-level almost selfish human things, in terms of ya know, us being humans, being in ya know, this existence together, is one of the main reasons I wanna get people, in on it, is because ya know, ya know food does get better, come on! (Eli)

One of the reasons not consuming animal products is not considered an act of deprivation by vegans is due to their changed perceptions. As discussed earlier, participants report being disgusted and saddened by these items and no longer view them as food at all:

> I avoid that section in the supermarket … if I think about it, those are corpses for me. (Keira)

> I don't really feel drawn to animal products, they're more disgusting to me than anything else, I'm like well okay, it's pretty easy, I don't need to really force myself to make the right decisions, it's more that they're the default choice. (Gavin)

Alongside taste pleasure, food was also described in more functional terms relating to health and the environment. A few participants moved to plant-based eating initially due to health issues:

> for me the best part is that I'm able to one hundred percent control, the rheumatoid arthritis. (Lucy)

Environmental concerns were also frequently touched on:

> knowing that I'm doing the right thing by my kids … particularly the environmental stuff, the effects … I'm not causing any more harm to to animals and … I'm not sick anymore … it's completely changed my view on the world. (Harvey)

4.4.1.4. People Are More Used to the Idea.

Other positives frequently mentioned by participants were enormous shifts in the acceptance of veganism, availability of vegan products, and the ways veganism is reported on and discussed in the media. Andrea has been vegan for 14 years and discussed some of the changes she has observed over that time:

> things have got a lot easier … you can get like lots of vegan products from the supermarket … it was a lot harder, when I first became vegan.

Also discussed was how changing technology and the ways people access information, mainly through social media, has led to increased understandings of and growth in veganism:

> the media don't have as much control as they used to, I mean they still do, and they still have too much control … but I think at least there's access, ya know, people are um, at a younger age, because of social media have an opportunity … to make up their own minds. (Harvey)

Vegan communities found through social media were a significant source of social support; however, some participants expressed concerns. Tentative behaviour included participants being selective about which groups they belong to and assuming a critical approach to material shared:

> there's a lot of um, misinformation and pseudo-science in veganism … I think that an evidence-based approach would really help the vegan cause, because what we know about nutrition absolutely supports the choice of veganism. (Keira)

Increased societal awareness of veganism was also linked, by participants, to growing awareness around environmental concerns, specifically how animal agriculture relates to climate change. Participants

noted that increased discussions of veganism are allowing people to rapidly become more accustomed to its legitimacy:

> veganism has been in the spotlight and people are more used to the idea, and also because there's a lot of talk about environmental problems, which wasn't the case only one year ago, there's a massive switch. (Keira)

4.4.2. The Challenges

4.4.2.1. Oh Look, Someone Wearing Cow Skin.

Despite growing awareness, being vegan in a carnism saturated world presents many challenges. Even if one keeps a vegan home, it is almost impossible to shut carnism out. For example, an evening watching television or using online media likely includes multiple reminders of carnism. These reminders include incessant advertising for animal products, discussions framing animals as commodities, euphemisms such as "livestock", and references to veganism and vegans in stereotypical and derogatory ways.

Mann (2018) has coined the term "vystopia" to describe the shift in perception of everyday occurrences once the invisible and hidden practices of carnism become visible. It is an experience of understanding and empathically connecting with the cruelty inflicted upon animals:

> The most challenging part is far and away, far and away, it's knowing what animals, have to undergo. (Eli)

> daily life, so, I mean just going down CBD and, smelling the kebab, you're thinking 'bleugh' and, then you're um, overtaken by this biker in his full leathers and you're thinking 'oh look, someone wearing cow skin' instead of uh, accepting that as something normal you're seeing all these little instances where, the the exploitation and commodification of animals is just ingrained in our society and it's something that, can can be quite disheartening on bad days. (Gavin)

A sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment also involves being aware of the relentless manipulation involved in wider systematic, economic, and educational practices which support carnism. Additional to this is the acknowledgement that others are likely to be unaware of it. Gavin and I had an exchange which demonstrates the frustration and powerlessness experienced by many vegans upon witnessing structural speciesism. Mindful that he is currently completing a PhD in biology, I was

reminded of something I had witnessed when waiting for the meeting room I had booked, so raised it with him to gauge his response, I stated:

I: there was group in here … for um, parents and and babies and it was a nutritional talk … the woman who was running it was saying 'so now is the age that you should start feeding your child meat' …

P: ((puts head in hands))

I: So yeah, your react-so what is your reaction to that, so you, there's a response there, can you um, explain that to me?

P: Yeah, it makes me angry because these people should know better, it's super unnecessary and unhealthy and they shouldn't be, they should be going back to school and learn their shit and stop feeding the people misinformation, yeah … I'd like to de-platform these people, shut them down

I: … I think it was a government thing cause she talked about go to this website dot govt …

P: Well obviously, why wouldn't the government support animal agriculture?= [this is true] =because agriculture is the main economic sector in New Zealand right? So yeah, that's that's that's the other thing, you're seeing all these intersections between, where the money's at and what people are being fed in terms of information, and, I mean we see it in science too, look at the, uh, science that uh, New Zealand Beef and Lamb are sponsoring … you can make your paper have a good headline and have, all the uh, things they want, you want to sell in the abstract and then you look into the methodology and you see how much bullshit they're selling you, I mean that's that's how the dairy and egg industries has um, muddied the water when it comes to dietary cholesterol … a lot of shoddy science going on … there's been a lot of actually very good science been done in the 80s and 90s uh on cholesterol and heart health and nowadays people are saying 'oh well that's such old science and we have these new studies' but they're not pointing to any flaws in that science, so it's like, complete bullshit

I: … it's a hard one isn't it when you witness this misinformation being spread and it's like these people, like I just, I feel for the the parents, they're being told to feed these kids this …

> P: Yeah, trick their children into eating something they would not eat themselves in their right minds, because a lot of kids are put off by meat before they're being told it's necessary and they have to eat it right= [yeah yeah] =it's a very natural response

Structural speciesism sanctions carnism, undermining veganism by making it invisible, seeming insufficient, or even irresponsible (Cole & Stewart, 2009). Gavin's last point regarding the food children are raised eating brings forth some worthwhile considerations at an individual level. The "normality" of carnism is endorsed as the supposed default, neutral position, when it is, in reality, the opposite of harmless to both animals and humans. Recognising carnism as its own ideology helps us identify the inconsistent standards applied to veganism. Non-vegan parents feed animal products to children who are not in a position to withhold consent, yet only vegan parents are framed as "imposing" their beliefs on their children (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Research indicates that children would be unlikely to knowingly and willingly eat animals if they had full awareness of what is involved (Amato & Partridge, 2013). This, of course, is not to say there is a conscious determination by parents to deceive their children, instead, that parents themselves are also likely to have been born into carnism and unlikely to have critically considered these practices themselves. Since most children come to enjoy animal products, and since behaviour reinforces beliefs (Joy, 2010), it becomes increasingly difficult to challenge or open oneself to alternatives. Thoughtfully engaging with the philosophy of veganism raises the uncomfortable possibility of having once accepted and contributed to cruelty, and the potential of identifying with an openly stigmatised, "abnormal" group. Thus, the operationalisation of carnism exemplifies a moral injury to those denied the opportunity to offer fully informed consent.

4.4.2.2. Are You One of Those Kinds of Vegans?

Navigating social situations is a particularly challenging aspect of living as a vegan in a non-vegan world. As Greenebaum (2012), states "identifying as vegan is a public declaration of one's identity, morals and lifestyle" (p. 129). Although to the vegan, their practice may merely be an alignment between their values and personal actions, from an external perspective, they can appear to have become very strange, deviant, and threatening.

Another inconsistency is evident when considering the ubiquity of carnistic messaging. Non-vegans are seemingly oblivious of the extent to which carnism is entrenched and how prevalent and pervasive carnistic messaging is. That is, how often the carnistic agenda is "pushed". Despite being surrounded by

carnism, resulting in what Mann (2018) describes as a "vegan's anguish", ironically, vegans are also often accused of being the ones who "push their agenda". When discussing stereotypes, Lucy stated:

> when I tell people I'm vegan, I always get this look of 'oh are you one of those kinds of vegans?' [laughs].

Isabelle theorises a reason for these perceptions:

> it's like that thing where you have ah, like meetings and people always imagine that the minority person is talking longer than they actually are, it's it's that kind of thing, it's like if, your voice, and your views don't [fit the dominant narrative], they're jarring for people.

Because carnism is so normalised and accepted, as Isabelle points out, like other marginalised groups, people can have strong reactions to hearing vegan perspectives. Ferree (2004) described typical forms of repression used against social movements as "soft" (non-violent), suggesting three actions typically employed by dominant group members to suppress challengers to normative narratives. These are ridicule, stigma, and silencing. This has also been called "silencing by the different voice" (Stefan, 1992, p. 763). Relating to this, Eli recalls an experience involving a conversation about veganism and how his expression was perceived:

> I got told that I was, that I was shouting at this person [pause] and so I was like 'aw ah, am I? I don't think I am, I'm sorry, I didn't, that's not my intention' and (partner's name) was immediately, was like 'he's not shouting, what are you, what are you talking about?'.

Alongside misperceptions, vegans are often the butt of jokes (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Most participants mentioned this joke: "How do you know someone's a vegan? Don't worry, they will tell you". Some seemed unconcerned or amused, others, however, were very conscious of being perceived this way, actively altering their behaviour, including hiding their veganism:

> I probably do avoid, talking about it overtly because of the whole joke about ya know, vegans always constantly bringing it into conversation whenever they can. (Isabelle)

> if I just got offered food, I'd just say 'oh no, thank you, I'm fine', I wouldn't say 'no thank you, I'm vegan, I can't have it' … I don't want to impose on people, and I don't like to cause problems. (Andrea)

These examples demonstrate an internalisation of the "difficult" narrative (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Tropes like these act to silence vegan voices, marginalise vegans, and invalidate the vegan experience and motivations as being outside what is socially acceptable to discuss (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017).

Jacqui discussed how the stigmatisations and labelling do not fit with her self-perception:

> the stereotyping is made by people who don't understand right? [laughs] and they paint us as this specific picture that's 'this is what you guys are'.

Mowery and Duffy (1990) describe "voice assigning" as a dominant group projecting their own belief confirming biases onto non-dominant groups by putting words into their mouths. Some distanced themselves from the stereotypes, expressing: "I don't wanna be a stereotype" (Frank). For others, there was a desire to counteract the stereotypes and present veganism in a different light:

> I love the different, just it's all shapes and sizes aye like, um [laughs] people, when they see me, or know me, they don't, when I tell them I'm vegan, they're like 'what?' like you're, cause I'm not, I mean I'm six-one … I'm 100 kgs, I'm not a small guy, yeah, so, it's it's quite funny. (Harvey)

Illustrating the heterogeneity of vegans and vegan experiences, Lucy, who lived in various locations in the US and has recently moved to New Zealand. She described some of her experiences living in a Southern US state:

> truly my idea of living in hell … 100 percent meat-based … you go into a restaurant and, they had never even heard of veganism … we lived next to an equally large hog farm, and, it, the, the butchering that they did over there, I mean you could hear them, it was just horrifying, ah and then not to mention, because of my, my skin colour they don't see a lot of brown people there, so weekly I was asked if I was a terrorist

Lucy's experience of being a vegan woman of colour can be understood within the intersectional framework of normalisation, where various forms of oppression intersect with unique and compounding effects. This extends to her experience in New Zealand. She is very mindful of the ways she raises and discusses veganism, recognising throughout her narrative the multiple layers she contends with: her skin colour, her veganism, her geographical location, her recent immigrant status, and her nationality. These components intersect impacting her experience, including the ways she can talk:

> I don't, wanna get off on the wrong foot with people here … I think there's some preconceived notions when people find out I'm from the US anyway, so adding more layers onto that isn't always helpful for me … I also think because of the dairy industry and the prominence of it here, it's more of an uphill battle and people feel kind of betrayed if, if you, if you do talk about the animal welfare part of it in particular, that gets people's hackles up pretty quickly and they start to feel a bit offended and so I've been, I've been careful both as somebody not from New Zealand, but also, also as a vegan

Counter to this, drawing on comparisons between the ways that feminist discourses trivialise and characterise women as over-emotional and incapable of serious debate (Cole & Morgan, 2011), Gavin reveals how some intersecting factors can instead benefit the speaker:

> I guess I'm really profiting a lot from male privilege there because um, people usually take my appearance-uh-my opinions quite seriously, and um, they're realising pretty quickly that I'm not just an emotional hippy, so they, they're usually quite intrigued and want to know more about my reasoning.

4.4.2.3. It's a Confrontation Just by Saying It.

Continuing from how perceptions of vegans impact their experience, participants spoke about how being a known vegan or merely mentioning that they are vegan often provokes defensive responses from others. The responses may be due to the perception of vegans having made an outward declaration of their moral and values, explicitly caring about animals enough not to want to eat them (Greenebaum, 2012) and the discomfort this provokes in others (Joy, 2010). Keira recounts:

> a few years ago I remember feeling quite attacked a few times … when you speak about a choice that is based on ethics, um, usually the person who's listening feels like reacting and justifying uh, their choice not to do that … like even when you, you really don't want to say that your choice is a better choice or a more ethical choice, it is a choice based on ethics, so it comes across as such, and many many times, the person who's listening feels they have to defend their position.

As Isabelle observes:

> if I'm choosing not to do this thing, for moral reasons, then, even if I don't say it, you can infer, I think what you're doing is wrong.

Figure 5.
Challenging the defence mechanisms of carnism.

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If one believes that vegans have chosen to show more care toward animals and by extension, oneself has not, acknowledging this can feel unpleasant. Some participants discussed their empathy and understanding for non-vegans:

> I'm not a judgey vegan, because I've like I was ya know, four years ago, that was me. (Harvey)

> I understand it's a confrontation just by saying it … you almost can't help it and I think that just being confronted by someone who's a vegan makes the other person feel not so great about themselves often, you know, it tunes into that 'oh I probably shouldn't be doing it', and I think that just that alone, just the fact that you *are* is confrontational. (Clara)

4.4.2.4. People I Love and Care About … Basically Won't Have a Bar of It.

Many of the participants described other peoples', mainly family and friends', seeming indifference to the suffering of animals and refusal to engage with information that challenges carnism, as some of their

most painful, frustrating, and disappointing experiences since becoming vegan. Eli offers some potential explanations for this:

> the biggest disappointment, like seeing, parents and family and friends you've had years of ya know, of strong connection with, and love with, and then, realising that, they're not open, to this … is the world really in such a bad place where people I love and care about and think are are fairly intelligent, reasonable human beings just won't, basically won't have a bar of it? … they change the subject, or they'll come up with the usual bullshit excuses … I think it ya know scares people, the idea of, the possibility of change, the possibility that they're doing a bad thing, they're part of something that's wrong

The reluctance to engage with information or even discussions around veganism may also reflect broader social discourses (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019), including those present in the media (Cole & Morgan, 2011). As discussed earlier, most participants themselves previously believed the stereotypes and these acted as barriers to further investigation and understanding. As Beardsworth and Keil (1993) suggest, parents may perceive their child's veganism as a rejection of their upbringing and the values of their parents. Adding to this, the primary motivation for non-vegans continuing to eat animal products is taste (Lea & Worsley, 2003). Gavin discussed his deep disappointment at his father's response to his attempts to dispute carnism:

> I used to enjoy cooking a lot together with my dad … he basically told me 'you're right, I don't have any good arguments, but I still, I'm still not gonna change', and that's for me like, 'oh okay, fuck you' what what else can you say? So, I think that that makes it worse, when people are consciously, deciding their own taste pleasure trumps the basic rights of other beings, yeah, that was a hard pill to swallow. I mean, I certainly have less love and less respect now for them than I had before.

Similarly, Harvey expressed how much the disconnection he witnesses affects him. He was sympathetic towards non-vegans, recognising: "four years ago, that was me". Once the connection is made, the sentience of animals can be more openly recognised and empathy extended. This connection means, for example, being able to recognise that pigs do not differ from dogs in their capacity to suffer. Therefore, seeing a deceased pig who has been ravaged by hunting dogs has an equivalent emotional impact to seeing a dog who has been killed in dogfighting. Like others, he recognises that others are viewing the same material world, yet are perceiving the same things very differently:

> I think the disconnect hurts, when I see that stuff, um, when I see my friends, ya know, may have killed a pig, or whatever … I don't know what they see … I don't get angry at them, uh, because, I, like I say, you don't know what you don't know, but uh, I definitely it, it hurts.

Having an awareness of others' misconceptions of veganism and feeling unable to speak up, participants discussed how they navigate social situations involving animal consumption. Some expressed sentiments like: "I'm not entirely comfortable with it, but just, I accept it" (Frank), whereas others: "quite actively avoid it" (Eli). Brian usually avoids animal consumption; however, discussed how he navigated finding himself in an unanticipated situation:

> I just [pause] just, avoided looking at the food as much as I could and avoided saying anything and, just tried to get on.

Isabelle discussed the strategy she uses:

> it's more like I kind of disconnect from it … it's like a dead animal, so I I put in place kind of a defence, disconnecting mechanism and, like 'okay I didn't cause that, I don't want to think about it' but if I think about it, yeah, it's really sad.

Participants emotionally affected by witnessing carnistic saturation outlined the various coping mechanisms they use. These include denial, avoidance, being an example, having support systems such as relationships with other vegans, and keeping a vegan home:

> I'm living in a vegan flat … the place where I uh, recover from these things, and then obviously there's the outside cruel world that you just have to brace yourself. (Gavin)

The ways people cope is particularly striking in that they mirror the carnistic defences of denial and avoidance (Joy, 2010). Vegans differ in that they selectively use these defences for aspects of carnism outside of their control, recognising that one cannot be completely free of carnism, while taking responsibility for the aspects that are within their control.

> I think, partly you just have to live in denial, or you just go crazy, cause it's just everywhere, you can't escape it, um, but also a feeling of I am doing what I can, to help end it. (Brian)

4.5. Advocacy and Activism

In this final section of the findings, I cover the topic of individual advocacy, which connects to earlier findings relating to the experiences and feelings of those interviewed. I follow this with a focus on participants' opinions regarding recent supermarket activism. Advocacy is an issue pertinent to the current New Zealand context, keeping in mind Bleakley's (2005) assertion that research should aim to bear witness to each individual's subjective experience, while considering the narrative is time-bound, contextualised within culture and history.

4.5.1. Once You Understand … Of Course You're Gonna Talk About It

Advocacy is seen as working "within the system" typically on a more personal one to one level. Every participant discussed the ways in which they advocate veganism. These ranged from strategic advocacy:

> I'd rather pull in people ya know, in a gentle, respectful way than kind of make them feel bad, and and have a knee jerk reaction. (Clara)

To very minimal:

> If like it comes up, I'll kind of just say that I'm vegan and leave it at that … if they asked me why, I would tell them. (Andrea)

Andrea's account was anomalous in many ways. She expressed that she typically actively hides her veganism, generally dislikes and does not associate with other vegans, and strongly dislikes what she views as forceful forms of activism. Andrea moved to a plant-based diet after developing an eating disorder and has since identified as vegan after learning more about veganism. However, she distances herself from the vegan identity, is the only participant who does not belong to any vegan Facebook groups nor associates with the vegan community. Thus, she appears to be an "individualistic" vegan, such as those identified by Larsson et al. (2003). Andrea advised that her personal history of disordered eating has informed her views, stating: "I see how damaging restriction can be". I think it is critical to

distinguish between the ideology of veganism as an animal protection movement that extends to diet and calorie restriction for weight loss.

The complex topic of eating disorders is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to briefly touch on some potentially relevant points, research has suggested that "vegan diets" can be used as a way to conceal existing eating disorders, rather than lead to eating disorders (Norwood et al., 2019). Further to this, Norwood et al. (2019) looked at the link between psychological well-being and various "diets" and found that the weight loss group showed the poorest psychological well-being, in contrast, those following vegan, vegetarian and paleo diets were the groups shown to have characteristics most highly associated with psychological well-being and healthy eating. Salient to consider alongside Andrea's account is that one of the other participants, Isabelle, also disclosed a history involving disordered eating. However, the transition to veganism within Isabelle's account is entirely separate from her earlier eating disorder. Unlike Andrea, she is supportive of various forms of vegan activism and personal advocacy. Andrea stated that her reason for practising veganism is "I do think it's kindest for the animals, which is why I do it", referring here to her actions. However, she deviates markedly from other participants in stating "I have no problem at all with other people eating it … but I don't want to". This stance is different from that taken by other participants, many pointing to current practices such as factory farming and the present-day lack of necessity for animal consumption as contributing factors. Thus, Andrea's conclusions appear to end in a different place than the other participants. It is highly likely that her views would not be considered by other vegans to align with veganism fully.

I was hesitant and somewhat reluctant to include some of the aspects I have included of Andrea's account. This hesitance arises from being cautious not to reinforce potentially undermining stigmas and stereotypes. This is with particular consideration to media and academic representations of veganism as a restrictive and potentially harmful diet (Cole, 2008), which obscures the centrality of the ideology of animal protection which happens to extend to food. I am aware that these misrepresentations may present people with a justification to not more deeply consider the fundamental motivations underlying veganism. However, this issue illustrates some of the tensions that vegans contend with in their representations.

The idea of not minding what others do also highlights a particularly contentious and often misunderstood aspect of veganism. Veganism is often framed as a "lifestyle" or "personal choice". In

conceptualising veganism as a “personal choice” or “lifestyle choice”, the value system critical to the vegan perspective is removed. Many participants challenged the “personal choice” narrative:

> I don’t care what your personal choice, you do whatever you want in the bedroom, with whoever you want, however you want, whenever you want, as long as its consensual, I don’t care. What you eat, I don’t care [pause] unless there’s an innocent victim, and it’s unnecessary, I do care. (Brian)

As an attempt to explain this rationale, most people would comfortably state that they would not harm a dog and would also not find it acceptable for others to harm a dog. They would not consider others harming a dog to be a personal choice. The key defining aspect is the extension of consideration to the experience of the animal involved. Perhaps personal speciesism can be observed resulting from different emotional responses when comparing the idea of a dog being deliberately hurt as opposed to a chicken, for example. As Brian asserts, eating animals and their secretions is not just a human experience, there is another party involved. Mill’s (1962) Harm Principle argues that people can do whatever they choose, so long as they harm no one else. An earlier equivalent to this is France’s "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" (1789) which states; “Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else”. Vegans generally extend this consideration to every*-one*, including animals. This perspective encompasses the decentring of the human experience, which links to CAS. This view is not necessarily to say that humans and animals must occupy equivalent moral standing, rather, that their lives are considered by vegans to be of greater importance than, for example, the taste pleasure one might experience from consuming their flesh. To a human, a meal or snack is a transitory, perhaps barely conscious daily act. To the animals involved, it can mean being bred into a life of abject suffering and being deprived of life through an excruciating early death. Given this, typically participants expressed that they would like to bring about change in others:

> if I could flick a switch and make everyone go vegan overnight I would. (Harvey)

However, exactly how to achieve that change is more complex and one of the key points of tension within veganism. There are many contexts participants feel unable to advocate veganism, such as workplace settings and certain social situations. Participants reported at times not speaking up due to feeling outnumbered, believing they would find it upsetting to talk about, and predicting they would not

change anyone's mind within certain contexts. In general, participants report being selective and strategic about how and when to discuss veganism.

Despite the complexities brought about through specific contexts, intersecting with not wanting to be too pushy, or be perceived in stereotypical ways, most participants expressed a desire to share what they have discovered. Many regretfully felt they had been deceived, having had the truth hidden from them previously, see the injustice involved, and view advocacy as attempting to share otherwise hidden truths. For example, the common practice of newly hatched male chicks being ground up alive in macerators (McKenna, 2016) is not an opinion; it is an objective reality many people are simply unaware of. A substantial tension is added when the vegan is met with a great deal of resistance in attempting to share what they have learned:

> I think the main thing most of us wanna do is share it with everyone else, and wake up everyone else ... I try to convey to non-vegans when they start going 'aw, why they being so, ya know, forcing their beliefs and they're always going on about it' … I'm like 'well, it's a thing, once you understand, what's going on, and the, desperate need for it to end as soon as possible, of course you're gonna, talk about it and try and encourage others to engage with it', I mean, you can't be silent about it, can't. (Eli)

> I think it's a natural step that first if you're discovering all these principles and you're thinking 'oh my God, what have I been doing?'… you're realising, 'oh well, uh, I'm I've had this change of mind and it's been quite rapid and I'm seeing the world in a completely new light and if I just told other people about this they would agree and we could all go vegan and it would be a perfect world, and…' and then you realise as well it's not that easy aye. (Gavin)

Participants advised that despite their best efforts, their words often fall on deaf ears. This apparent indifference leads to disappointment at others' apathy and inaction, many emphasising how exasperating it can be to feel able to recognise the atrocity of carnism, yet feeling unable to effect change:

> I'm against injustice in general, and I've strong ethical convictions and yep, that just frustrates me. (Gavin)

> there's a lot of injustice, that is ignored, or that people know exists and no one does anything about it. (Frank)

Eli, like others, discussed this frustration together with his efforts to resist judgement, misanthropy, and cynicism despite this:

> otherwise you just end up, *so* judgmental, and I always try to remind myself … we're not perfect, no one's perfect, no one's zero impact ya know … but there's a there's always that thing were ya know, it's understanding you, you can make a huge difference, by choosing to go vegan and thinking, I think it's thinking really quite consciously, whereas I feel like, most people … just don't, wanna know.

Most participants do not engage in public activism, preferring instead to advocate on an individual level, within their existing social circles. In general, aligning with Twine's (2014) research, people tended to alter their advocacy approach over time. People tended to feel shocked, saddened, and angry following discovering the hidden practices involved in animal agriculture and initially wanted to let people know with a strong sense of urgency. Sometimes after being met with resistance, they reflected on and questioned the effectiveness of certain approaches. Harvey shared an experience involving social media:

> I shared a video … this thing of a, um, a cow being dragged in a digger or something like that, out on a farm and I was just like 'you don't love animals if you eat them', and all this stuff, 'this is what you're contributing to' and um no one wanted to talk to me, um, for a while … I didn't get invited, like, one of my good friends had a barbeque … she's pretty honest with me, she was like 'I just didn't want any of that bullshit, um, at the party, I didn't want you to be like that' and I was like 'aw' and it was a bit of a wakeup call … it was only only the vegans that were actually like 'yeah, you're right' ya know? Well I don't need ta make you more vegan [laughs] I don't need to let you, you know what I mean? So I changed my tack I think after that.

The ways people discussed their advocacy included talking to people, being an example, and sharing messages through social media. Many people discussed their favourite way to advocate was through the sharing of food. This food sharing demonstrates intervention at the level of everyday practice and experience. It is offering an alternative experience to counter the common assumption that one cannot live (pleasurably) without animal products. This a belief that entire industries are invested in sustaining:

> they say 'oh this is really quite good, this is really very filling, I don't feel like I'm missing anything' 'yeah, that's that's the point, I don't either'. (Lucy)

> once people tried that it was 'oh, this is fantastic! It tastes just like regular cake!' which was just a really beautiful opening for me to talk about the fact that 'yes, yes it does, all my food that I eat also tastes very normal and is really quite delicious'. (Lucy)

> I made them pulled jackfruit burgers before, and he's like 'bro this is like better than pulled pork' and I'm like 'yeah, it is, it's just the flavours and ya know … there's no cholesterol in it and like ya, there's no saturated fat', like there's, I'll go that angle with it, I'll go the health side of things, um, sort of uh, ya know, I'll talk to him, them about living off the land and that sort a stuff, cause it's it's relatable. (Harvey)

As Harvey suggests, sharing food not only challenges misperceptions about vegan food, it also creates an opportunity to open dialogue to other aspects of veganism. This approach appears to be a less threatening way to familiarise others to one aspect of veganism, as opposed to raising the issue of animal cruelty. Discussing animal suffering in animal agriculture often results in sharp defensive responses and a shutting down of dialogue (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Harvey, who had spoken about how he altered his advocacy approach after being excluded from a friend's gathering later went on to say:

> that same girl that didn't invite me to her barbeque, we have vegan barbeques with them now at their house … we'll have sort of 10, 15 friends around to have a barbee and the whole thing's vegan, and it's just pretty cool, um, ya know everyone leaves with recipes and questions.

Others did not necessarily move toward a "softer" advocacy approach, instead, moving towards more outspoken activism. Brian feels very strongly that ending the exploitation of animals is a matter requiring a direct approach, referring to the ways other social justice movements have achieved change historically:

> a lot of people don't understand the power and importance of uh, social disruption and direct action … the women's suffragette movement, the civil ri-the civil rights movement, even the gay pride

> movement, at different times, all sorts of movements have employed disruption, because it gets the public talking.

Activism and the various forms of activism are a topic of wide-ranging debate and varied perspectives within, and outside of, the vegan community. The topic of recent supermarket protests was raised throughout the interviews. This action involved a group of vegan activists who occupied the meat section at several supermarkets with flowers for the deceased animals, images of animals, and signs displaying statements such as "it's not food, it's violence" (Fitzgerald, 2019). Participants had a range of responses and views, many disagreeing with the approach:

> I don't think it works, because when people feel confronted on an ethical level, there's a defence response, and there's less, um, possibility for listening and conversation. (Keira)

Others expressed support, pointing out that the distress some people might feel as a result of direct-action activism pales in comparison to what animals go through:

> a lot of 'aw you're just gonna upset people or' and I'm just like well 'people, animals go into slaughterhouses, scared, ya know terrified, confused, and they get stabbed'. (Eli)

Isabelle, like Brian, drew parallels between the actions taken in other social justice movements, pointing out that disrupting negative peace is sometimes necessary to effect change:

> I'm fully supportive, it's like [pause] we wouldn't have as many rights for women or for minorities if we didn't have these people.

This consideration relates to Potts and White's (2008) findings about their participants viewing their resistance as connecting them with the history of other social justice movements. Isabelle later went on, like others, to express a degree of uncertainty about these forms of activism:

> I do think that change requires more deep, individual work and it doesn't happen because of a very decisive action that someone else performs, I think that it's an internal choice, at the same time it could be inspiration, so yeah, I don't know. (Isabelle)

For Harvey, this included concern over how his involvement in such actions might affect his relationships and ability to advocate on a personal level:

> while my gut feeling is 'oh no please stop doing that' … I don't know enough about that to have a firm stance on it either way… my circle of humans that I interact with and have grown up with, with my family, my friend groups … if I start doing those things, I'm gonna push a lot of them away without being able ta get to them, if they see me doing that stuff, ah, yeah, I'm conscious of that. (Harvey)

Brian expressed wholehearted support for the supermarket disruptions. The stickering he refers to below are reported (Fitzgerald, 2019) cases of stickers appearing on packets of meat stating things such as "this package contains the body of someone who did not want to die".

> when vegans do the supermarket disruption or protests, or anything like that, even, even something as harmless as the stickering, everyone loses their shit and get upset. And I can understand why, as I said before, they don't understand, the public especially, even some vegans, don't understand the *seriousness* and urgency and scale of the problem … a lot of vegans, so this goes in the media, it goes on social media, and then, you're just a be the change vegan, you're not an activist, you got to work the next day 'oh, you're one of those fuckin vegans aren't you, oh you, you bloody bastards' and you get all the shit, which is really directed at the activists but you have to wear it, and I can understand why a be the change vegan [pause] gets freaked out, when the activist vegans does what they do

Other participants however, tended to discuss concerns about the effectiveness of these actions, rather than the personal impact on themselves, reflecting Horta's (2018) observations about second order discrimination. Second order discrimination relates to vegans being more concerned about the consequences to the animals involved than themselves personally. I should note that Brian's response when questioned about the effectiveness of direct action was to emphasise further that it has worked for other social justice movements historically. The discourse about effectiveness highlights a significant debate within the vegan community. Despite most not finding others' consumption of animal products morally acceptable, there is an acknowledgement that one cannot *make* anyone else do (or not do) anything coupled with the legal, social, historical, and cultural contexts which enable carnism, keeping it invisible:

> we can't control other people's behaviour … there's been a lot of letting go in that process, because it's it's rarely the outcome that I want, and it's never in the timeframe that I want. (Lucy)

Kiera deliberates over the dilemmas involved in taking various stances. She reflects on how, even if completely correct, taking the stance that veganism is a moral imperative can lead to condemning others, resulting in conflict. Since the change to veganism requires deeply personal moral reflexivity, conflict may be unproductive, however, it also may still be important in raising initial awareness. Kiera, like many others, struggles with uncertainty around the best approach to take:

> there's no way that it's a justifiable choice so, that's why I have to disconnect because otherwise I'd be picking a fight with everyone right? [laughs]. Like um, people are still killing animals when we have an alternative now, um, so I do understand that, yeah, I just don't know how effective it is to take that perspective, like I think it's correct logically, like it is a moral obligation, I agree, but I think that in any decision that is moral or ethical, um, personal um, personal choice still plays a big part, like we cannot make people, um, understand or do what for me is the right thing, I cannot make them so, it still has to like, deep change still has to come from within, from like a personal transformation, so a shift in, a shift in awareness, I don't know how much it can be prompted by condemning choice, even when it's ah, when it shouldn't be a choice. So that's not resolved for me.

Gavin points to a critical difference between vegan activism and activism as performed by other social justice movements:

> I'm not really sure, I'd like to have more hard data on how um, effective different kinds of advocacy are … I mean, direct action has had an impact in other social movements before, so, I can see that being effective, then again it's a very different dynamic, because usually direct action has been people standing up for themselves and, demanding space and if people are doing that on behalf of, someone else it's a, I don't know how effective that's gonna be, so so, it's a very hard thing to judge.

This place of unresolved tension is where most participants land on the issue of direct-action vegan activism. Since non-vegans may struggle to access and comprehend the vegan perspective, for example, seeing innocuous items where the vegan sees violence, activism may be misperceived for example, as virtue signalling, or reinforce the stereotype of a "forceful" way to "push personal opinions". Although there is a need to raise awareness and follow the path of other social justice movements, it is very

challenging to ascertain whether the net positive gained outweighs the net negative over time, particularly given the differences between veganism and other historical movements. Overall participants tended to fall on the side of supporting the actions, despite choosing not to participate in direct-action activism themselves.

4.6. Discussion

This discussion aims to explore and connect the themes established in the narratives, emphasising what I have observed as unique emergent findings. Consequently, this discussion will focus on what I have determined to be the most relevant findings concerning the original research questions. The first of these is what leads some individuals to transition to veganism, emphasising some defining characteristics that vegans at this current milieu appear to possess, recognising social constructionist perspectives including the ways narratives are context-bound within the conversation between teller and listener (Gergen, 2009). The second is the contrast between the thoughts and feelings reported by vegans before and after becoming vegan, namely how their expectations compared to their experience. I then discuss how the combination of both changes resulting from the adoption of veganism and vegan stigmas impact relationship dynamics and subsequently, the experience of vegans.

The space limitations of this thesis and the richness of the narratives meant I needed to make difficult choices about what to exclude and include. I returned to my original research questions and narrative methodological approach in order to determine this, acknowledging the likelihood that my own moral and ethical stance has also informed these decisions. As an example, although an interview question asking about the use of humour in veganism led to some thought-provoking discussions, I regretfully needed to exclude these as I deemed other issues more immediately related to both the interview questions and the experiences presented by those interviewed. Consequently, several themes needed to be excluded or severely limited. These included vegans' perceptions around vegan stereotypes, the degree of truth these hold, how much vegans internalise various stereotypes, and how they impact upon behaviour and experience. Other themes excluded were: facing discrimination in workplace and medical contexts, and the divergence of opinion around various activism approaches (including incrementalism versus abolitionism). Also excluded were: concerns around other social issues including the environment and health, sentiments around speciesism, predictions for the growth of veganism in the future, the role of science, vegansexuality, "straight edge" veganism relating to music culture, and how various cultural and religious contexts intersect with the vegan experience. The thoughtfulness of

responses received made excluding so much richness very challenging. I am full of admiration for the deeply considered reflection, nuance, and passion that participants enthusiastically brought to the research.

4.6.1. What Leads to the Shift?

These findings, in many ways, echo some features of existing literature and challenge it in others, such as the process McDonald (2000) developed and the transtheoretical model applied by Mendes (2013). Both models are relatively broad and hence can be applied to the current research; however, I do not think the diversity of transition experiences can be adequately expressed as linear phases. I am unconvinced of McDonald's (2000) interpretation of the adoption of a "vegan world view", precisely the assertion that "the adoption of a vegan worldview includes the belief in equality between human and non-human animals" (p. 3). Through the combination of discussions with participants and personal experience, I do not agree that this definition can be universally applied. It fails to consider the diversity of interpretations possible to align oneself with veganism and erroneously conflates the issues of equality and non-maleficence. Although the notion of equality itself stirs up a multitude of complexities, I would contest that it is not necessary to believe humans and non-human animals are equal in order not to want to harm animals as far as practicable and possible, and become vegan.

The transition from carnism to veganism for participants involved diverse routes, initiated by different factors, and occurred across a variety of timeframes. These catalysts for change could be conceptualised as being initiated by disruption or change in one or more of the following areas: physiological, cognitive, emotional, or behavioural. The cognitive model posits that these dimensions interact so that if one changes, the others also change in response (Padesky & Mooney, 1990).

Some participants' route to veganism was initiated by health (physiological) reasons and subsequent behaviour change to plant-based eating. In Harvey's case, for example, the behavioural and physiological changes (enjoyment of plant-based food and health benefits) in turn led to him being more cognitively and emotionally open to exploring other counter-narratives to carnism. For others, like Clara, an emotional response to viewing disturbing footage of animal suffering and violence in animal agriculture, what Jasper and Poulsen (1995) call a "moral shock", lead to a swift determination to become vegan (cognitive) and rapid behavioural change, which was later followed by learning more about carnism and veganism. This aligns to McDonald's (2000) finding of mostly emotional catalytic

experiences resulting in rapid behaviour change. Gavin's catalyst was mostly cognitive, through the determination that there is no logical basis for speciesism that can morally justify our treatment of animals in animal agriculture.

Another useful way to conceptualise this transition, which complements the cognitive model, is the three levels of thought (Padesky & Mooney, 1990). Cognitive change (and accompanying changes to other dimensions in the cognitive model) involve levels of thought which move from superficial to deep. The first, at the superficial level is automatic thoughts, the second is intermediate beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes which affect our perceptions. The third is the core belief level, which are beliefs we tend to filter the world through, they are less flexible and more difficult to change once internalised.

Regardless of the initiating factors, the routes, and time involved, the transition cemented beliefs fundamental to veganism at the core belief level. In order to move to veganism, there needs to be openness to both discovering new information and engaging in behaviour change. It is through this discovery that the primary defence of carnism, which is invisibility combined with personal consumer denial, is shattered. Once aware of the atrocities involved, participants undertook a determination of their stance concerning the norm of animal consumption, through engaging in moral reflexivity. This combination of awareness and moral reflexivity is experienced as "waking up" from "false consciousness". According to Jost and Banaji (1994), false consciousness is due to not having been exposed to adequate information and a lack of reflection.

The decision to become vegan was reported to not necessarily be a result of a purely emotional or cognitive response, but rather a combination of the two. This outcome aligns with Herzog's (1993) findings that "the distinction between emotion and logic was not an issue: they held a more integrated, holistic vision combining reason and emotion" (p. 108). According to Loughnan, Bastian, and Haslam (2014), everyday moral decisions are negotiated through the interplay of emotions, cognitions, and personality characteristics. With regards to personality characteristics, it certainly appears that openness plays a significant role in facilitating the transition from carnism to veganism. Relating to this, robust personal values and a willingness to challenge dominant norms, or at least act against the status quo, appear to be critical to the adoption and maintenance of veganism at this current stage in the movement.

Barriers to veganism investigated by Bryant (2019) include taste pleasure (the belief that meat/cheese/eggs taste good), convenience (the belief that being vegan would be difficult in a practical sense), and price (the belief that being vegan would be expensive). Other barriers deemed less important by Bryant's (2019) respondents were social stigma (the beliefs that vegans and veganism are strange and that they would face social ostracisation if they became vegan), and concerns around nutritional requirements. Participants report experiencing the same perceived barriers to veganism reported by non-vegans, although not all participants experienced all barriers, for example, those who have always had an aversion to meat did not experience the taste barrier.

The cognitive distortions of carnism are overturned when animals are recognised as individuals, not abstractions. This can occur through emotionally connecting with animals, by intellectually recognising their sentience, or critically questioning the illogicality of speciesist practices, or a combination of all three. Empathetic connection toward "food animals" occurs due to carnism's cognitive distortions, such as denigrating the victims, being recognised as unjust and unjustifiable. Shadnam (2020) states "the very category of 'moral' … is socially shaped and will vary from one historical period and one social context to another" (p. 13). Participants expressed that their stance involves the recognition that modern practices involved in the commodification of animals are inherently cruel and that consuming animal products is no longer necessary, which are time and context-bound values discernments. The refusal to participate in carnism is underpinned by core beliefs which overturn carnism's defence mechanisms. Those core beliefs, determined through awareness and moral reflexivity, are that carnism involves unnecessary exploitation and cruelty, and that animals are individuals who matter.

Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira (2016) found that people selectively disengage ethical self-regulatory behaviour by detaching moral concern when thinking about how meat is produced. Contrasting this, it appears that vegans instead engage their moral concern. According to Graça et al. (2016), non-vegans desensitise themselves to animal death and suffering, deny negative consequences of animal products, diffuse personal responsibility, and disbelieve their free choice to refrain from eating meat. Demonstrating behavioural integrity vegans appear to do just the opposite. Vegans engage moral concern, allow themselves to empathise and engage with animal death and suffering, openly see the consequences, including environmental repercussions, and taking personal responsibility for their role, choose non-participation in carnism. The decision to not participate in carnism, and thus become vegan,

involves the decision to prioritise what has been determined to be the “right thing”, over the perceived barriers to veganism, such as taste, convenience, and social acceptability.

4.6.2. Before and After

Unlike other marginalised groups, vegans who were previously non-vegan hold the unique position of having been a dominant group member before moving to a non-dominant group. As a result, I was able to compare their former preconceptions with their actual experience. This exploration encompassed their thoughts and feelings around meat and animal products, self-identity, and vegans and veganism. The findings revealed that what people anticipated about becoming vegan tended not to match their actual experience once vegan, thus challenging some of the barriers to veganism.

Food was anticipated by most participants to be an extremely difficult and unenjoyable aspect of veganism and was instead reported to be one of the highlights. This finding contradicts existing literature which frames veganism as an act of restriction (Cole, 2008), and aligns with those finding food to be a very much enjoyed aspect of veganism (Twine, 2014). Participants reported their changed perceptions of food occurred through lived experience. Non-vegans anticipate veganism to be difficult (Bryant, 2019), which participants also reported believing before becoming vegan. Meat and animal products typically went from being enjoyed, not consciously thought about a great deal, and considered “normal”, to being seen as disgusting, saddening, and no longer viewed as food. They became reminders of violence, suffering, death, and the unjust commodification of animals. This observation relates to the finding by Greenebaum (2012), that people did not stop consuming animal products due to taste enjoyment; rather, their consumption instead became a core value violation making the change easy.

Far from feeling deprived or needing to exercise extreme restraint, participants expressed immense gustatory enjoyment and satisfaction. Plant-based foods were reported as surprisingly satisfying and varied, opening avenues for exploration of new types of foods and flavours not previously considered. Plant-based eating itself was found to be a joy, rather than a hardship. This finding is critical since research has found that the main barrier people report to becoming vegan is taste (Lea & Worsley, 2003). The differentiation to previous research is that the current research finds that vegans too perceived the dietary aspects of veganism to be a barrier before becoming vegan themselves.

Since carnism is an invisible ideology, the majority of responses indicate that moving from carnism to veganism is considered by participants as less of a conversion of self and more of a development of self. Rather than necessarily changing one's self-identity, beliefs and values, for example, around the acceptability of animal suffering, the transition from carnism to veganism is typically the result aligning behaviour to already existing values.

Vegans and veganism were generally formerly viewed by participants as extreme and strange, reflecting dominant narratives (Cole, 2008). The transition to veganism demonstrates that people who were previously closed off to and dismissive of veganism, can become vegan. After transitioning to veganism, for most participants, other vegans became a source of hope, providing inspiring examples of personal integrity, offering empathy, and a sense of belonging. Most found community and shared understandings amongst other vegans through online communities and in-person relationships. Words and language are context-bound, carrying meanings according to ideology and group membership (Tuffin, 2005), so the very meaning of "vegan" itself changed for participants. Although there are a variety of possible interpretations and practices presenting points of tension, for example, types of activism, every participant consistently holds personal non-use of animals, as far as practicable and possible, as a core tenant of veganism.

4.6.3. Negotiating Relationships

The experience of being open to the scale of suffering of non-human animals, as well as witnessing the social acceptability of their commodification, can be painful, leading to the need for the development of coping mechanisms. The act of becoming and being vegan means falling out of alignment with dominant narratives and the practices of most other people. Occupying the public "vegan identity" (McDonald, 2000) results in altered positional perception in multiple ways. Although there is an internal alignment between values and action for the private self, perceptions of the world and others may change dramatically. Further to this, echoing Greenebaum's (2012) assertion of veganism being a public declaration, others may perceive the vegan quite differently.

Bryant's (2019) research, found that people predict the practical aspects of veganism, namely food, to be the most difficult, and the social stigma to be less of a barrier. The current research found participants report the reverse is true. While participants generally reported the food changes as a joyful process of discovery, the impacts on close relationships were often reported as the most challenging

aspects of becoming and being vegan. In anticipating becoming vegan, it appears that people overestimate the difficulty of the practicalities of veganism and underestimate the social pressures.

Social environments and the "non-vegan world" are where participants encounter carnism's secondary defence systems of the invalidation of veganism, and the legitimisation of carnism. MacInnis and Hodson (2017) found that others perceive vegans as violating social values. However, vegans' actions align more closely with most people's professed values, such as caring for animals and not wanting to be the reason they suffer (Plous, 1993). Regan (1980) states "It would be difficult to find anyone who is in favour of cruelty" (p. 533). However, Weible et al. (2016), found that "while people state that animal welfare is very important for them they behave differently at the point of sale" (p. 2027). Since carnism, including the often-hidden violence towards non-human animals, is so normalised, veganism, which represents non-violence towards non-human animals, is interpreted as contravening common sense, being "weird", "extreme", and "unnatural". So, refusing to participate in violence towards vulnerable, sentient others, appears to be a deviant stance to take.

Carnism operates through the interplay between industry making unpleasant realities invisible and consumer denial (Joy, 2010). Many participants found it hard to comprehend that they did not know about or make the connection to the hidden practices of carnism earlier. They report being bemused witnessing others' inconsistent behaviour towards animals, such as others expressing outrage over some forms of animal abuse, yet refusing to consider the cruelty involved in their own consumpton. Tanner (2015) defines cruelty as "knowingly causing unnecessary pain and/or suffering" (p. 822). The prospect that one is taking part in ongoing cruelty may be psychologically threatening to those unprepared to consider counter-narratives or change their behaviour. Actions reinforce beliefs (Joy, 2010) and carnism is socially and culturally sanctioned, so it may be very challenging to consider the prospect that one is unwittingly actively contributing to widespread cruelty.

When the vegan brings hidden issues to conscious awareness, a light is shone on practices previously hidden or invisible. A vegan's presence can expose the incongruence between others' professed values and practice and catalyse cognitive dissonance. Instead of reviewing their beliefs and behaviour, people may attempt to alleviate their cognitive dissonance through various defensive strategies. It is within this space that vegans often operate in interpersonal relationships. Being on the receiving end of accusations, labelling, social exclusion, and various forms of ridicule were all reported by participants.

Silencing is a common strategy applied by dominant groups to maintain the status quo and extend control over non-dominant groups. By denying the opportunity for the vegan voice to be heard, the listener can remain "unknowing" and maintain their self-assessment as someone who is not cruel, without having to engage in moral reflexivity or change their behaviour (Crossley, 2011). A large body of empirical evidence confirms that consuming animal products is unnecessary, and the vegan offers living evidence of this. As such, their "openly out as vegan" existence may be perceived as a confrontation in itself. Hence the necessity of tropes which act to silence and trivialise vegan voices. Vegans, not wanting to reinforce stereotypes or be ostracised may refrain from stating that they are vegan, or do so in an apologetic or indirect way. Choosing to unapologetically declare one's veganism may invite knowing and derisive looks or comments, confirming dominant group biases and prejudices.

The trope of "pushing" or "forcing" views acts on participants' behaviour in that they often do not want to a) be seen as a stereotype and therefore easily dismissed or marginalised and b) push people away from being open to veganism. Most people are unaware of carnism in everyday life, not recognising it as being imposed upon us through conditioning, advertising, discourse including euphemisms, and social norms. Thus, veganism, which offers counter-narratives to carnism, may instead be perceived as especially loud and jarring. This is intensified through a combination of stigmatising media representations and the social acceptability of vegaphobic discourse (Cole & Morgan, 2011).

Despite not wanting to be perceived in stereotypical ways such as being preachy or judgmental, the majority of participants expressed the strong desire to share what they have learned. Once people see the systems in place which keep carnism hidden, their own former lack of awareness, denial and justifications, regret at not knowing earlier, as well as the injustice of the unnecessary suffering involved, they typically expressed a strong desire to "wake other people up". This is motivated by a desire to reduce animal suffering and take a stand for the oppressed (Horta, 2018). Participants also generally recognise that carnism is not a "freely made choice" (Joy, 2010) since most of us are born into it, and partake in it uncritically.

Upon first becoming vegan, participants report having expected to be able to discuss the hidden atrocities of carnism with others. The experience of instead being met with denial, defensiveness, or ambivalence was particularly challenging. Typically, participants report efforts to advocate veganism to family and result in strong reactions and sometimes relationships becoming distant. Upon encountering

sharp resistance, participants report finding interactions with family and friends difficult and sometimes painful. The pain is both from witnessing both the consumption of animal products and disappointment resulting from efforts to discuss veganism being met with dismissal, denial, and refusal to listen. Receiving these responses can lead to the vegan feeling defeated, frustrated, and struggling with misanthropic feelings. This conclusion is consistent with research findings that family members are typically unwelcoming of veganism (Jabs, Sobal, & Devine, 2000), that most opposition comes from the vegan's nuclear family members, and that this forms the most significant social challenge for vegans. Relationship tensions require vegans to have "additional competency that involves skills of emotional and social negotiation" (Twine, 2014, p. 631).

Often the contextual differences between accounts led to very different outcomes. For example, Brian, whose father was a slaughterhouse worker and hunter, and whose brothers are all hunters, and Lucy, who grew up witnessed her father slaughtering animals, may be perceived to have violated family and cultural norms. Brian, who grew up in a farming community and advocates in an outspoken way (though no longer within his family unless in response), and Lucy who refused meat consumption as a child, may present symbolic (Stephan & Stephan, 2017) or even existential threats (Newman, 2019) to these norms. Both Lucy and Brian reported largely strained and distant family relationships. Whereas others, such as Andrea, who grew up eating vegetarian family meals quite often and is not outspoken, does not report strain over her veganism within her relationships. Dynamics, therefore, affecting the interplay between experiences and outcomes appear to include personal circumstances, cultural contexts, advocacy styles, and the openness of others to counter-narratives. Roth (2005) found family members can view alternative diets as "deviant, strange, or crazy – a threat to the family's "homeostasis", its traditions, and its group identity" (p. 183), this may also link to cultural identity. Thus, strong adverse reactions may be attempts to restore the family to its "homeostatic condition".

Sometimes over time, an unspoken truce may occur, where both parties in essence "agree to disagree" and resolve not to discuss veganism. However, being surrounded by practices of carnism while being disempowered to discuss their experience is another way that vegans can experience silencing. For vegans seeing the perpetual and ubiquitous nature of carnism throughout their daily lives, and within relationships, yet feeling silenced, can be emotionally draining and can impact relationship closeness. The mechanisms for coping mirrored some carnistic defences, such as denial and avoidance (Joy, 2010).

Other mechanisms included changing advocacy styles and having a vegan home as a place to "get away" from the outside world.

Non-vegan/vegan relationships often involve a lack of understanding of the vegan position, minimisation, and failed empathetic reciprocity. This lack of understanding can lead to sadness, frustration, confusion, and disappointment in those people closest to the vegan for their seeming inability to empathise with what the vegan views as the vulnerable, innocent victims of carnism. Vegans' concerns with others failing to empathise with animals illustrates Horta's (2018) observations of vegans being more concerned with the mistreatment of animals, than their own mistreatment, labelled "second-order discrimination". For non-vegans, empathising with the vegan position may mean in turn engaging in the idea that what oneself is participating in might be problematic and morally objectionable, so may be challenging to do.

A contributing factor may be the experience of disenfranchised grief for the vegan. Disenfranchised grief describes grief that cannot be openly acknowledged or socially supported (Doka, 1999). This grief might involve regret over past behaviours, sorrow for the non-human animal victims of carnism, and loss involving changed perceptions of the world and other people. Since carnism is invisible and veganism is inaccessible from a non-vegan position, those closest to the vegan may fail to fully appreciate the depth of grief experienced and may dismiss these feelings. The same items or events that appear innocuous or invisible to non-vegans can be disturbing to vegans, for example, dead animals on the table. In these instances, avoidance of and distancing in those relationships were typically reported. This is similar to other findings such as those which found dismissal of experience can lead to the relationship being weakened and even eventually breaking down (McDonald, 2000).

Many participants discussed how their advocacy approaches have changed over the time they have been vegan. Participants often moved to more "soft" forms of advocacy, such as sharing food or discussing the health benefits of plant-based eating. Food practices are imbued with meanings with social, cultural, historical, and psychological components; however, these practices are constructions, not naturally occurring phenomena. This means they are amenable to change (Asher & Cherry, 2015), and the rate of the shift in food consumption is striking (Mennell, 2008). Twine (2014) found that vegans performing veganism is a "demonstrative manner" helps to improve perceptions of it, which may in turn also restore "a sense of commensality and social connection with food" (p. 637). Since social action and

knowledge are interwoven, the increasing practice of the sharing of “vegan” food can help to normalise vegan practice (Burr, 1995).

Similar to Twine’s (2014) findings of difficulties in relationships often easing over time, in general, participants report that their friends and family have been increasingly accepting of their veganism. Twine (2014) also reported that responses can range from extreme disapproval to approval and support. In the current research, those who did not report relationship difficulties typically were very selective about or passive in their advocacy, had vegan friends, or family who were able to be somewhat supportive of the vegan position.

Social pressures and being surrounded by carnism appears to indicate that vegans need to have very deep convictions (Menzies & Sheeshka, 2012) and strong values, however many of the participants discussed how changes that have occurred since they became vegan have helped to ease their practice. Veganism is becoming more openly discussed, mainstream and acceptable (Ministry of Health, 2019). Alongside heightened awareness around climate change, people are increasingly coming to understand the environmental impacts of animal agriculture and how individual consumer behaviour can impact broader systemic change. There has been an exponential growth in the variety and selection of vegan-friendly products readily available, which has helped make vegan choices more convenient, accessible, and is helping to make it increasingly normalised. As veganism grows, more people will have first-hand social encounters with vegans which may help to disrupt dominant narratives and stereotypes. So, barriers to veganism are likely to be reducing in intensity, facilitating growth in the adoption of veganism and subsequently calling the acceptability of the practices of carnism into question as more people speak out and awareness grows.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter, I provide a summary and some reflections on the current research. I discuss core insights relating to the original research questions, share my reflexive observations, discuss limitations, and suggest potential areas for future research. I conclude with some final thoughts.

5.1. Core Insights

I focus on three core insights emerging from the narratives. The first relates to the transition to veganism, some personal characteristics appearing to facilitate this, and the core beliefs fundamental to the transition. The second insight, unique to the current research, is the contrast between reported thoughts and feelings before and after becoming veganism, concerning animal products, vegans and veganism, and self-identity. The final insight relates to the tensions vegans experience between maintaining relationship closeness and the desire to engage in advocacy.

The factors initiating the transition to veganism were conceptualised using the Cognitive Model (Beck & Haigh, 2014), as involving emotional, cognitive, physiological, or behavioural components. The common aspects identified were a disruption in some form, attaining critical awareness around hidden practices, and engaging in moral reflexivity in order to determine one's stance concerning these. The decision to become vegan was facilitated by the personal value of justice and the characteristic of openness.

While the adoption of new practice may have occurred at any point, for example changing to plant-based eating for health reasons disrupting the belief that eating animal products is necessary, the transition to veganism is ultimately completed through a determination underpinned by core beliefs. Firstly, after becoming critically aware of either hidden practices, the lack of necessity for animal products, or both, participants moved from not recognising carnism to acknowledging the unnecessary suffering involved. Secondly, participants moved from either not thinking about the animals involved or believing that their suffering does not matter, to prioritising their suffering over the perceived barriers to carnism. In summary, the transition to veganism involves recognising that animals matter and that carnism involves unnecessary animal suffering, and the determination that not contributing to the exploitation of, and cruelty towards, animals matters more than the perceived barriers to veganism.

The research was able to explore participants' thoughts and feelings relating to meat and animal products, vegans and veganism, and self-identity, before and after becoming vegan. Previous literature

has discussed vegans' perceptions in these areas (Joy, 2010; Mann, 2018) and barriers to veganism related to these areas for non-vegans (Bryant, 2019; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). However, vegans' own experiences before and after the transition to veganism have not been compared previously. Participants reported having experienced the same barriers to veganism as those reported by non-vegans (Bryant, 2019; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019) before becoming vegan themselves. These mainly related to perceived taste pleasure and the anticipated difficulty of being vegan. However, now that participants are vegan, animal products are no longer appealing, and they have been pleasantly surprised by how easy, satisfying, and flavoursome plant-based eating is. Vegans themselves moved from being characterised in negative and stereotypical ways to being perceived very positively by most participants. The change in perception of veganism and vegans demonstrates that people who were previously closed off to veganism can become open to it. Most participants considered the move to veganism aligned them more closely to their already existing "good self" identity.

Although participants report the joy of the elimination of cognitive dissonance concerning consumption and enormous pleasure in food, they also contend with difficulties. Being vegan in a non-vegan world involves being mindfully aware of the scale and extent of the injustice inextricably connected to animal products and seeing instances of this interwoven through daily activity. Participants report that connecting the use of animals to suffering and violence results in feelings of sadness, helplessness, disgust, and frustration at the injustice involved. The challenging emotions are exacerbated by witnessing others' obliviousness. This experience typically leads to a desire to advocate, yet facing stereotypes, marginalisation, silencing, and relationship difficulties. There are notable tensions evident for participants between engaging in moral behaviour (wanting to take a stand for animals by educating and informing) and pro-social behaviour (not wanting to be seen in stereotypical ways, push others away from veganism, or damage their relationships).

The resistance to hearing about veganism experienced by many vegans reflects social constructionist assumptions around the ways social identities privilege the interests of dominant groups, whose internalised discourses mean existing bias can be readily confirmed, and counter-discourses easily dismissed or ignored (Burr, 1995). This behaviour is a way that control can be extended over the non-dominant group (Burr, 1995). Vegans often experience hurt resulting from witnessing others' resistance, denial, and perceived indifference to animal suffering. The grief and pain experienced as a result of both witnessing carnism and marginalisation is largely disenfranchised, socially unacceptable, and

misunderstood by non-vegans. Despite these challenges, participants reported primarily being driven to advocate in ways they found through time and experience to be most effective.

Although most participants were cautiously supportive of more overt forms of vegan activism, most preferred to advocate on an individual level personally. Often this was through the preparation and sharing of food. Since the main barrier to the adoption of veganism is perceived taste pleasure (Bryant, 2019; Lea & Worsley, 2003), in presenting delicious and satisfying alternatives, vegans can challenge the belief that one cannot live pleasurably consuming exclusively plant-based food. This can help to facilitate openness to other counter-narratives that challenge the social and moral acceptability of animal exploitation. As McLaren (2002) observes, resistance to normalisation on an individual level can lead to broader social transformation through new ways of living and counter-discourses.

5.2. Reflexive Observations

As a relatively new vegan, I discovered a series of prejudices towards vegans and veganism which this research has helped to disrupt. In particular, I expected the majority of participants to be younger and more alternative. Through my transition to veganism, I had discovered the level of contemplation engaged in by many vegans. However, I was still surprised by how reflexive, well-considered, and articulate participants were in recounting their experiences and constructing their narratives. It was a very willing group, keen to participate and have their voices heard. It is likely that my "insider" position and access to assumed shared meanings within veganism helped as did being able to empathise with daily experiences of non-normative living. Daily experiences, including being surrounded by carnism are constant reminders of the "otherness" of veganism and may mean vegans become acutely aware of their rationale. Some participants remarked they had not ever sat down and discussed their experiences in this way before, highlighting the co-created weaving together and development of the narrative.

The role of avoidance in maintaining carnism has also become evident through my attempts to ask a few people whom I respect and admire to review this thesis for me, none of whom are vegan. I had advised beforehand that the content might be confronting and challenging at times. On this basis, I have had one person, whose opinion and perspective I very much respect, politely decline to review it despite wishing to support my efforts. I have thought a great deal about how vegans who choose to engage with disturbing truths might differ from those who choose to hide from exposure to them. I think avoidance reveals what most intuitively know, but do not want to admit, which is that animals suffer terribly so we

humans can use and consume their bodies. If carnism was readily acceptable and veganism so easy to refute, then avoidance would be unnecessary. Over time I have come to believe that just like I had been for so many years, others are also not fully consenting participants in carnism. The alternative of believing that those who participate in carnism are being deliberately cruel or are genuinely indifferent to the suffering they support just does not ring true for me. I also think it would likely be deeply unhelpful to assume.

5.3. Limitations

Many limitations undoubtedly result from research of this nature. I focus on just a few here for the sake of brevity. A significant consideration in the writing of this thesis was breadth versus depth. I feel I have favoured breadth over depth. The reason for the choices made was the attempt to compile a more inclusive and comprehensive narrative across a range of often contradictory experiences and viewpoints. Although I endeavoured to honour participants' individual accounts, many thought-provoking, personally unique narrative aspects have been omitted in favour of attempting to expose and represent themes across a range of experiences and stances. This will have resulted in the loss of the opportunity to convey more nuanced understandings.

The inclusion criteria for the research, namely being over 18 years old and having been vegan for at least three years, will have excluded valuable perspectives and experiences. Those under 18 years old will have unique insights into the experiences of being a vegan as a child or teenager at this point in time, which will have been omitted. Equally, those who have been vegan for less than three years would inevitably offer transition narratives distinct from those who have been vegan for more than three years. This is because even in the last three years, the acceptability of veganism and availability of vegan items has altered dramatically. This will in-turn have altered the transition experience, from social, relational, and practical perspectives. Additionally, those who have been vegan less for than three years may be more likely to accurately recall details of the transition experience due to recency, including emotional aspects and the reactions of others. Further to this, they may be in the process of still developing coping strategies.

Due to purposive sampling, and methods of recruitment, it is possible that the data represents the "loud voices" and those confident in articulating their position, neglecting, for example, more "individualistic vegans". Subsequently, there may be underrepresented groups with distinctive or differing experiences

and perspectives. Demographic information obtained was used to attempt to ensure those interviewed covered a range of ages, geographical locations (such as urban and rural), and ethnicities. Despite this, all participants currently live in main centres. The experience of vegans currently living in rural farming communities would offer rich and unique insights, which I have been unable to obtain.

5.4. Future Research

Critical Animal Studies is an area of research in its infancy, and as such, potential research topics in this area, including veganism, are vast. Therefore, I mention only a few ideas relating most directly to the findings and situatedness of the current research. Namely, personality in relation to veganism, beliefs and effectiveness of activism approaches, and with regards to the New Zealand context, the relationship between veganism and te ao Māori.

A key finding emerging from this research is the importance of openness in the transition to veganism, as such, it would be valuable to examine how other aspects of personality, beliefs, and values play a role in veganism. It would be useful to examine what differentiates a) those who choose to expose themselves to counter-narratives to carnism and those who do not and b) those who are exposed to counter-narratives and eventually become vegan and those who do not. For example, it is possible that present-day vegans may be less concerned about social conformity and subsequently may be more willing to challenge the status quo. Further to this, it would be beneficial to examine the interaction of beliefs and praxis. For example, those more concerned about social conformity may engage in more "individualistic vegan" practice, engaging in greater self-silencing. This may then extend to beliefs, for example, believing that being vegan is not necessarily a moral imperative, but rather a personal choice.

Focusing on the New Zealand context, a valuable area of research would be an exploration of the relationship between Tikanga Māori and the growing adoption of veganism by Māori (Pointing, 2019). "He ika haehae kupenga" is a phrase which literally translates to "the fish who tears the net". The fish tears the net freeing themselves and also allows other fish their freedom. This metaphor usually refers to a troublemaker challenging the status quo. Mahinga kai (plant-based living) may be conceptualised as an act of resistance against the corporatisation of kai (food) and westernised diet practices that are harmful to Māori. As one example, Huriwai (2020) states "dairy farming as an industry, and cows' milk as a product, exemplifies blatant disregard for our tikanga and perpetuates systemic racism within Aotearoa." (*He Ika Haehae Kupenga*, 2020). Related concepts and values of exploration could include

kaitiakitanga (guardianship as it relates to sustainability, environmental protection), arohanui (compassion), aroha (love), and te rangatiratanga (sovereignty and liberation).

5.5. Final Thoughts

Several events have occurred during the writing of this thesis that highlight the different levels of moral concern and compassion we extend to various animals, despite their fundamental likenesses. One example is the Australian bushfires. There has been well-publicised footage, a sustained public outcry, and sincere sympathy expressed for Koalas and other "wild" animals injured and killed in the fires. However, there was very little coverage of the plight of countless "farm" animals. Where there was media coverage, sympathy toward the financial difficulties faced by the farmers was highlighted, rather than the extreme suffering of the animals involved, many of whom were trapped and burned alive.

The pandemic brought forth as a result of Covid19 has also illumed many levels of social and economic oppression. Meat processing supply chains have been interrupted as a result of disease outbreaks in an estimated 20 predominant slaughterhouses in the US (Kevany, 2020). By May 2020, roughly one-quarter of 2,000 workers at JBS, the largest slaughterhouse in the world, had tested positive for Covid19 (Jones, 2020). This has resulted millions of animals who have and will reach slaughter size, who are more expensive to keep alive than they are commercially worth. Consequently, it has been reported that "producers" have needed to "euthanise", tens of thousands of animals daily in an effort to "depopulate" (Pitt, 2020). The term "euthanasia" means "a good death", its use in this context is an example of the ways euphemisms "tell it like it isn't" (McGlone et al., 2006, p. 261). Depopulation methods that have been deemed acceptable include using blunt-force trauma, water-based foam, and ventilation shut down (VSD), to suffocate animals (Kevany, 2020). VSD occurring while steam is released to intensify heat has been recently documented by activists (Greenwald, 2020). Cameras have captured enormous sheds full of pigs being left overnight to die slowly from suffocation and heat stress. Audio has recorded their anguished screams they are "cooked alive" over the course of several hours (Greenwald, 2020). The recordings have also captured staff, the following morning, walking through the bodies and shooting those showing signs of life who had survived the ordeal.

It is widely reported that the Coronavirus originated from "wet markets" in the Wuhan province of China. Media coverage has highlighted the cramped, unsanitary and cruel practices involved, particularly in the killing of "wild" animals (Andelane, 2020). Much of the reporting carries a tone of moral outrage

and marked sorrow for the animals trapped in these horrific conditions. Yet, alongside the cruel practices, other zoonotic diseases have arisen from what westernised countries consider "food animals". These diseases have also emerged, and are likely to continue to emerge, as a result of unsanitary, cramped, and horrific conditions in industrialised countries (Anomaly, 2015) and rapid deforestation by humans for grazing land and animal feed (*New Zealand Livestock Feed Situation 2017 to 2020*, 2018; *Palm Kernel Meal Production by Country in 1000 MT*, 2014), which places human populations and domesticated animals in closer contact with wild animal populations (Gough, 2020).

These examples demonstrate that despite our being conditioned to speciesism and potentially being blind to our participation in it, most people are deeply disturbed by animal suffering. They also expose the inconsistencies between public concern for some animals and not others, as well as the ways profit-driven and powerful industries act to keep concerns from public consciousness. These atrocities are the result of the combination of capitalism and the assumed right to exploit the bodies of sentient others.

Borden (2003, p. 155) states "There is great beauty in mixing academic knowledge and human compassion", pointing out that medicine has always been about combining biological science with human sympathy. Extending our caring beyond human concerns, to include all beings, is an extension of ever-widening philosophical perspectives. The animal protection movement, like other movements, will arise from reconceptualising what is right in front of us, challenging assumed norms, reframing our thinking, and shifting our perspectives from the interests of the oppressor to those of the oppressed.

The matter of abuse and cruelty we inflict on other animals has to fight for our attention in what seems an already overfull moral agenda. I have seen firsthand how injustice gets overlooked when victims are powerless and vulnerable, when they have no one to speak up for them and no means of representing themselves to a higher authority. Animals are in precisely that position. Unless we are mindful of their interests and speak loudly on their behalf, abuse and cruelty go unchallenged.

(Tutu, 2013, p. 1)

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Appendix A: Information Sheet

Researcher Introduction

My name is Emilie Field. This research project is a thesis for part completion of a Masters in Psychology being completed through Massey University. The purpose of this project is to discover more about the transition from carnism to veganism, as well as the experiences of being vegan, in a non-vegan world. It is important to note that I am vegan.

Project Description and invitation

Carnism is the invisible dominant belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals and not others. People come to veganism in a variety of ways and becoming vegan can have far reaching emotional and social implications, which deeply affect vegans' lived experiences within a non-vegan world. The current literature around the vegan experience is limited and given the growth of veganism, as well as various current social, environmental, and cultural issues, it would be timely to explore the experiences of those who have gone through this ideological shift.

You are invited to put forward your expression of interest to participate in this research (subject to selection). You may withdraw your participation at any time.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

- Participants will be recruited either via invitations posted on NZ Vegan Facebook groups, or through vegan contacts known to friends and family.
- Participant names will be obtained at first expression of interest through Facebook accounts or contacts.
- Selection criteria: depending on numbers who express interest in participating, participants will be selected either randomly/through convenience sampling or, if numbers allow, will be chosen in an attempt to gain a diverse sample group.
- Exclusion criteria: participants must be over the age of 18 years and have self-identified as vegan for at least 3 years, according the Vegan Society's definition: "Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose."
- There will most likely be around 15-20 participants in this study.

Project Procedures

- Interested persons who have been selected will be invited to meet at a public/private space, such as a meeting room in a library, to be interviewed, or via Zoom online if outside of Auckland. Interview data will then be transcribed verbatim and emailed to each participant to ensure they are happy with the information. At this stage you will be able to make edits, additions and deletions, and may also wish to undertake a further short interview.
- It is anticipated that initial interviews will take between 1-1.5 hours. Second interviews, if required, should take around 30 minutes. Other time considerations may include travel time, responding to emails and editing of transcript, if desired.
- Although it is not expected, some participants may find this conversation distressing and therefore support processes to deal with adverse psychological risks include the provision of support services information as necessary.

Data Management

- Data will include audio files of interviews, transcription of interviews, and interviewer notes.
- The data will be securely stored on the researcher's computer and/or external hard-drive for the length of the research.
- Once the research is complete, and written up, the hard copy data will be securely kept in an anonymised form in a locked filing cabinet. Soft data will be stored on a password protected computer. After a period of 3 years, hard copies will be securely disposed of and any digital data will be permanently deleted.
- Project findings will be shared with participants, if they so wish. This option will be communicated by the researcher at interview stage and a short synopsis of findings provided to interested parties once the research is complete.
- Confidentiality will be preserved through the use of pseudonyms. Any potentially identifying information will be discussed with the participant, who will then be able to decide if they wish for the information to be included or excluded.

Participant's Rights

- You are under no obligation to accept an invitation to participate in this research.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to:
    - decline to answer any particular question;
    - withdraw from the study (prior to 1 May 2020);
    - ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
    - provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
    - be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
    - ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Researcher: Emilie Field carntovegan@gmail.com
Supervisor: Dr Clifford van Ommen C.VanOmmen@massey.ac.nz

Please feel free to contact the researcher and/or the supervisor if you have any questions about the project.

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named in this document is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext. 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet attached. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree to the interview being sound and video (if via Zoom) recorded.
2. I agree to having hard copy data securely kept, in an anonymised form, in locked storage for a period of 3 years, after which it will be destroyed.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Appendix C: Interview Procedure Sheet

Before:

- Ensure phone is charged
- Ensure all set up required (Info Sheet, Consent Form, Counselling Services, Gift Cert, Note pad/book)

Meeting:

- Provide a copy of Information Sheet
- Get Consent Form signed OR ask say Consent Form Q's need to be recorded via Zoom
- Ask if participant would like a short synopsis of the Research Findings
- Explain a little about the interview structure (it's a semi-structured interview, we may not get through all the questions and that's ok. Feel free to take your time to answer questions as you feel you need to, I may from time to time, bring us back to the question)
- Ensure phone is turned onto DND (Do not Disturb) and say audio (video) recording being turned on, is that ok?
- Ask Consent For video recording and other Q's (if consent form not already supplied) via Zoom
- If someone becomes upset during the course of the meeting, ask:
    - Would you like to take a break?
    - Shall we have a drink of water?
    - Remind them that we can take a break or they can end the interview/withdraw from the research at anytime
    - At the end of interview – check how they are feeling:
        - How are you feeling, are you ok?
        - Give a list of counselling services that they can access.
- At the end of meeting, explain next steps:
    - Transcriptions will be emailed to you once ready, which you can edit or have a further follow up shorter interview if you would prefer
    - At the conclusion of the research, a short synopsis of findings can be provided to each participant – would you like a copy of these?
- Give gift cert (or advise that I will email one through)

After meeting:

- Email gift voucher if via Zoom
- Once interviews are transcribed (verbatim), email a copy of their own transcription through to each participant to check if they are happy, or would like to add anything or take out (or set up a short second meeting to discuss further thoughts)
- *Once research is complete: email a copy of a short synopsis of the research findings to those who indicated they would like a copy.
- If research is published and any potentially identifying information is included, the participant/s in question will have the opportunity to have the information deleted if they choose (even if it is deemed salient to the research)

Appendix D: Interview Questions

- How long have you been vegan for?
- Were you vegetarian before becoming vegan?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your life before you became vegan, particularly what your thoughts and/or feelings were towards meat and animal products?
- How did you view vegans and veganism before becoming vegan?
- Can you tell me the story about how you became vegan?
    - What happened and how you felt during this time?
    - Did you see yourself as going through different stages?
        - beginning
        - middle
        - end, or current state
        - Did you notice making a head and heart connection? Did these happen simultaneously or at different times?
        - How have your thoughts or perceptions changed since before you went vegan to now? (about other people/about the world)
        - How do you view vegans and veganism now that you are vegan?
- Can you tell me about your experiences since becoming vegan? How it has impacted your daily life, through to how it has impacted your perspective about the world and other people?
    - What has been the most challenging/difficult part?
    - What has been the least challenging/difficult part?
    - How have your relationships been impacted since becoming vegan? (thinking about family, friends, romantic relationships, work relationships, strangers and associates)
    - What happens when people "find out" or you "come out" as vegan?
    - What do you think about vegan stereotypes (i.e. do you think they are true?)
    - How do you, as a vegan, cope in a non-vegan world? (stereotypes and stigmatisation, pain of "burden of knowing"/everyday exposure to animal products)
    - Do you think certain vegan stereotypes impact your behaviour in any way?
    - I've spoken to a couple of people who feel they aren't "vegan enough" or feel ostracised by other vegans – so don't want to join vegan FB groups etc. what are your thoughts on that?
    - What are your thoughts about activism and/or different types of activism?
    - An article I read recently said that becoming vegan "demands the rejection of the normative ideology of speciesism" (McDonald, 2000, p. 3) and that the adoption a vegan worldview included the belief in equality between human and non-human animals – what are your thoughts on that?

To "challenge":

- I've come across this idea…. What do you think of that?

Back-up questions

- Can stem from previous info that could be elaborated on:
    - You mentioned "x" – I'm quite curious about what you mean by that?
    - I've noticed this theme (or noticed elsewhere too – in other interviews etc.) – has that had an impact?
- Use of humour – how do you see the role of humour in veganism (if at all)?

Main points covered or learned from the interviewed recapped between both interviewer and interviewee, then asked:

- Is there any other information that you would like to add or that you feel is relevant?