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# Queering Veganism: A Biographical, Visual and Autoethnographic Study of Animal Advocacy.

**Nathan David Stephens Griffin**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

School of Applied Social Sciences,
Durham University.
2014

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## Material Abstract

### Queering Veganism:
### A Biographical, Visual and Autoethnographic Study of Animal Advocacy.

Nathan David Stephens Griffin.

I am vegan. This means I eschew animal products (such as meat, dairy and eggs) for ethical reasons. Academic interest in animal advocacy is expanding, as evidenced in the emerging field of Critical Animal Studies (Taylor and Twine, 2014). However, concurrent with a 'criminalization' of legitimate protest since 9/11 (Gilmore, 2013), empirical research suggests a tendency for mainstream media sources to ridicule, misrepresent and discredit vegans (Cole and Morgan, 2011). I examine the events and experiences that have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegan animal advocates. I use biographical interviews with twelve (12) vegans alongside visual methods, and autoethnography. Participants created comics -the narrative juxtaposition of words and images- about their lives, and I created an 'autoethnographic' comic about my biography as a vegan researcher, thus examining animal advocacy from a reflexive, situated vegan perspective. I found that vegan identity is often subject to normalizing processes (Foucault, 1977), and is necessarily fluid across social situations (as evidenced in descriptions of 'coming out' vegan). Vegan identity is performed and achieved in various embodied ways. These processes intersect with other social structures such as gender and sexuality. Access to cultural narratives about veganism is also significant in the experience of participants. The project contributes to the diverse fields of Biographical Research and Critical Animal Studies, adding rich biographical and visual data to existing empirical evidence around animal advocacy. It sets a precedent for the potential use of comics in research, particularly in connection with queer methodological approaches that challenge existing representational forms and focus on fluidity. It also offers novel applications for autoethnographic and visual biographical approaches.

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## List of Abbreviations

A-IC- Animal-Industrial Complex
AATW- Anarchists Against The Wall
ACAB- "All Coppers Are Bastards"
AETA- Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, 2006
ALF- Animal Liberation Front
Antifa- Antifascist
AR- Animal Rights
ARM- Animal Rights Militia
ATCSA- Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2001
BNP- British National Party
BUAV- British Union Against Vivisection
CAA- Compassionate Action for Animals
CALA- Center on Animal Liberation Affairs
CAS- Critical Animal Studies
CMU- Communication Management Unit
COK- Compassion Over Killing
CRAC- Collectif De Recherche Sur L'Autonomie Collective
CRT- Critical Race Theory
ELF- Earth Liberation Front
FBI- Federal Bureau of Investigation
FoA- Friends of Animals
G7- The Group of Seven
GSS- General Social Survey
HSA- The Hunt Saboteurs Association
HSUS- Humane Society of the United States
ICAS- Institute for Critical Animal Studies
ISM- International Solidarity Movement
LAA- Leeds Animal Action
LCA- Last Chance for Animals
LGBTQ- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer
MFA- Mercy for Animals
PAR- Participatory Action Research
PETA- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
RSPCA- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SDA- Seventh Day Adventism
SHAC- Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty
SOCPA- Serious Organized Crime and Police Act, 2005

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

> *"A vegan is someone who tries to live without exploiting animals, for the benefit of animals, people and the planet. Vegans eat a plant-based diet, with nothing coming from animals - no meat, milk, eggs or honey, for example. A vegan lifestyle also avoids leather, wool, silk and other animal products for clothing or any other purpose."*
> - The Vegan Society, 2014 n.p.

Seven years ago, whilst an undergraduate student, I decided to "*go vegan*". This decision was primarily rooted in my firmly held belief that non-human animals[1] deserve respect and compassion, and so I wanted to avoid contributing to their suffering, through my own diet and lifestyle. I see my veganism as a form of everyday animal advocacy, a daily project in reminding myself, and sometimes others, that the food on our plates did not arrive there through magic or chance, it is the product of complex processes and relations of power. I believe that we do ourselves a great disservice when we decontextualize the pain and suffering of animals and shy away from the realities of the meat and animal industries. This doctoral thesis developed out of a convergence of different paths I have taken in my life; the first being my veganism and interest in radical politics; the second, my interest in creative narrative forms, particularly the medium of comics, and third, my continuing journey through academia.

I was raised vegetarian, and so going vegan did not require a monumental shift in behaviour. I find that veganism is straightforward at home, cooking from scratch, but when stopping at a service station on the M6, or trying to find a decent snack at the local pub, or registering for an academic conference, options can be limited. The scarcity of 'vegan options', in certain contexts, reflects societal tastes and tendencies, but it can also reinforce them. Meat and dairy are relatively difficult to produce, requiring several more stages of production than plant-based products (UNEP, 2010). A 2010 UN report stated that "*animal products, both meat and dairy, in general require more resources and cause higher emissions than plant-based alternatives*" and urged a global move towards a meat and dairy free diet in order to protect against the worst aspects of climate change (UNEP, 2010: 79). A more recent research paper produced

[1] Throughout the project the term 'animal' is used when referring to 'non-human animals'. Animal advocates have stressed the important of always including the 'non-human' qualifier as it underlines the common scientific classification of human and non-human animals. However, for brevity and clarity 'animal' is frequently used herein.

by the thinktank Clatham House reported that livestock industries contribute more greenhouse emissions than transport, including cars, trains, ships and air travel (Bailey, Froggatt and Wellesly, 2014). Notably, this stands in direct contrast to public perception: according to the same study, twice as many people think that transport is a bigger source of emissions than livestock (Bailey, Froggatt and Wellesly, 2014). The high level of emissions is a result of the relatively onerous process by which meat is produced, animals must be bred, raised, fed (on grain that must be grown, watered and harvested), slaughtered and prepared – each stage producing emissions (Bailey, Froggatt and Wellesly, 2014). Globally, around 80-85% of the soy produced is used to feed livestock (World Wildlife Fund, 2014). This has clear ecological and environmental implications, alongside the ethical considerations in killing animals. Hence, it can be frustrating to feel like the 'fussy-eater', when so much trouble has gone into, and so much blood has been shed, producing the meat on the plates of others.

Veganism is very significant to me and I feel that going vegan is one of the best decisions I ever made. That some people cut out certain foods may seem like a benign or even prosaic topic, but it is important to problematize that assumption, and interrogate the logic that underpins it. Food is an important part of most people's lives, but it can be a real battlefield for many. The existence of veganism indicates that food and consumption are not apolitical. Veganism challenges the notion that the decisions we make about what we eat can ever be ethically or politically neutral. I am interested in challenging the idea that social norms like these can somehow be fixed, stable and objective. When reflecting on my own veganism, I find myself asking lots of questions, like what does it mean to be vegan? What motivates people in their decisions to go vegan, and pursue other types of animal advocacy? Is there such a thing as a 'vegan identity'? If so, is it as fixed as the 'rules' for veganism presented at the beginning of this chapter, or is it more fluid?

Like many people, when I was learning to read, write and speak, I started by reading picture books. Often these would be about animals. I learned the names of the animals and to imitate their noises. I would point at the cow and say "*moo*" or at the sheep and say "*baa*". As I grew up, my concern for animals did not abate, nor did my interest in picture books, although the trajectory of these two interests separated. I began reading superhero comics in primary school, and continued through secondary

school. I still enjoyed reading prose-based fiction, but comics always seemed more immediate and dynamic. I could burn through several comics in a night. As a teenager, I even tried to write my own superhero comic; sadly my limited artistic skills caused frustration and I eventually gave up.

As I got older, I moved away from superheroes. I read comics written by adults, for adults, like 'Watchmen' (Alan Moore's genre redefining deconstruction of superhero comics). I discovered Daniel Clowes' 'Ghost World', a story about nerds and outsiders, without a spandex costume or cape in sight. I read non-fictional, journalistic comics, like Joe Sacco's 'Palestine'. I read idiosyncratic British comedy-dramas like Posy Simmonds' 'Tamara Drewe'. I found semi-biographical historical comics, like 'Maus' by Art Spiegelman. I read autobiographical comics, like Raymond Briggs's 'Ethel and Earnest' and queer coming of age story comics, like Alison Bechdel's 'Fun Home'. I read surrealist supernatural teen horror dramas like Charles Burns' 'Black Hole'. Before long, I had come full circle. I read 'Animal Man', Grant Morrison's meta-fictional comedy drama, about a vegetarian animal rights activist superhero, and 'We3'- a story about animals escaping vivisection, by the same author. Then, on a trip to Germany in 2007, I read 'Road Trip' by J.T. Yost, the last comic I read as a vegetarian and the first I read as a vegan. In it, a young child's family day-trip mirrors the journey of a calf to the slaughterhouse. The two stories run parallel, with a pleasant day out juxtaposed with the horrifying, brutal pandemonium of the abattoir. The narratives intersect at two points, first on the motorway, where the child sees the calf being transported in a cramped and claustrophobic lorry, and finally at the fast food restaurant, where the 'product' of the slaughter arrives on her plate, presented to her by her parents. It is intended to force the reader to problematize aspects of daily experience and socialization that are otherwise viewed as benign. It re-contextualizes the food on our plates, and I think that is why it was so effective on me. It was a turning point in my own biography that led me to writing this thesis. As the study is so immutably connected to my own biography, it made sense to engage with the interdisciplinary field of biographical research, to develop an appropriate methodology with which I could conduct the research.

## What is this study?

This project is a biographical, visual and autoethnographic study of twelve (12) vegan animal advocates, conducted from a situated vegan standpoint. I discuss this sample and associated issues with it in Chapter 4: Methodology. There are three key dimensions to the methodological approach. These are: biographical interviews [Chapters 5 and 6], comics created by participants [Chapter 7], and an autoethnographic comic I created myself, about my life and the project [see Insert[2]]. I conducted biographical interviews with vegan animal advocates, asking them about their lives with a particular focus on their experiences of veganism. I also asked participants to create comics about their veganism, which are analysed and presented in the thesis. I developed notes I made during the research process, as well as elements of my own biography into an autoethnographic comic presented as an insert. This was done in an effort to work towards reflexivity, especially given my status as a vegan researching vegans.

Based on the research findings I argue that vegan identities are necessarily fluid and that this fluidity often occurs in response to processes of normalization (Foucault, 1977). These processes are evident in the stories told by participants, and in the comics they produced. They are the processes by which eating meat is upheld as 'normal' and 'acceptable' in day-to-day life and veganism is positioned as 'abnormal' and subordinate. Thus aspects of vegan experience are frequently politicized, which are depoliticized in the lives of others, such as meal times, making it easier for non-vegans to consume unquestioningly, and thus preserve the status quo. I also argue that vegan identity is often achieved, managed and maintained through performance, within this normalizing context (Butler, 1990). This analysis allows me to query dominant understandings of vegan identity as fixed and rigid, and contributes to Critical Animal Studies' (CAS) efforts to provide intersectional analysis of the social world (discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy and Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework). Alongside this, I argue that comics represent a valuable research tool, and a useful mode of representation, certainly suitable for further exploration in academic contexts. This value is particularly pronounced in relation to the project of queer theory and efforts to develop queer

[2] The autoethnographic comic I produced during this project is presented within the thesis as an Insert. The reasons for presenting the comic in this way are explained in detail in Chapter 4: Methodology; but in brief, I felt it was important that the comic could work within the context of the thesis, and as a standalone piece. This comic is discussed in Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism.

approaches to methodology (Browne and Nash, 2010; Giffney and O'Rourke, 2009). Queer methods are characterised by a deliberate focus on fluidity, intersubjectivity and 'the particular', and the necessity of challenging normative discourses (Jones and Adams, 2010). Comics do this through challenging the perceived superiority of text and prose as means of communication, and through destabilizing fixed meanings and objectivity, through the complex relationships and interplay between images and words within the comic medium.

I now offer some definitions of key words, before giving an outline of the project, highlighting its relevance to the interdisciplinary fields of biographical research and CAS.

## Defining Key Terms

### Veganism and Animal Advocacy

Where a vegetarian is someone who eschews meat, a vegan is someone who eschews all animal products. This includes meat and fish, dairy, eggs, leather, wool, honey. Adams (1994) argues that vegetarianism and veganism have increased in popularity due to the simultaneous developing health and ethical concerns.

Animal advocacy can arguably be split into two loosely defined camps, the more moderate, 'welfarist' camp - which supports better treatment of animals, whilst accepting the animal industries- and the radical, liberationist or abolitionist camp, which demand an end to any/all exploitation of animals outright (Best and Nocella, 2004). A typical welfarist campaign might seek better conditions for factory chickens in the form of bigger cages, whereas an abolitionist campaign would reject the very notion that chickens belong in cages. This somewhat crude distinction neglects a great deal of nuance and overlap between these two supposed poles. However, the distinction is useful in assisting our understanding of key tensions within the movement. Notwithstanding the problems of perpetuating what is often a false dichotomy between animal welfare and animal rights campaigns, it is fair to say that debates around these issues abound within the movement broadly (Best and Nocella, 2004). It is not my wish to pre-emptively pigeonhole anyone, or to overstate the importance of such distinctions, but it is important to be aware of these ideological and political differences within the movement. In defining the scope of the project, I have resisted the term 'animal rights activism', due to its association with the

abolitionist camp, and I have opted for what I see as the more all-encompassing term: 'animal advocacy'. Animal advocacy is thus defined here as actions in support of non-human animals. This may include consumer choices, day-to-day discussion, activism and direct action. Veganism can thus be regarded as a form of animal advocacy.

### Comics

Magnussen and Christiansen (2000) define comics as a narrative medium utilizing visual and/or textual modes of expression. For Eisner (1985), they are more broadly sequential art. The term 'comic' therefore describes a very wide range of media accessed by diverse audiences. For example, McCloud (1993) suggests that cave paintings and hieroglyphics were progenitors of the medium. Likewise, disparate media like illustrated diagrams, children's books and movie posters could theoretically be forms of the comic medium. However, the comic form can be understood as a distinct medium in its own right, with its own specific history and trajectory. Comics tend to derive focus and meaning from the specific juxtaposition of panels, text, images and speech presented in sequence (Duncan and Smith, 2009). Other common features specific to the comic medium are speech bubbles and thought balloons, panel size and placement used to control narrative pacing and the prevalence of cartooning in imagery.

Comics have not been widely used in an academic context; this may be because of the lingering reputation of comics as childish and vulgar, particularly due to the preponderance of pulp superhero comics in the early 20th century (Duncan and Smith, 2009). An extensive literature and database search produced some examples of the use of comics in academic contexts, which I discuss in Chapter 4: Methodology. Examples of the combination of comics and autoethnography were even more rare (Tavares, 2011). Nevertheless, a precedent has been set for the use of comics in academic contexts, for example the work of Han (2008) and Jones and Evans (2011) discussed in Chapter 4.

## Why this research? Why now?

Here, I answer these questions, by explaining the contemporary context for my research. There are three main, interconnected reasons that this research is important; the first concerns the mainstream emergence of 'ethical consumerism', the

second the politicization and criminalization of protest, and de-legitimisation of ecological and animal advocacy activism. Thirdly, the study fills a gap in the existing literature around animal advocacy, as a biographical, visual and reflexive study emerging from within the bourgeoning field of CAS (this is discussed in more detail Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy).

Veganism is a pertinent contemporary phenomenon. The Vegan Society estimates that there at least 150,000 vegans in the UK currently, and that the ideas and arguments behind veganism are increasing in popularity (Molloy, 2013). Many high profile public figures have advocated veganism in recent years. Beyoncé and Jay-Z recent adoption of the lifestyle attracted attention, but others include Brad Pitt, Sinead O'Connor, Joaquin Phoenix, Mike Tyson, Prince, Jared Leto, Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Hathaway, Woody Harrelson, Paul McCartney, Samuel L. Jackson, Natalie Portman and Russell Brand (Molloy, 2013; Berman, 2012; Noveck, 2011; Corner, 2011). Former US President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore are also both reportedly now vegan (Noveck, 2011). This trend is interesting especially in the context of consumer ethics more broadly. 'Ethical consumerism'[3] is a term used to describe the increasingly popular tendency for mainstream consumers to demonstrate awareness of the political significance and impact of their purchasing, and to opt for goods and services that reflect their ethical values, such as environmentalism and animal welfare (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2012). According to the Co-Operative Bank, expenditure on 'ethically produced' goods and services in the UK almost trebled between 1999 and 2009, resulting in an annual value of the 'ethical' market excess of £36 billion (Memery et al, 2011). Food has become a pressing political issue (Morgan, 2006).

These consumer trends towards a more critical and political attitude to food run parallel with, what CAS scholars have identified as a 'criminalization' of legitimate protest within the UK since the early 2000s (Gilmore, 2013; Gilmore and Tufail, 2012). 'Criminalization' describes the process by which certain actions are identified and designated as illegal, either through the introduction of new legislation, or the reinterpretation of existing legislation (McConville, Sanders and Leng 1991). In recent years, this process has been evidenced in the UK and USA, particularly in

[3] Examples include 'Organic', 'Fair Trade', 'Rainforest Alliance Approved', 'Made in the UK', 'Sweat-Shop Free', 'Union Made', 'Recycled', 'Recyclable', 'Carbon Neutral', 'Dolphin Friendly', 'Free Range' and, of course, 'Suitable for Vegetarians/Vegans'.

connection with 'War on Terror' discourse (Gilmore, 2013). For example, Anti-Social Behavioural Orders (ABSOs) first introduced under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, have been used against Anti-War protestors to criminalize the previously acceptable practice of protesting at military sites (Gilmore, 2013). The Crime and Disorder Act, introduced before the World Trade Centre was attacked, has been repurposed for the suppression of political activism in the context of the 'War on Terror'. Criminalization was evident in the subsequent introduction of new legislation. For example, The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001) gave the police new powers to remove disguises and seize items that could be used to conceal someone's identity; the Counter Terrorism Act (2008) has been used to prevent the photographing of police officers (Gilmore, 2013). Surveillance of activism and dissent is also a key battleground today. Commentators have criticised the, apparently widespread, use of undercover police officers to infiltrate and monitor non-violent activist groups in the UK (McDonald, 2013). The case of Mark Kennedy, a police spy who infiltrated a group of environmentalists for seven years, engaging in sexual relationships with women in the movement under false pretences, sent reverberations throughout UK activist groups (Gilmore and Tufail, 2013).

Within this socio-political context, I was keen to access the voices of vegans, and elicit rich, descriptive accounts of their perspectives, motivations and experiences. Furthermore, I wanted to resist the academic tendency towards reducing participants to objects of study or reinforce dominant understandings of veganism. Therefore, influenced by the work of biographical scholars such as Roberts (2002; 2004), Sparkes (2000; 2007; 2009) and O'Neill (2010), I sought a methodology that combined reflexive biographical research and the comic medium. In developing the methodology, I also hoped to contribute to the exploration of comics as a viable academic tool within biographical research, producing an accessible and artistically valuable biographical comic through the research.

## Research Questions

The project addresses the following research questions:

1. *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*
2. *To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*
3. *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?*

4. *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*

These questions were developed to address gaps in the existing literature in line with the conceptual underpinnings of the project, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Biographical and visual methods were used in an attempt to elicit textured, in-depth accounts of the lived experiences and subjective perspectives of vegans. I sought to make space for the voices of vegans, and resist mainstream understandings and representations of veganism. In eliciting "*situated, partial biographical and visual accounts*", we may better understand "*social relations, processes, structures and lived experiences of participants*" and challenge the "*dominant knowledge/power axis*" (O'Neill, 2010: 22-23). I constructed a methodology to engage with and value research participants through the research process. Existing research on animal advocacy has tended to limit the subjectivities of those involved, often taking the form of attitudinal surveys or questionnaires, conducted by non-vegans (discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy). This project specifically aimed to reduce the distance between the participant and the researcher, treating those involved not simply as sources of information, but as autonomous individuals, whose insights and input were valuable to its success.

Alongside this, the project aimed to contribute to the fields of biographical, visual and queer research through the use of comics in an academic context. Formal constraints on how academic inquiry is presented mean that academics tend to work within strict guidelines when it comes to presenting work. This project aimed to create space for less conventional modes of academic discussion, by successfully using comics as a methodological tool, and mode of representation. This project aimed to have as an output, an accessible, appealing academic comic, of potential interest to a non-academic audience, which has the potential to also have an artistic life of its own, outside of the context of academia [see Insert].

## Structure

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured and organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines veganism and animal advocacy in more depth, contextualizing the research project. Within it, I offer a concise overview of contemporary animal advocacy, and briefly present some key ideas that have emerged from the animal

advocacy movement. I consider the emergence of CAS, as the academic wing of the animal advocacy movement, explaining how this project fits into that tradition. I introduce the idea of intersectionality as a central focus of CAS. I also discuss how animal advocacy has been studied academically, examining large scale, positivist, outsider studies, alongside, small-scale, social constructionist studies. I explore how biographical and critical methodologies have been employed to examine the movement, and situate this project within that academic field, as a small-scale, biographical, visual, qualitative, insider-study.

Chapter 3 provides a literature review and theoretical framework for the project, situating it conceptually, within the academic field. The conceptual framework emerged from the literature review process. I consider the epistemological and ontological texts that underpin the project, positioning it within a social constructionist tradition of deconstructing and challenging binary dualisms, and linking this forward to the field of biographical research. I identify reflexivity and situated knowledge as important concepts informing the project, and consider their link to biography and biographical research. I then return to the topic of intersectionality, discussing it in more detail, and review the development of the concept and how authors have used it, for example, within critical pedagogy, feminism and CAS. Finally, I examine the concept of 'normalization' and how it has been theorised, initially by Foucault, and then the development of the theory through queer scholars. The ideas discussed represent significant conceptual assumptions underpinning the research.

Following on from this, in Chapter 4: Methodology I discuss the biographical approach of the project, explaining how the methodology is compatible with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3. Beginning with the development of biographical research, I identify key concepts that have emerged from the field that inform the project. I consider autoethnography, as a practice that developed from within biographical research. I then discuss visual methods, with a particular focus on the comic medium. I review the use of comics in academia, establishing a precedent for their use as part of this biographical research project. Next, I discuss my own use of these methods- specifically, biographical interviews, visual methods in the form of comics solicited from participants, and autoethnography in the form of a comic I authored personally. Returning to the research questions, I explain how these

methods and techniques have been used to address them. Sample, access, data analysis and other practical aspects of the project are explained. Ethical issues in the project are also discussed within Chapter 4, highlighting that ethics have been treated as an on-going process within the research, rather than something that ends once ethics forms have been approved (Banks et al, 2013).

Next, I present my research findings. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on data that emerged from the biographical interviews, these chapters are organized around narrative themes emerging from the data, outlined below. Chapter 7 focuses on the data that emerged from the comics, produced for the project by participants and myself. This chapter is organized around specifics comics, with each being addressed separately in turn. Chapter 5, entitled 'Normalizing Veganism', presents narratives that provide evidence of processes of normalization in the lives of participants. I look at 'Coming Out' narratives, and how participants have hidden, or managed their identity in social contexts. I discuss 'Vegansexuality' and relationships among and between vegans. I consider the impact of religious and other doctrinal ideas in the lives of vegans, focussing on vegans of faith, and vegans who adhere to 'straight edge'[4]. I explore the significance of normalization on the fluidity of vegan identity, and how this could be regarded as contesting the relative rigidity of veganism (as discussed by Philips, 2010). I also look at how access to the alternative cultural narratives provided by 'straight edge' has been significant in shaping vegan experience. This chapter can be seen to primarily address Research Questions 1 and 2.

Chapter 6, entitled 'Demonstrating Veganism', focuses on explicitly political narratives in the participants' lives. These range from narratives of political expression, to stories of activism, direct action and criminality. Continuing with the theoretical thread of normalization, I examine various narratives that provide evidence of the significance of performativity in shaping the fluid identities of vegan animal advocates. Within this, I look at stories of political engagement, for example, through involvement in mainstream, electoral party politics. I explore stories of activism in various forms, such as street demonstrations, picketing and hunt

[4] 'Straight Edge' is a sober youth subculture popularized by US hardcore punk bands such as 'Minor Threat' in the 1980s. Adherents to 'Straight Edge' eschew alcohol, taking drugs and smoking. In the 1990s, this developed further with some bands suggesting that straight edge lifestyle should also include vegetarianism/veganism (Haenfler, 2006).

sabotage. I consider narratives of criminality, arrest and imprisonment, and how performativity and normalization are evidenced within these stories. Having access to cultural narratives about veganism is identified as important in the experience of participants. This chapter primarily addresses Research Questions 1 and 3.

In Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism I focus on the visual data collected throughout the project, specifically, the comics produced by the participants. Unlike Chapters 5 and 6, which were organized around narrative themes, in Chapter 7 the comics are presented and analysed separately. I explore how normalization is evident, as well as examining other themes that emerged from the comics (such as intersectionality, normalization and interspecies companionship). I then briefly introduce my own autoethnographic comic, presented in the form of an Insert, providing some context and explanation. This comic is deliberately written so that it can be read as part of the thesis, or as a separate, standalone comic. This comic should be ideally read at the end of Chapter 7 (if being read in the context of the thesis). This chapter primarily addresses Research Questions 1 and 4.

In

Chapter 8: Conclusion, I draw the thesis to a close. I reiterate the Research Questions, recap what I did, summarise what I found, and explain how these findings map on to the existing terrain of research in this area. I summarise the significance of this project to the wider body of literature, from a theoretical and methodological perspective. Finally, I discuss some areas of potential future study, based on the impact of this project, and its contribution to the field. The next chapter focuses on animal advocacy in order to further contextualize the research.

# Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy

## Introduction

The key purposes of the chapter are to establish a socio-political, legal and cultural context for the research project, as well as looking how vegans and animal advocates have been positioned as abnormal in social situations; for example, through negative popular representations of veganism (Joy, 2010; Cole, 2008; Cole and Morgan, 2011) and through terror discourse (Best, 2004; Nocella, 2011; Potter, 2010). It also frames the project within an appropriate academic context. It contextualizes the research in terms of the historical trajectory of animal advocacy. I begin with a very brief history of animal advocacy, including the development of animal advocacy as a more overtly political movement in the UK during the 19th and 20th centuries. The social, political and cultural status of animal advocacy and veganism are discussed, particularly how animal advocacy has been positioned as abnormal and/or threatening and framed within terror discourse (Best and Nocella, 2004; Gilmore, 2010; Potter, 2011; Sorensen, 2009; Nocella, 2011). The plurality of tactics, and diversity of viewpoints represented within the movement more broadly are considered.

I review animal advocacy in an academic context, as well as how it has been researched. This section appraises studies, grouped broadly as being quantitative and qualitative. The chapter also demonstrates that Critical Animal Studies (CAS) is an intersectional academic tradition that this project contributes to. In particular, through producing a study of animal advocacy that is methodologically unusual, visually interesting, and conducted from a situated vegan perspective. I consider issues of reflexivity, and position this project as a reflexive insider study that fills a conceptual gap in a field disproportionately populated by positivist, empiricist, and objectivist outsider studies. The chapter therefore begins with a brief history of animal advocacy.

## Historical Context

To establish a historical, legal, social and cultural context for discussing animal advocacy, this section focuses on the recent development of contemporary animal advocacy (for more information see Appendix 1. Selected Timeline of Contemporary Animal Advocacy). Here, I discuss the development of animal advocacy, starting with

some brief historical intimations, for example religious and other practices of nonviolence towards animals. From here I focus on activism in the 20th century as a key time in its development. Finally, I discuss the emergence of CAS as the academic wing of the animal advocacy movement more broadly.

**The Development of Animal Advocacy**

Human concern for the wellbeing of non-human animals has a long recorded history. In the 6th Century BCE, Jainism advocated non-violence ('ahimsa') towards all animals (Rankin, 2006). Ryder (2000) discusses concern for animals in Ancient Greece and the principle of 'animism' that urged respect for animals on the grounds that humans and non-humans share spiritual affinity, and have similar souls. This is particularly associated with Pythagoras, described as the first animal rights philosopher (Violin, 1990). Jeremy Bentham argued the case for compassion for animals in 18th Century Britain, and is often cited as an influential thinker in contemporary animal rights philosophy, linked to his utilitarianism.

> *"What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor can they talk? But, Can they suffer?"* (Bentham, 1789/1974: 283).

Bentham's 'insuperable line' was a conceptual precursor to contemporary debates on 'speciesism'- a term first coined by Ryder in 1970 (Ryder, 1990), popularised by Peter Singer (1975)- and on deconstructing the binary between human and non-human animals. 'Speciesism' refers to how members of certain species are valued, and afforded rights and treatment, which other species do not receive (Ryder, 2000). A simple example of speciesism is that the slaughter of (non-human) animals is deemed permissible in most societies, where the slaughter of human-animals is forbidden (Ryder, 2000). Speciesism can also refer to the differing treatment of non-human species, for example, the way in which Western society values dogs and cats as pets, and generally eating dogs is viewed as 'inhumane' in the West, whereas pigs or cows are not afforded the same concern, regardless of their comparable levels of personality and intellect (Ryder, 2000). Speciesism has been an important concept within the animal advocacy movement, as it has moved concern from animals beyond

traditional understandings of human superiority and compassion to a non-hierarchical conception of human and non-human animal relations (Ryder, 2000).

Other significant figures in the 20th century development of animal rights philosophy include Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Singer's (1975) 'Animal Liberation' is an influential text in contemporary animal rights philosophy, not only for the ideas presented, but also for how widely read and cited the work has been. Singer's utilitarian argument forced many ethical philosophers to engage with the plight of animals as living beings. Singer (1975: xii-xiii) posits that "*all the arguments to prove man's superiority cannot shatter this hard fact: in suffering the animals are our equals*". These oft-quoted words clearly draw inspiration from the '*insuperable line*' in Bentham's utilitarian philosophy. Regan's (1983) 'The Case For Animal Rights' was another influential text. A key idea came in Regan's argument that animals have moral rights because they are "*subjects-of-a-life*" (Regan, 1983: xvi). Regan's approach differs from Singer's, as it is not rooted in a utilitarian case for the greatest good. Instead, it is rooted in a Kantian deontological position, arguing that subjects of experience possess intrinsic rights, and therefore must not be regarded as a means to an end.

A more recent theoretical concept, rooted in Speciesism, is 'Carnism'. Carnism refers to the dominant paradigm, in which it is permissible to consume meat (Joy, 2010). Within this, the ethics of meat consumption are rarely problematized, and the theoretical and physical processes at work remain largely invisible. Millions of animals are slaughtered every year, but most are unseen, at least in a live state, by the people who will eventually consume them (Joy, 2010). Living beings come to be viewed purely in abstract or as objects. Carnist discourse is thus perpetuated through the media and through the government (Joy, 2010). Similarly, Parry (2010) has used 'carnonormativity', vis-a-vis the concept of 'heteronormativity', whereby essentialist binary understandings of sex and gender, alongside heterosexuality, have been discursively positioned as dominant and acceptable, in contrast to any/all other sexes, genders and sexualities. For Parry (2010), 'carnonormativity' describes the process by which meat eating is positioned as natural, innate and 'normal', in contrast to behaviours such as veganism and animal advocacy, which are thus positioned as aberrant, abnormal, negative and deviant. These ideas link to the concept of 'vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011), which is discussed later in this chapter.

## 20th Century Animal Advocacy

The UK has been described as the birthplace of the contemporary animal rights movement (Molland, 2004). Organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and the British Union Against Vivisection (BUAV) are firmly established within British culture, each dating back over 100 years.

UK Parliament has long since taken an interest in animal advocacy issues. The 'Protection of Animals Act' in 1911 was the first comprehensive legislation relating to farm animals and includes provision for the offence of 'unnecessary suffering' (McConnell, 2012). Incrementally, legislation has protected animals. For example, the 'Hunting Act' 2004, made it illegal to hunt wild mammals with one or more dogs, with some exemptions. The maximum penalty for transgression is a £5,000 fine (RSPCA, 2010). These legal and political developments have taken place alongside a long tradition of animal advocacy in the UK.

Activism in the UK stretches back over a century, evidenced in the foundation of various animal advocacy groups; from of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) in 1898 (BUAV, 2014), and the Vegan Society, founded by Donald Watson in 1944 (Vegan Society, 2014), through to more radical direct action groups like the Hunt Saboteurs in 1963 (Best, 2004) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) in 1985 (Monaghan, 2000). Over the past decade, high profile cases have involved radical animal advocacy activism. In 2006, Newchurch Farm closed down following a prolonged ALF campaign (Mann, 2007), during which the grave of Gladys Hammond (mother-in-law to the owner) was dug-up by an ALF splinter group known as the Animal Rights Militia (ARM) (Ward, 2005). In 2009, Heather Nicholson, Gregg Avery, Natasha Avery and others receive lengthy prison sentences for their part in Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaigning, which included hoax bomb threats and false allegations of child abuse. Nicholson was sentenced to 11 years; Gregg and Natasha to 9 years. The charge was 'conspiracy to blackmail'. Prosecutors' evidence is formed from email surveillance, informer testimony and covertly recorded conversations. The Judge describes the campaign as 'urban terrorism' (Bowcott, 2009). In 2010, ALF activist Mel Broughton was jailed for 10 years for conspiracy to commit arson against an Oxford University laboratory (BBC, 2010). In 2013,

Broughton was released having served over five years of his ten-year sentence (Tidings, 2013)[5].

Over the last two decades, the interdisciplinary academic field of CAS has emerged, applying critical theoretical analysis to issues of human-animal relations. CAS can be considered the 'academic branch' of the contemporary animal advocacy movement.

**Critical Animal Studies**

> *"CAS is the academic field of study dedicated to the abolition of animal and ecological exploitation, oppression, and domination. CAS is grounded in a broad global emancipatory inclusionary movement for total liberation and freedom."* (ICAS, 2011, n.p.)

CAS is an interdisciplinary field of study dedicated to human, non-human and earth liberation. It entails an intersectional approach to exploitation and oppression and is compatible with critical social theories more broadly. CAS is associated with Steve Best and Anthony Nocella II, who formed the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (CALA) in 2001, which later became known as the Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS). The interdisciplinarity of CAS, as well as the focus on intersectional analysis, has allowed for a broad body of literature to emerge in a relatively short time period. These coincide with influential eco-feminist texts (in particular the work of Carol Adams, 1990) that connect Patriarchy with the exploitation of animals, discussed in Chapter 3. More recent CAS texts include edited volumes by Taylor and Twine's (2014) entitled 'The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre' and Nocella et al's (2014) entitled 'Defining Critical Animal Studies', and Sorenson's (2014) 'Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable', which have each offered contemporary perspectives on the field of CAS as it continues to expand on through its second decade, with deliberate focus on intersectionality.

Next, I consider the diversity of viewpoints and tactics favoured within the animal advocacy movement and examine how politicians and the media have represented animal advocacy, particularly the 'terror discourse' (Sorenson, 2009).

[5] Appendix 1 provides a more detailed timeline of contemporary animal advocacy, including legislation, the formation of advocacy groups, specific high profile direct action and criminal events, and other cases.

## Animal Advocacy Tactics and 'Terror'

Animal advocacy is not monolithic. A variety of political, social and ethical perspectives are reflected within animal advocacy movements, from across the political spectrum. As a movement, it is diverse and complex, and brevity precludes a lengthy discussion of this diversity and complexity[6]. As one might expect, animal advocacy activism can take a variety of forms, including, for example, letter writing, picket lines, performance art. Radical aspects of the animal advocacy movement focus on the goal of animal liberation, and adopt tactics that seek to achieve that aim.

### Animal Liberation

The ALF is an international movement that engages in (legal and illegal) direct action in pursuit of animal liberation, and is perhaps the most infamous contemporary radical animal liberation movement. Tactics utilized by the ALF include breaking into laboratories, farms and slaughterhouses to rescue animals, property damage and economic sabotage. The willingness of ALF activists to cross legal lines sets them apart from other groups, and has seen them labelled as 'terrorists' (Best and Nocella, 2004). However, something particularly noteworthy about the ALF is that it is a leaderless form of resistance. Anyone can belong to the ALF, it has very little formal organizational structure, and it is entirely non-hierarchical. This makes legal action against the ALF itself difficult. Anyone involved with the ALF is expected to adhere to the following principles:

1. *To inflict economic damage on those who profit from the misery and exploitation of animals.*
2. *To liberate animals from places of abuse, i.e. laboratories, factory farms, fur farms etc., and place them in good homes where they may live out their natural lives, free from suffering.*
3. *To reveal the horror and atrocities committed against animals behind locked doors, by performing nonviolent direct actions and liberations*
4. *To take all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human and non-human.*
5. *Any group of people who are vegetarians or vegans and who carry out actions according to ALF guidelines have the right to regard themselves as part of the ALF.*
   (Liddick, 2006: 42)

[6] Appendix 2 provides a table of animal advocacy tactics, providing a diverse but non-exhaustive list of tactics commonly used, and/or associated with animal advocacy activism.

In this way, the ALF acts more as a set of guidelines for action that individuals and groups (or 'cells') can align themselves with, whilst minimizing the potential for infiltration and surveillance by the police. It should be noted that principle 4 requires "*all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human and non-human*". This explicitly differentiates ALF actions from those who use violence against individuals as a tactic. Best and Nocella (2004) discuss the ways that the movement's existence and trajectory has been constrained by the presiding socio-political context, in which ALF and other radical animal rights activism has invariably been described as 'terrorism' within dominant discourse, despite explicitly avoiding violence as a tactic. This 'terror discourse' is discussed in more detail below.

One contested issue, within circles espousing direct action, is that of 'concealment'; that is, whether or not to conduct direct action covertly or overtly. Davis (2004) discussion of 'concealment' versus 'disclosure' highlights the complex plurality of perspectives within animal advocacy, even in the more radical groups. Groups such as Compassion Over Killing (COK), Compassionate Action for Animals (CAA) and Mercy for Animals (MFA) have all embraced the practice of 'disclosure' during rescue operations. This entails a deliberate openness about the activists' identity and a focus on the compassionate element of the 'crime' committed. Activists gain entry to the buildings causing as little damage as possible (even supplying replacement padlocks). Activists routinely inform the police of an action once the animals have been safely removed, and hand themselves in to face justice. This is coupled with a coinciding press release, which explains the motivation for the action. Such tactics are intended to highlight the compassionate ethical stance, which underpins these actions, and to "*put [animal abuse] on trial"* publically, enabling those following the story to ask serious questions about morality and legality (Davis, 2004: 206).

There are a number of more formally established and structured organizations that adopt direct action tactics in defense of animals. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS or 'Sea Shepherd') is a non-profit marine conservation group based in the United States (Sea Shepherd, 2014). Sea Shepherd uses direct action as a primary tactic for protecting marine life, specifically through the disruption of fishing and whaling, using its own fleet of sea vessels. Other tactics include, shining laser light

into the eyes of whalers, scuttling whaling ships, seizing nets and fishing equipment from other ships and throwing bottles of acid onto whaling vessels (Sea Shepherd, 2014).

Various other activist and campaign groups pursue animal advocacy causes. These groups adopt a multiplicity of tactics and reflect a broad spectrum of values and politics. Notable groups include: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA, 2014)[7], Viva! (Viva!, 2014), Animal Aid (Animal Aid, 2014), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA, 2014), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS, 2014), British Union Against Vivisection (BUAV, 2014), The Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA, 2014), Farm Sanctuary (Farm Sanctuary, 2014), SPEAK (SPEAK, 2014), Last Chance for Animals (LCA, 2014), Friends of Animals (FoA, 2014), Uncaged! (Uncaged, 2014), and Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, which recently disbanded (SHAC, 2014). Brevity precludes a detailed discussion of these groups but the bibliography provides websites for all of these organisations offering more information. Next I discuss challenges facing radical animal advocacy movements, particularly in relation to the 'terror discourse' (Sorenson, 2009).

**'Terror Discourse'**

Sorenson (2009: 237) argues that the discourse on terrorism has been plagued by confusion and misrepresentation and that the term 'terrorist' has been inconsistently applied to actions "*far-removed from violent mass casualty attacks*". This is evidenced in the UK, where animal rights (AR) activists have been described as 'terrorists' and 'extremists' in government, judicial and media discourse (Upton, 2011; Walby and Monaghan, 2011; Goodman, Sanders and Clinton, 2011; Lovitz, 2010; Rood, 2005; Best and Nocella, 2004; Goodwin, 2003; Monaghan, 2000). This occurs despite them having seldom explicitly pursued violence as a tactic.

[7] It is important to note that PETA have been criticised by feminists for frequently employing sensationalistic and misogynistic images and ideas in their campaigning (Deckha, 2008). To take just one example from the multitude of cases of PETA reinforcing sexism through its campaigning, a 2012 Campaign entitled '*Boyfriend Went Vegan and Knocked The Bottom Out of Me*', showed a visibly assaulted woman, walking along the street in a neck brace and bandages, showing various cuts and bruises (the apparent result of *"mind-blowing intercourse"* with a vegan*).* The adverts are particularly problematic in the correlation of violent sex with 'good' sex, without any contextualization of consent (Pennington, 2013).

The 'Serious Organized Crime and Police Act' (SOCPA), introduced in 2005, specifically targets AR related 'interference' and 'intimidation' (SOCPA, 2005: 5, 145-149). AR activists have also been prosecuted and detained without trial, under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2001 (ATCSA), legislation targeted on Islamic fundamentalist terrorism (Fenwick, 2002). In 2007, a two-year long police investigation known as 'Operation Achilles' culminated in the arrest and eventual imprisonment of AR activists associated with 'Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty' or 'SHAC' (Laville, 2007). Seven activists were jailed for 'conspiracy to blackmail' (a non-violent offence) and between them received a total prison sentence of 50 years (Yeoman, 2009; cited in Upton, 2011).

Similarly, in the USA, the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), is a federal law prohibiting the use of force, violence, or threats "*for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise*" (AETA, 2006: 1.a.1.) The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has listed the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) as one of America's most dangerous domestic terrorist threats (Freidan, 2005). However, although ALF related direct action focuses on property destruction not violence against sentient targets. The severity of legal and political discourse about AR activists is can be contrasted with their relatively non-violent tactics (Best and Nocella, 2004). Nocella (2011) argues that a process of 'terrorization' occurs, whereby legitimate activism and civil disobedience is discursively curtailed, dismissed and discredited through the inconsistent and politically motivated use of the 'terror discourse'. Whilst the ALF tactics (for example) are demonstrably different from those of Al Qaeda, the term 'terrorism' is applied to both. Hijacking a commercial flight and flying it into a skyscraper resulting in a massive civilian death toll, is defined as terrorism; but so is breaking into a laboratory, rescuing/stealing animals, and damaging computers, resulting in a loss of profit. Both acts are illegal, some may even argue that both are immoral, but the use of the exact same terminology seems inconsistent. This appropriation of the terror discourse for political ends has the dual impact of limiting the usefulness and value of the term 'terrorist', as well as undermining opposition to industries, which exploit animals (Sorenson, 2009).

The impact of anti-terror laws on the AR movement, and a gradual erosion of the supposedly cornerstone values of freedom of speech and (peaceful) protest in the

USA, are examined by Lovitz (2010), who analyses the changes in US law in the wake of AETA, and how they have radically curtailed activists' ability to function within legal frameworks. Lovitz argues that, rather than being a genuine effort to prevent terror in the US, AETA and other laws are intended to protect the economic interests of the industries that profit from the exploitation of animals.

> *"To compare individuals who preach nonviolence to all life, to those who fly planes into buildings for the purpose of causing substantial loss of life is offensive on many levels."*
> Lovitz, 2010: 105

Lovitz offers a far-reaching account of the changing legal landscape, and its impact on peaceful direct action, using recent history of high profile animal rights cases, including a case study of the SHAC 7. Offering an in-depth consideration of the precise usage of the term terrorist, as well as its ramifications, Lovitz presents a persuasive case, especially of how public opinion and perception is influenced and shaped by government and media portrayals.

Similarly, Potter (2011) explores the increasing use of anti-terror laws and resources by the US federal government to target environmental and animal rights groups. A parallel between contemporary trends to stifle activism and the 'red scare' is drawn, whereby the success of a conservative political agenda was achieved using particular scaremongering labels (then 'communist'). Potter examines the case against Daniel McGowan, an environmentalist associated with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), sentenced to seven years in prison for his involvement with several arson attacks on logging firms. What is noteworthy was the consistent use of the word 'terrorist' to describe McGowan's actions, despite every care being taken to protect and preserve human life, and no one being hurt. McGowan was sentenced to incarceration in a Communication Management Unit (or CMU), described by Potter as "*a special prison unit… not listed in the Bureau of Prisons Directory… [housing] prisoners that the government has decided are terrorists*" (Potter, 2011: 208). CMU's are severely restrictive prisons, which manage and monitor all communication of inmates. They were designed and built to house 'terrorists', and have increasingly been used to house environmental and animal rights activists, as the term's usage has broadened.

For Foucault (1977), discipline is key to how people are controlled. His analysis is relevant to understanding the use of these processes: *"Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society"* (Foucault, 1977:93). Discipline enables nuanced techniques for controlling the population, for example, people are controlled simply by being made to feel continually 'watched'. Foucault called this a system of 'Hierarchical Observation', and explained that it produces 'Docile Bodies', innately disinclined to misbehave (Foucault, 1977). The ideal example of this is Bentham's 'Panopticon', an architectural idea for maximizing control of prisoners with minimal staff (Bentham, 1843: 201 cited in Foucault, 1977: 132). In a Panoptic prison, the cells are set out in a circle around a central tower. The prisoners cannot see into the tower or know that they are not being watched, so they behave themselves regardless to be safe. This idea is central to the concept of a surveillance society, as, Foucault argues, it is evidenced in many forms of architecture in modern society (e.g. lecture theatres are designed so that lecturers have a clear view of students, similarly for hospitals, barracks etc). For Foucault, this 'panopticism' dominates every area of modern society, and can be seen in the existence of CMUs.

Jenkins, Colling and Jonas (2014) apply Foucault's Panopticon to the treatment of environmentalist and animal advocate prisoners; arguing that the logic of 'panopticization' discredits all animal advocacy activists. Discourses surrounding 'terror' have legitimised a widespread system of state surveillance, that impacts upon all forms of activism and political dissent. Legal activism is subjected to special scrutiny, evidenced in the infiltration of animal advocacy groups. Awareness of observation and surveillance limits not only what activists (legal and otherwise) do, but also what they conceive of doing. These negative discourses surrounding animal advocacy benefit corporate interests within industry.

Noske (1989) has used the term 'animal-industrial complex' (A-IC) to describe the fundamental connections between large-scale animal exploitation and capitalism; arguing that "*animal industries are embedded in a capitalistic fabric*" (1989: 22). Twine (2012: 15) develops this concept, pinpointing the importance of the concept as a means of re-contextualizing human-animal relations "*not primarily within a rubric of inadequate ethical frameworks but as part of the wider mechanics of capitalism and its normalizing potential*". For Twine (2012) the A-IC provides an important

organizing frame of analysis from which CAS scholars can challenge the status quo of human-animal relations. These examples provide a context to consider the experiences of those who commit their lives to the political struggle for animal liberation.

**Section Summary**

As we have seen, concern for animals is not something new or exceptional, it has a longstanding historical precedent across cultures and places (Rankin, 2006; Ryder, 2000). Nevertheless, despite this continuity, the animal advocacy movement today is incredibly diverse, and this diversity is reflected in the tactics used by animal advocacy activists. The collision of animal advocacy with discourses surrounding 'terror' is an important contextual factor, which frames this research. Whilst some tactics and actions may be consistent with definitions of terrorism, key distinctions persist. Animal advocacy activism, even at its most radical and violent, has never claimed a human life. Furthermore, those within the movement who share values, but differ with regards to preferred tactics, risk being similarly constructed. Discursive practices are used to dismiss and discredit the arguments in favour of compassion for animals.

Having considered the recent trajectory of animal advocacy, I now examine how animal advocacy has been investigated in an academic context, and the crossover between political and academic animal advocacy, giving consideration to the methodologies emerging from CAS. In establishing the academic context of my project, I now discuss how animal advocacy has been researched, and identify gaps in the existing literature.

## Approaches to Studying Animal Advocacy

Interest in human concern for animals has taken a plurality of trajectories across academic disciplines; it is necessary to strictly delineate my focus, whilst acknowledging the breadth of scholarship. The field is vast and extensive; it ranges from the ethical debates concerning the moral status of animals (cf. Singer, 1975; Regan, 1983; Adams, 1990) and historical research into the emergence and development of human compassion for animals (Ryder, 1989; Tester, 1991; Spencer, 1996; Linzey and Clarke, 2004) to sociological, political and psychological

investigations into the motivations of AR activists (e.g. Herzog and Golden, 2009) and beyond.

This section focusses on substantive empirical research into the lives of animal advocates, which has varied significantly in terms of aims and focus. Here, I discuss some of the most pertinent recent empirical studies. I have divided these broadly into the categories of Quantitative and Qualitative Studies. This is often a false binary, especially when engaging in mixed methods approaches, and indeed some of the studies discussed blur this boundary. In discussing them as two broadly separate traditions within the study of animal advocacy, I acknowledge the limits of the distinction, suggesting that biographical, visual and CAS approaches could provide an important means of innovating beyond limiting ideas about where research must fit. I consider the use of unusual biographical and visual methods, including studies from within the CAS tradition, to position this project before discussing the theoretical framework in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. I discuss Cole and Morgan's (2011) concept of 'Vegaphobia', as significant to this project.

**Quantitative Studies**

Much empirical research into animal advocacy has been, broadly speaking, methodologically quantitative in approach. It has tended to be conducted from an 'expert outsider' perspective and has often focused on the 'psychological character' of individuals who align themselves with animal advocacy causes, seeking positive correlations between concern for animals and other demographic indicators.

A study by Herzog and Golden (2009) used quantitative methods to explore why some people and not others become involved in social movements. They enlisted participants through two social networking websites, who were asked to take an online survey. The study focused on the relationship between disgust (a 'moral emotion'), and animal rights activism. It found that activists were more sensitive to 'visceral disgust' than supporters of animal use or 'nonaligned' participants. It concluded that the relationship between animal activism and vegetarianism to be 'complex' -half of the vegetarians studied did not consider themselves activists, and almost half of self-described activists ate meat. Similarly, Klar and Kasser (2009) used online surveys to measure the psychological well-being of activists (including some animal rights activists). Participants were drawn from colleges, and results from a

national pool of activists and were measured against a control group. They found that activists were more likely to be 'flourishing' in life, and enjoying greater social well-being than non-activists.

Plous (1991) surveyed 402 American animal-rights activists (identified through their attendance at a national animal-rights rally). Almost half felt that animal research should not be the movement's primary focus; criminal direct action (property damage, laboratory break-ins etcetera) was divisive among even the strongest animal-rights advocates. The research found that animal-rights activists '*hold diverse objectives and viewpoints*' (Plous, 1991: p194). This conclusion is useful, presented with supporting empirical evidence, especially within a political climate where marginalised groups are often subject to simplistic assumptions about their homogeneity and interconnectedness.

Building upon conceptually similar work by Franklin, Tranter and White (2001), Jerolmack (2003) examined data from the 1993 and 1994 General Social Survey (GSS), a large-scale annual attitudinal survey in the USA. Contrary to the stereotype, Jerolmack found that animal-rights advocates were not mostly upper-middle class, middle-aged, and white; but that young, non-white minorities, and the less educated were statistically more likely to support animal-rights. These findings again highlight the need to recognise heterogeneity among animal-rights advocates, and avoid assuming that animal-rights only concern those affluent and 'middle-class' enough. Kruse (1999) used secondary data from the GSS (1994), analysing the expressed opinions on animal-rights and animal testing of a sample of 970+ individuals. Significant gender differences were identified; generally, women were more likely to display higher levels of animal advocacy than men, echoing findings of various previous studies (Plous 1991, Jasper and Nelkin, 1992, Garner, 1993, Peek, 1996). Furthermore, Kruse found that an individual's views on nature impact upon animal-rights advocacy more among men than women. Methodologically similar research abounds; for example studies by Wuensch, Jenkins and Poteat, 2002; Herzog, Betchart & Pittman 1991; Galvin and Herzog, 1992; Driscol, 1992; Broida et al, 1993; Hills, 1993; Shaprio, 1994; and Peek, Dunham and Dietz, 1997.

Moving away from studies of 'activism', Beardsworth and Bryman (2004) have produced a quantitative study of the eating habits of young adults in the UK, which provides some useful insights into animal advocacy. The 11-year study started in

1992. All first year sociology and social policy under-graduates at Loughborough University were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire on their food consumption habits and attitudes. Over the course of 11 years, 637 students completed the survey (effectively, under 60 responses per year). The authors argue that their sample response group (which is "*predominantly young and female*": 313) represents a "*critical case*" (316), with which we may assess broader trends in societal attitudes towards meat consumption and, crucially, meat avoidance. Self-administered questionnaires often suffer from small returns, but this was done 'in class' and not a single student declined to participate. It may also be argued that the participants (who were all enrolled on a social research methods course) got to see the benefit of real, applied research in practice. The participants were able to use and analyze the data set as part of their module. However, 'food consumption preferences' is seen as a benign and non-problematical topic of study, viable to effectively compel undergraduates to participate. For some, food consumption represents an emotive area, for example, people who experience eating disorders. There is also an issue about religious aspects of food consumption, as well as ethical approaches to food, the complexity of which is not really reflected in the research. The authors argue that the findings suggest relatively high levels of meat avoidance (which is defined as either reduced meat consumption or vegetarianism) within the sample. However, this is counteracted by a reported trend towards an increase in the inclination to eat meat, in more recent surveys. The authors attempt to interpret the data in the context of broader socio-political trends regarding meat-eating, with a particular focus on beef consumption after the outbreak of Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Unfortunately, the study also fails to differentiate between vegetarianism and veganism, limiting its usefulness to this project.

One key finding of the studies reviewed above, has been the heterogeneity of perspectives within animal advocacy. It is difficult to garner an overwhelming consensus about to what the priorities of the movement should be on the whole, and priorities change over time, as evidenced in the criticism from participants in Plous's (1991) study that too much emphasis was placed on animal testing. Another key theme is the complexity of people's relationship to animal advocacy. Herzog and Golden's (2009) large scale study suggests an inconsistency between people's self-definitions and external perceptions of animal advocacy. Many who adhere to

vegetarianism or veganism do not consider themselves activists, and many, who do identify as animal rights activists, are not vegetarian or vegan. What this tells us is that, in very simple terms, subjectivities matter. Valuing the subjectivity of participants is a cornerstone of this project and these principles have informed the methodology and sample of the research project (discussed Chapter 4: Methodology).

While quantitative research is often interesting and thought provoking, I am ultimately left with some concerns regarding distance between researcher and participant. Large-scale surveys and questionnaires can usefully generate data on a social group, especially with regards to demographic factors such as race, class and gender. However, the inevitably messy research process, by which this data has been collected, is largely invisible in the research write up (Law, 2004). There is also an issue with outsider/insider status. Many research projects in this vein are conducted by academics with no connection to animal advocacy. They are assumed to be neutral, external observers, but in approaching the subject from this external vantage point, they arguably perpetuate and consolidate the notion that compassion for animals is 'unusual'. They reify animal advocacy as being 'abnormal'.

There is also, what might be considered, an exploitative relationship on display at times. Academics with an interest in animal rights activism as a phenomenon, enlist activists and benefit themselves (financially, and personally) from their involvement in the project. However, the activists get relatively little out of it, and the movement itself is also unlikely to benefit. Instead, animal advocacy movements on the whole have arguably suffered through this sort of expert 'dissection', especially in a hostile socio-political context where studies may be used by policy makers and may influence decisions made about the relationship between the state and animal advocacy. With this hierarchical dynamic between researcher and participant in most studies, the 'distance' intended to facilitate objectivity can be alienating to socially and politically marginal groups. The activists are reduced to statistics. The impartiality of the researcher is rarely questioned; the fact that they may be meat-eaters is deemed irrelevant to the study. This does not sit well with my constructionist ontological and interpretivist epistemological standpoint (discussed in Chapter 3). Furthermore, the most radical activists are unlikely to participate in a study they deem to be conducted by people or organisations that actively promote animal exploitation, as evidenced in Upton's (2011) ethnographic study (discussed

below). With these issues in mind, it is useful to consider some qualitative inquiries into animal advocacy.

**Qualitative Studies**

Research on animal advocacy has also been done in a more qualitative vein. Upton's (2011) ethnographic research into Stop Huntingdon Life Sciences (SHAC) in the UK, usefully describes how unforeseen personal, biographical factors (the unexpected sudden serious illness of a researcher's close relative), and other unforeseen events (like criminal investigations into those being studied) can impact on a research project. The study also provides useful insights into the ethics of researching 'hard-to-reach', politically marginal/radical groups. The following quote from a participant highlights the difficulty of enlisting activists.

> *I do get asked to participate in academic research projects but often it is a one-way system and which raises the question: where is the end result? What do I get out of this arrangement? Where is the feedback? Doing media work and interviews with journalists always has tangible outcomes and results - in the form of appearing on the news or seeing your comments appearing in print - whereas helping with academics never resulted in that kind of benefit for those who cooperated with it. Put crudely, "What do we get out of this?"* (Upton, 2011: 6.1)

This quote serves as a useful critique of some of the aforementioned quantitative studies, in which benefit to participants is difficult to identify. It also illustrates methodological issues of access and sampling. Those who are very committed to animal advocacy causes are likely to self-select or exclude themselves, based on their perceptions of the study's value. Will it demonize activists? Does the researcher care about animals? These are considerations in terms of the validity of the samples used in 'outsider' studies. A study on animal advocacy, in which the most radical sections of the movement are unrepresented, is arguably less valuable for that reason.

Steele's (2013) qualitative study of vegans in Burlington, Vermont took the form of 17 semi-structured interviews, examining why and how these individuals decided to become vegan and how they maintained veganism on a daily basis. The study identified a number of shared stages that many of the participants went through, for example, the 'spark' (or turning point) in their decision to become vegan. The study is useful in its in-depth approach to veganism, especially through the

geographical specificity of the project, offering perspectives rooted in a shared spatial context; Burlington is a city with a relatively wide selection of options for vegan food, and good general awareness of veganism.

A combination of ethnography and semi-structured interviews with activists was used by Goodman and Sanders (2011) to study attitudes of activists, particularly towards divisive tactics such as 'residential picketing'- demonstrations outside of the homes of private citizens. Their research is useful in generating a more in-depth account of the motivations and perspectives of activists. Highlighting the complexity of activists' feelings regarding key issues, the study paints a more nuanced picture of the movement. In particular, it emphasizes activists' awareness of the negative perceptions and implications of home demonstrations, and their ultimate concern with the efficacy of the tactic in achieving goals. This focus on the subjectivities of participants, and on their motivations and perspectives, is a cornerstone of biographical research.

Building upon previous research, Gaarder (2011) used qualitative interviews to explore the predominance of women within the animal rights movement. Studies of animal advocacy and veganism have consistently found a gender imbalance; women appear more likely than men to become involved in animal advocacy causes (Gaarder, 2011; Beardsworth, Bryman and Kiel, 2002; Kruse, 1999; Peek, 1996; Garner, 1993; Jasper and Nelkin, 1992; Plous 1991). Various authors have explored issues of gender in an animal rights context, both with regards to explaining the predominance of women in animal rights, and exploring the overlaps and intersections between patriarchy and speciesism. Using data from semi-structured conversations with twenty-seven female activists, Gaarder (2011) explored how activists themselves make sense of their centrality in the movement, and the ways that broader cultural discourses surrounding sex and gender, impact upon their personal understandings of gender imbalances within the movement. Gaarder found that women are typically more interested in explaining the absence of men, than they are explaining the predominance of women. This study is a useful counterpoint to many of the more distance based accounts (and 'explanations') of the gender composition of animal rights movements.

Taylor's (2005) qualitative approach challenged what she recognised as the prevailing understanding that animal-rights activists are 'anti-science'. From 31 semi-

structured interviews (with 23 women and 8 men), Taylor found that, whilst activists predictably reject the use of animals in biomedical science, they actually support alternative non-animal based scientific techniques. She concluded that these activists are not simply anti-science, but are deeply concerned with the ethical limits of science, which animal testing exemplifies. Similarly, Einwohner (2002) used qualitative data from ethnographic fieldwork, in four different US animal rights campaigns, to explore how activists conceptualize success and accomplishment within the movement. Cherry's (2006) research has sought to challenge the relatively narrow definitions of animal advocacy activists, through redefining veganism as a 'cultural movement'. In-depth ethnographic interviews, with twenty-four vegans, highlighted the diversity of experience, especially through the engagement of many participants in punk subculture.

In a study of online discussions of veganism, Sneijder and Molder (2009) utilized a qualitative analysis of quantitative data. The research examined 48 discussion threads (comprising 525 emails), combining quantitative and qualitative elements, by eschewing first person interviews but looking at lengthy written extracts. The authors argue that 'ordinariness' is a key factor in vegan identity, and particularly in establishing that veganism can be 'ordinary' and not overly onerous, complicated or unhealthy. Vegans preferred to present themselves as having an uncomplicated lifestyle and diet, and disliked being viewed as 'health freaks' (Sneijder and Molder, 2009: 628). Participants were resistant to notions of extremeness in response to normalizing processes surrounding veganism, which have frequently seen it represented as 'abnormal' and almost exclusively in pejorative terms. Whilst this study focused on discussions of veganism in online environments, the findings are particularly relevant to aforementioned discussions of veganism as abnormal or dangerous (for example, through terror discourse surrounding animal advocacy).

Having considered these broadly differentiated quantitative and qualitative projects the following section considers some examples of studies of animal advocacy conducted from within a CAS paradigm. That is, research into animal advocacy or related topics, conducted by animal advocates. I also consider the implications my engagement with this literature has had for the direction of this project.

## CAS Methodologies

There exist myriad inclusive, participatory models for social research that actively seek to dismantle oppressive relationships and to ensure a more evenly valuable experience for participant and researcher alike. Work within feminism (e.g. Reinhartz, 1992), critical pedagogy (e.g. Freire, 1970, Nocella, 2004) and biographical research (e.g. Roberts, 2002) take this concern for limiting hierarchy and distance between researcher and researched as a cornerstone of good practice. Returning to the above quote from Upton, (2011: 6.1), participants might very well ask, *"What do we get out of this?*" The question highlights the uneven and sometimes exploitative relationship that can emerge between researchers and researched, regardless of qualitative or quantitative distinctions, and a gap in the existing literature.

CAS studies may claim to answer that question more satisfactorily, by virtue of the shared values of researcher and participant in relation to animal advocacy. In a chapter I contributed to Taylor and Twine's (2014) book 'The Rise of Critical Animal Studies', I argued that CAS can benefit from continuing to explore the use of unusual biographical methodologies, pointing to examples of methods that have been utilized by CAS scholars in recent years, including autoethnography, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and performative social research (Stephens Griffin, 2014). Here I present examples of CAS approaches that my study draws influence from.

Autoethnography (discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology) typically refers to research in which the author has a deliberate narrative presence (Sparkes, 2000). It has been utilized in an explicitly CAS context. For example, Grubbs (2008) produced an autoethnography of a six-week internship she completed with Farm Sanctuary (a USA animal protection organization that runs sanctuaries for rescued farm animals). Grubbs set out to examine social movement theories through her focus on the animal rights movement, and in so-doing produced an interesting and thoughtful, narrative account of the inner-workings of an activist organization. Gingrich-Philbrook (2005: 311) argues that autoethnographic accounts can provide a means of accessing the "*lost arts, and hidden experiences*" of the marginalized, for example, stories of struggle, oppression and humiliation. These are the stories that CAS should be accessing, in order to promote empathy, compassion and solidarity among marginal groups towards the aim of total liberation.

Nocella (2011) combined autoethnography with Participatory Action Research (PAR) to study animal advocacy. PAR is distinct from typical research, in that it deliberately aims to intervene and positively impact upon the environment/context in which it is conducted, as such it is rooted in ethical and political praxis and so it is suited to the principles of CAS research. Nocella (2011) utilizes a critical pedagogical methodology informed by PAR practice, exploring how activists respond to the process of 'terrorization' (that is, the stigmatization of being labelled as or associated with terrorists) (Nocella, 2011: 130). To do this, the author actively and reflexively engaged and collaborated with animal advocacy movements in the USA.

As an example of CAS research using empiricist methods, Cole's (2008) work on othering is particularly noteworthy, as well as the related concept of 'vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011). Cole highlights how academia has reproduced societal trends towards discursively 'othering' the experience of vegans and perpetuating normative assumptions about those who adhere to veganism. Cole (2008) conducted a systematic analysis of extant social research literature on vegetarianism/veganism, focusing particularly on descriptive language used, and how this language has contributed, or may contribute to, broader understandings of vegetarianism/veganism. Cole (2008) criticizes the tendency, as exhibited by Beadsworth and Bryman (2004) for research in this area to frame vegetarianism/veganism in 'ascetic' terms. That is, to portray veganism as difficult, limiting and ultimately a restrictive, undesirable lifestyle. More broadly this can be seen to contribute to a hierarchizing of diets in Western food discourse, in which meat consumption is positioned as normal, straightforward, healthy and unproblematic, and veganism is 'the other'. This tendency towards 'normalizing' meat-consumption, and 'othering' veganism is something which seems endemic across animal rights research. Cole identifies a pattern of language and repetitive phraseology used by authors writing about vegetarianism/veganism, in which words such as 'restrictive', 'avoidance', 'strict' are used. This supports the hierarchizing of diets, and limits the ability for vegetarianism/veganism to fulfill its promise, as a potentially beneficial lifestyle for the environment and the wellbeing of human and non- human animals.

> *"[T]hese discourses reveal more about assumptions about the relative aesthetic value of diets that are hierarchically structured in Western food cultures, than it does about the experiences of [vegetarians/vegans]."* (Cole, 2008: 713)

This observation is important, in that it indicates not only the 'normative' assumptions of the existing research, but also the disservice that these conclusions do to the actual, lived experiences of the individuals the studies purport to illuminate. For many, the vegan lifestyle and diet is a source of empowerment and liberation, rather than limiting or restrictive. Cole and Morgan (2011) have offered the term 'vegaphobia' to describe patterns of negative discourse surrounding veganism. Based on empirical research, the authors documented a tendency for newspapers and other media sources to ridicule, misrepresent and discredit vegans as fussy, ascetic, absurd, extreme, and represent the lifestyle as ridiculous, unrealistic and unmaintainable. Vegans are subject to stereotyping that casts them as extremists or even terrorists. This links to the concepts of 'Carnism' (Joy, 2010) and 'carnonormativity' (Parry, 2010), and establishes an empirical basis for the claim that vegan experience is often mediated by hostile and limiting discursive contexts.

Harper's (2010) work ties together ecofeminist approaches (discussed in Chapter 3) with CAS and Critical Race Theory (CRT)[8] to produce an intersectional biographical and critical account of veganism, from a situated black feminist vegan standpoint. It drew together narratives, essays, poems and reflections from black-identified vegans in the USA. The project, entitled 'Sistah Vegan', highlights the experiences of women who have adopted a vegan lifestyle and responds to the erroneous assumption that American women of colour are destined to live out their mature lives battling type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and other physical and emotional problems linked to a junk food diet (Harper, 2010). According to ICAS, this is the first book to examine the intersections of veganism with race, gender, animal rights, nutrition, health, body image and environmentalism, and to challenge whiteness and patriarchy in vegan culture and racism in food politics (ICAS, 2010). Harper's project is particularly interesting in its biographical focus and is deliberately aimed to be accessible to audiences outside of academia. These principles have influenced this project a great deal.

[8] CRT seeks to provide an intersectional analysis of power and racism, and has emphasised the value of narrative and storytelling in order to allow the voices, experiences and perspectives of People of Colour to emerge (Delgado and Stefancic, 1993).

Intersections between animal advocacy and queer politics, have been researched by Jovian Parry (2010a, 2010b) especially discourses surrounding veganism and hegemonic understandings of meat-eating. Parry looks at the gendered assumptions underpinning animal slaughter, in particular how emotional concern for animals, and the animals themselves, are feminized and denigrated in popular television representations of cooking (Parry, 2010b: 381). Parry also found that meat-eating and the slaughter of animals was consistently presented as masculine and celebrated, supporting the idea that domination of animals is an essential component of the performance of gender (discussed in Chapter 3). Similarly, Stanescu (2012) has applied work on queer experience, to examine grief as a social performance, and looked at the way in which discourse functions to position certain bodies as worthy of mourning, and others as not. Butler (1993a) discusses the way in which homosexual love is unacknowledged within heteronormative discourse, and thus the loss of homosexual attachment cannot be openly grieved. Issues surrounding mourning are closely tied to debates about which lives 'count' (Stanescu, 2012). Animals do not possess mournable lives, and thus a performance of mourning for animals transgresses social norms and a normative context.

A number of authors have worked to highlight the interconnectedness of speciesism, sexism and heteronormativity (Adams, 1990; 1994). Television advertisements often rest on shared values surrounding masculinity, heterosexuality and meat-eating (Glasser, 2011). Veganism is frequently represented as feminized, abnormal and even 'queer' (Potts and Parry, 2010a, 2010b; Stephens Griffin, 2012). Sobal (2005) argues that there is evidence to suggest that one of the ways men and women perform gender is through food choices, and in particular through emphasising and minimising meat by men and women respectively, in line with perceptions about gender. Ruby and Heine (2011) have conducted research that suggests that people are more likely to view vegetarians as more virtuous and less masculine than omnivores, regardless of their own diet. Kubberød et al's (2002) quantitative study also supports this notion, finding that women are more likely to avoid red-meat, and that men display significantly higher attitudinal support for 'pro-red meat statements'. A recent psychological study by Loughnan, Bastian and Haslam (2014) found that people who value masculinity, and do not see it as a moral issue, and find dominance and inequality acceptable are most likely to consume animals.

Heinz and Lee (2009) argue that masculinity is one of meats 'core cultural meanings'. Consumerism and market relations have removed meat from the context of slaughter, rendering the slaughter of animals invisible to consumers. The authors collected 50+ texts relating to meat, analysing them from a Marxist and Burkean philosophical perspective. They identify a tendency for meat to be viewed as the most important aspect of a meal, and the related idea that a meal is invalid unless meat is a component part. Masculinity is identified as a cultural value frequently associated with meat (Heinz and Lee, 2009: 89). If we view this tendency through the prism of intersectionality, we see the pattern that authors like Adams (1990) have asserted, i.e. that hegemonic understandings of masculinity position it positively in a contrasting dualism with femininity. Meat is therefore positive, and the absence of meat is unnatural. Men who live without meat, are thus viewed as less masculine and less worthy.

These studies are useful in illustrating the potential for reflexive biographical research into animal advocacy. To conduct research into animal advocacy from a CAS perspective is to conduct it as an insider. This means being open about one's own subjectivity and values. Adopting a reflexive biographical approach helped me to achieve these aims.

**Biography and Reflexivity**

Having considered a variety of examples of academic inquiry into animal advocacy, we can begin to identify the areas that particularly warrant further exploration. I have identified a number of gaps in the literature and a number of avenues of thought for exploration, in particular, a reflexive study of animal advocacy that approached the topic from a CAS perspective, incorporating elements of some of the methodologies discussed here. I propose a study of animal advocacy that utilizes an innovative approach, and that challenges formal modes of representation in academic contexts.

A combination of biographical and visual methods (in the form of comics) could not only help to fill a methodological gap in the existing research, but also progress the aim of establishing the value of reflexive and innovative methods. One thing lacking in some research into animal advocacy is an active engagement with the issues surrounding 'reflexivity'. Reflexivity, put simply, is self-consciousness in social

research; good research should be "*highly tuned to the interrelationship of the investigator with the respondents*" (Delamont 1991: 8). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that reflexivity should be present throughout the research process, from conceptualizing to design to execution to writing. This requires researchers to try to make the research processes transparent and explicit. Much of the existing research into veganism and animal advocacy has tended to eschew considerations of reflexivity. Exceptions to this rule include Nocella (2011); Grubbs (2008), and Upton (2011) who each produced reflexive auto/ethnographic accounts of animal advocacy (discussed earlier). The emergence of research of this nature, particularly from within the field of CAS, suggests reflexivity can be an important aspect of the study of animal advocacy.

My project continues this emerging reflexive tradition, within studies of animal advocacy, and takes the opportunity to embed itself in a reflexive theoretical framework; this is evident through the research questions, methodology and the design of the project[9]. Innovative biographical and visual methods can provide an approach that allows for new forms of knowledge to emerge and develop, beyond traditional qualitative/quantitative distinctions.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the history of animal advocacy and explained the historical, social and cultural context in which the research takes place. I discussed animal advocacy in the 20th century, and the development of CAS, as the academic wing of animal advocacy, in the early 21st century. I then examined some key issues relating to contemporary animal advocacy, specifically, the notion of 'animal liberation' as a primary objective, the emergence of the 'terror discourse' in relation to animal advocacy and environmentalism, as well as the plurality of tactics used by animal advocates and differences within the movement. I then considered the academic context, reviewing the field of research into animal advocacy. I focussed initially on quantitative studies of animal advocacy, before appraising qualitative studies and the nuances of these differing approaches. Finally, I discussed CAS methodologies as a tradition my own research follows, in particular through engaging

[9] Reflexivity is discussed further in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.

with reflexivity and the idea of acknowledging subjectivity in research. In doing so, my project fills a gap in the field of research into animal advocacy. I also drew out the concept of 'vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011) as significant to the project. The next chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis.

# Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## Introduction

The biographical approach of this project rests on a queer critical theoretical foundation, developing from a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. The project uses biographical research methods to study the lives of vegan animal advocates. Alongside biographical interviews, participants were asked to create comics about their lives, and I created my own comic about the research process, as a form of visual autoethnography [see Insert]. These methods developed out of an engagement with the field of biographical research, according to the aims and objectives of the project (see Chapter 4: Methodology). This biographical approach rests on a number of underlying theoretical assumptions. These are outlined in detail throughout this chapter, first by a literature review, and second by a discussion of the specific conceptual basis of the project. As discussed earlier, previous studies of animal advocacy have tended to be conducted from an outsider position and have focussed on empiricism and establishing objective 'facts' about the movement. I identified a gap in existing literature, to be filled by a biographically informed, insider approach that acknowledges the critical stance of the researcher towards animal exploitation.

Unlike objectivist ontologies that see reality as something external, objective and fixed, this project sees reality as something fluid, contingent and continually shaped and reshaped by social actors. Our descriptions of the world are not benign; they can impact upon, and 'enact' specific realities (Law, 2004). Thus, we have a duty to acknowledge our subjective standpoint, and to ensure the realities we enact have a positive impact. Epistemologically, knowledge may therefore not be regarded as something neutral. Sociological descriptions of the social world impact upon it, and potentially alter it- in contrast to natural sciences, where a description of a molecule has no bearing on the molecule itself (Schutz, 1967). This is a foundation of the phenomenological philosophical tradition, which has been concerned with understanding how individuals make sense of the world and how philosophers should engage with the consciousness of others and with the notions of intersubjectivity (Bryman, 2004). Developing from this interpretivist epistemological position, this project builds upon feminist, post-structural and queer critiques of

binary dualisms (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1977; Jones and Adams, 2010). For example, the reason/emotion dualism, which sees emotional knowledge as less rigorous and valuable than rational knowledge, is challenged as part of hegemonic understandings of emotion, rooted in colonial and patriarchal power structures (Lorde, 1977). This ontological and epistemological foundation necessitates an engagement with critical theories, particularly intersectional feminist, Critical Animal Studies (CAS) and queer theory approaches. These approaches stress the importance of subjectivity and of the standpoint of the researcher, which in turn lead us to reflexivity as a guiding theoretical principle of the project. These underlying principles provide an impetus for the biographical approach. Interpretivist epistemology, constructionist ontology, phenomenology and queer critiques of formal modes of representation are foundations for the use of biographical methods, visuals and comics and the use of autoethnography.[10] Next, I discuss the structure of this chapter.

### Chapter Structure

The chapter begins with a discussion of important theories and texts that have influenced how the project was conducted (in particular, Lorde, 1977 and Law, 2004). Having synthesised these ideas and my own analysis, in section two, I explain the theoretical framework of the project. This approach to the study of veganism attempts to move beyond dualisms to produce a situated, critical analysis. In particular I focus on the concepts of 'normalization' (Foucault, 1977), and identity, and give consideration to how these have influenced other thinkers, particularly those associated with queer theory. These viewpoints have challenged the notion of 'normal' as a fixed category, which is a cornerstone of this project. This critique of value dualisms and the related concepts of 'normalization' and identity are key assumptions underpinning my research.

## Section One: Theoretical Literature

The project uses biographical approaches to access rich, in-depth accounts of vegan lives, with an awareness of the challenge veganism poses to dominant understandings about human-animal relations and ethics. This section examines the

[10] These methods and how they link to the theoretical framework are discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology.

central theories that inform the research questions and underpin the biographical approach, first looking at epistemology and ontology and how specific perspectives on knowledge and reality have impacted upon the trajectory of the research. I consider Lorde's (1977) epistemological critique of reason/emotion dualisms and Law's (2004) concept of Mess in Social Research. I discuss these in relation to the key concepts of reflexivity, situated knowledge and biography. I then explore some other key theories such as Intersectionality and its links to the CAS discipline.

**Beyond Dualisms: Reason and Emotion**

> *"The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt."*
> *(Lorde, 1977: 23)*

Audre Lorde was a poet, a writer and an activist. In the essay 'Poetry is not a Luxury', Lorde (1977) seeks to dismantle the dichotomous value-dualism between reason and emotion. This has been constructed in white male dominated academic and intellectual thought, limiting discourse. So only those thoughts deemed to be rooted in the supposedly neutral realm of rationality are worthy, while those rooted in the realm of emotion are tainted and worthless. With regards to epistemology and the construction of 'knowledge', Lorde's essay defies received wisdom about the kinds of knowledge we must value as critical thinkers. She conceptualizes poetry as a tool for emancipation, which can give structure and form to ideas in a way that other modes of expression cannot. Typically, emotion has had to concede its value to thought, in the same way that women have had to concede their value to men. Poetry, Lorde argues, is a means of articulating emotion against this oppressive discursive backdrop, and is thus a way to achieve revolutionary demands. Capitalist society is profit-driven and dehumanizing, a place where feelings were never supposed to survive. We must therefore use poetic tools- a "*vital necessity*" of our existence (37)- to subvert the status quo. Rational thought can only do so much; if we want our readers to empathise or to truly access any of the texture of the experience we describe (particularly the experience of the marginalized), poetic devices are vital.

This conception of limits to the potential horizons of thought links closely to the ideas of Michel Foucault.

In 'The Order of Things' Foucault (1970) develops the concept of épistemes as dominant discourses and worldviews, which frame what is possible, within a given epoch. Many differing épistemes may coexist and interact; their continuity is contingent. Épistemes may be understood as subconsciously shared knowledge bases within a society, which effectively enact a constitutive limit upon discourse (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000). For Lorde, a racist, patriarchal épisteme has risen to dominate others; the experiences and perspectives of the socially marginalised (such as women of colour) have been made invisible or irrelevant. We exist within an episteme in which emotional knowledge lacks discursive value. This has an impact not only on how knowledge is formed, but upon the trajectory of those societies which share these worldviews. But

> *"…poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action."*
> (Lorde, 1977: 37)

Emancipation is hindered by a restrictive and limiting epistemological hegemony. To develop Lorde's analogy, the quality of the 'light' with which we view the world is important. If we observe the world only by the bright, stark floodlights of scientific rationality, we may miss some of the details that the flickering of candlelight could potentially illuminate. Rather than expanding our horizons, our desire to negate emotion at the expense of reason can inadvertently obfuscate our view of the world at times. Lorde also clearly points to the importance of literary and artistic works in achieving social change.

The process by which we define 'rational' versus 'emotional' is not benign. It is political and problematic. If there is a fundamental epistemological basis for this project, it is that knowledge production is a political process. It is no coincidence that middle class, straight, white men tend to occupy positions of power and expertise across academic disciplines. That reason and emotion have been positioned as opposites across a value dualism, with regards to knowledge, is part of a the same

political process by which other restrictive binary value dualisms and power relationships are maintained, such as male/female. The ramifications of this process are felt in deeply embodied ways, by the queer victims of hate crimes, by survivors of abuse and sexual assault, by innocent people of colour murdered by the state, by asylum seekers risking their lives crossing borders. Our challenge is to resist these processes and to construct new ways of looking at the world, and to think differently about what it is possible to know. Lorde is espousing an interpretivist epistemology, which provides a framework in which we may acknowledge our own subjectivity and biography, critique binary value dualisms and move beyond objectivist conceptions of reality towards a constructionist ontology. This in turn necessitates an attempt to find an approach to study that reflects these underlying principles. For me, it provides an impetus to explore unusual methods and innovative modes of representation in research. It begs us to find new (and poetic) ways to share knowledge. The means by which we achieve this will undoubtedly be messy, but, as John Law (2004) argues, this is true of all research.

**Mess in Social Research**

John Law's (2004) book 'After Method: Mess in Social Research' has also impacted on the trajectory of this project, particularly with regards to ontology and ideas about reality. Law rejects objectivist ontology for a constructionist perspective on the nature of reality. Law is primarily concerned with interrogating and exploring how political, social and cultural value systems and structures impact upon and frame the supposedly neutral world of science and technology, and in the hermeneutic relationship, which emerges thenceforth, between science and society. There are two key strands to Law's argument. The first is that social research is invariably a messy process. Therefore, attempts to artificially conceal or tidy up that mess in our representations of social research do a disservice to 'reality'. Law calls researchers' discomfort with 'mess' a form of "*hygiene*" (Law, 2003: 3). The notion of 'mess' is something that Muncey (2010: 28) has also discussed, arguing that, in attempting to produce hygienic accounts of reality, the complexity of individual experiences can get "*lost in the wash*". The second strand to Law's argument is that 'reality' is, at least partly, enacted as it is described. Hence, we must consider the impact our descriptions of reality have on the world around us. The production of 'objective

truth' has long since been the central aim of social research. In fact, objectivity is very difficult to achieve in practice and, what we often understand as objective, is simply work in which the subjectivity has been hygienically removed. The notion of the researcher as an impartial, removed, observer must be challenged, as this inevitably rests on unchallenged assumptions about knowledge and perspective. This has long since been a concern of feminists. Indeed, Harding (1987) critiques the erroneous assumption of male-dominated science that it is possible to view and comment on the world from no particular vantage point.

For Law, reality is not something fixed and external, and this means that any account of 'objective reality' will be somehow tied to a particular context. Thus, reality is not something singular and accessible. We can apply our methodological tools to help us measure or describe reality, but these will always be at least partially limited; the process will always be messy. To apply this to Lorde's ideas, we might argue that within a strict reason/emotion dualist paradigm, emotion represents 'mess', and should thus be expunged at all costs. But, researchers have emotions. That is not to say that every emotion we feel is relevant to a research project, but simply to acknowledge that some might be. Therefore, Law argues that 'objectivity' should not be the only aim of social research. Instead, we must look to other aims, such as ensuring our work has a positive impact upon the world. If we can produce research which is methodologically coherent and sound, and in which mess is accepted, we can produce knowledge that might benefit the world, as well as describe it accurately. So, it is necessary to embrace a strategy that allows for the existence of 'mess'; biographical research represents an ideal field to draw from methodologically. This endeavour is central to the idea of reflexivity.

**Phenomenology and Reflexivity**

Having engaged with this ontological perspective, we might look to the philosophical tradition of phenomenology for guidance. Phenomenology contradicts positivist conceptions of the social world, focusing on the specificity of human consciousness to make claims about the social (Schutz, 1967). We must acknowledge our own position, the impact our claims have on the phenomena that we are studying and we must take care to acknowledge subjectivity in social enquiry. The key difference between the social and natural sciences is therefore that the objects of study in the natural

sciences are generally just that, objects. They behave in a predictable way, and the claims researchers make about them will not alter that behaviour. This is what Bourdieu et al (1999: 608) described as a "*positivist dream of an epistemological state of perfect innocence*".

As discussed above, knowledge, the way it is generated and the way it impacts on the topic of study in social science is necessarily different. For this reason, reflexivity has become such a centrally important concept within contemporary social research. Whilst it has risen to prominence in recent years, it is by no means a new idea. In the first half of the 20th century, George Herbert Mead (1934: 134) described the importance of "*turning back the experience of the individual upon [themselves]*", or, for Delamont (1991: 8), "*a social scientific variety of self-consciousness"*. In a methodological context, reflexivity requires a consideration of the circumstances under which research is produced, in particular, the subjective social, institutional and political dimensions to the project and the way it impacts upon the social world. It is vital therefore that the social researcher must *"state his/her attitude to the subject under discussion to let the readers know of the alternative position as well as to facilitate their better understanding of the situation [so that] it is no longer possible for the scientist to assume the classical so-called God's eye view"* (Dobronravova, 2009: 25 quoted in Tsekeris, 2010: 2). Similarly, the project of critical pedagogy (discussed in more detail later) argues that the theorist is not dominant over or separate from the subject of study, and instead should strive to understand it by being a part of it (Nocella, 2004).

The epistemological and ontological underpinnings of this project lend themselves to a reflexive research strategy. Lorde's epistemological call to value emotion, coheres with the notion that a good researcher must be also be willing to turn their gaze inwards, especially where research impacts upon the researcher's emotions. Similarly, the notion of 'mess' in social research is founded upon reflexive principles, that is, *not* discounting data or processes that complicate and disrupt the research process. Bourdieu et al (1999) explain the premise of reflexive research as emphasising the processes of construction at work in all of the sciences, and how these constructions interact with the world in which they are produced. Reflexive research is embodied, it engages with emotion, it accepts the inevitability of mess and, crucially, it seeks to enact a reality that might improve the world it is describing.

Feminist approaches have embraced reflexivity, through the application of biographical methods.

**Feminism and Biography**

Feminist researchers have long since favoured methodologies that focus on the lived experiences of the oppressed, create space for marginal voices and these values have also been a cornerstone of biographical approaches (Reinhartz, 1992). In the UK, biographical approaches gained significant academic momentum in the 50s, 60s and 70s through the popularisation of Oral History methods (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2013; Portelli, 1981; Thompson, 1978; 2000), feminist focus on marginalized voices, and through deviancy and cultural studies. Feminist research has been historically entwined with biographical research (Roberts, 2002). According to O'Neill (2007: 212):

> "*Feminisms and cultural studies share a methodological and epistemological focus upon a primarily phenomenological approach to understanding the processes and practices of our socio-cultural worlds and the everyday lived experiences and meaning-making practices we engage in*".

One influential figure who combined feminist and biographical research, Liz Stanley (1990), argues that feminist theory is fundamentally derived from experience, and that this means that a feminist researcher must engage with matters of auto/biography. Concomitantly, Stanley (1993) argues in favour of the use of first person accounts in academic texts, to appropriately contextualise research regarding the subjectivity of its author, and the situation in which it was produced. Thus, such work "*explicitly recognises that such knowledge is contextual, situational and specific and that it will differ systematically according to the social location (as a gendered, raced, classed, sexualised person) of the particular knowledge-producer*" (Stanley, 1993: 49). This challenges notions around objectivity in research, and paves the way for the inclusion of auto/biographical, reflexive, 'messy' data from the researcher, although this must always be tempered. Letherby (2003: 143) argues that there is a "*fine line between 'situating yourself' and 'egotistical self-absorption*'". The influence of this feminist tradition, illustrates the compatibility of biographical research with the theoretical framework of this project, particularly the importance of reflexivity, subjectivity and intersectionality.

Donna Haraway's (1988) theory of 'situated knowledge' is another important concept to engage with, particularly in the context of discussions of reflexivity and its centrality to the conceptual framework and biographical approach of this project.

**Situated Knowledge and Biographical Research**

These ontological and epistemological arguments are rooted in acknowledgements of subjectivity and biography, both in how we experience reality and how we generate knowledge. Haraway (1988) argues that all knowledge is inescapably partial and situated in context, irrespective of how 'scientific' the methods used to produce it seem. This idea of 'situated knowledge' rejects the possibility of a detached, omniscient observer stance within social research. Engaging with issues of power within the research process and acknowledging the context of research is vital (Nightingale, 2003). Ultimately, the knowledge produced through this project is situated in terms of my own analysis of experience, identity and biography. I am a white, cisgender[11] [12] man from North East England. I am from a middle class background (the son of a teacher and a social worker). I speak with a North East accent. I adhere to veganism, and participate in animal advocacy and other forms of activism. I have some social and cultural capital with regards to the animal advocacy movement. I identify as 'queer' with regards to my sexuality, but I also possess a great deal of 'passing straight' privilege on a day-to-day basis, due to being in a long-term relationship with a cisgender woman. These factors are all relevant to the way the project has been conducted, and to its underlying politics. Consistent with this, the reflexive, subjective and situated epistemological and ontological foundation of the project begs consideration of the idea of Intersectionality, as a pertinent and useful prism through which its analyses are constructed. I use the concept of 'situated knowledge', as a means of critiquing my own stance as a researcher from the very beginning.

The typical tone of scientific and social scientific writing, for Haraway (1988: 584) is a "*mode of seeing that pretends to offer a vision that is from everywhere and*

[11] To be 'cisgender' or 'cis' (as opposed to 'transgender' or 'genderqueer') means that your gender identity matches the one assigned to you at birth.
[12] As per Allen's (2014) guidelines for cisgender feminists speaking on trans issues, I use the category 'cisgender' here as a means of highlighting my own privilege within the project. It also aims to critique cisnormativity, by deliberately emphasizing the fact that we all exist on a spectrum of genders, sexes and identities.

*nowhere, equally and fully*". Thus the politics and the biography of the author is hidden, emphasising the apparent veracity of the argument, whilst simultaneously disguising subjectivity as objectivity. I have deliberately tried to problematize my role within the research project, not from a positivist position of neutrality, but from a necessarily and inevitably situated position of subjectivity. This account of veganism is situated within my own biography as a vegan, as an academic and as a human-animal. I make my subjectivity clear, throughout and through the autoethnographic comic I have produced [see Insert]. At the same time, I present the lives and experiences of participants, which, in a project conducted by someone else, might look altogether different. I have endeavoured to emphasise this, as integral to the process, and not to dismiss it, with claims about academic rigour.

Biographical research (discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology) provides an appropriate methodological approach for engaging with the principles of situated, reflexive research practice. The Oral History tradition is closely connected with feminist research (Gluck and Patai, 1991), and challenges the idea that social researchers can and should aim for objectivity. According to Oakley (2004), research guidelines have traditionally stressed objectivity and urged researchers to deflect questions, and keep the focus on the participant. This cannot and should not always be the case, for example, in the instance of interviewing survivors of abuse, the notion of refusing to answer questions about ones' own experiences or to not offer resources for survivors, Oakley argues, is quite frankly ridiculous. Abandoning the old, distant, positivist-focussed methods, and engaging with biographical approaches, can not only improve the research process, but also produce more enriching and illuminating results.

**Intersectionality**

Lorde's (1977) critique of binary thinking around emotion, highlights how dualism can be simplistic and limiting. Male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, human/non-human; these binary understandings restrict the complex continuums of experience. However, alongside the project of deconstructing binary dualisms, how these separate continuums may overlap must be considered. Intersectionality provides a means to do this.

Feminists have been defining and refining definitions of intersectionality for two decades, since it originally emerged as a concept and framework for analysis (Chow, Segal and Lin, 2011). The term was first used to refer to the various ways in which race and gender interact to contribute to the employment difficulties of women of colour (Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars have considered the connections between differing forms of oppression prior to intersectionality (for example, Marxist feminism), but Intersectional analyses focus not simply on a combination of two separate oppressions, but on the unique synthesis of these forms of oppression, as expressed by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991: 1244).

> *"My objective… was to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately*"

Intersectionality, as a distinct concept, allowed for theories and ideas to emerge without the constraints of a singular analytical framework (Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2012:). Today, Intersectionality is a vital concept in critical social theory. It is important to acknowledge the intersections between identities and forms of oppression, and to be sensitive to how they are fluid and contingent. As Weston (2011: 30) puts it "*different identities have different significance in different contexts*".

A variety of other authors have expanded upon the ideas discussed above, Patricia Hill Collins being a notable example. Collins (2000: xiii) underlines the strong link between Lorde's critique of formal modes of representation and contemporary intersectional thinking.

> *"Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of the dominant groups… By placing African-American women's ideas in the center of analysis, I not only privilege those ideas but encourage white feminist, African-American men, and all others to investigate the similarities and differences among their own standpoints and those of African-American women."*

Collins (1998) critiques 'singular' frameworks for understanding violence. Traditionally, attempts to conceptualize violence have been characterised by their

singular focus, such as Race or Gender. However, this misrepresents the complexity of violence in the context of oppressive power structures, and risks placing foci in competition with one another. For example, a Gender-only analysis of violence may focus too heavily on the 'private' sphere of domestic violence, sexual assault etc. whereas a Race-only analysis may focus on 'public' sphere concerns such as police brutality etc. A Gender-only analysis of rape in the US may ignore the fact that courts have failed to prosecute cases of rape against African American women, regardless of the race of the suspect. Similarly, a Race-only analysis of rape must engage with the historical reality of rape-related lynching of black men accused of raping white women. This creates an oppressive discourse in which black women who have been raped have their experiences silenced. Here we have two conflicting tropes (a rape trope and a lynching trope), which are automatically positioned in a zero-sum competition with one another, where only one can be victorious. The intuitive solution to this is to discuss the two categories together in tandem, but this is only likely to reproduce a similar internal dynamic of hierarchical competition. Instead, we must deconstruct the categories and seek an 'intersectional' approach, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of differing forms of oppression.

> *"Rather than viewing violence primarily as part of distinct social hierarchies of race and gender, violence may serve as conceptual glue that binds them together"*
> (Collins: 1998: 919)

Therefore, Collins takes violence as a point of intersection, at which differing power structures (such as Gender and Race) can be reconciled. She acknowledges that definitions of violence cannot exist outside of the hierarchical power relations that produce violence. In Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy I introduced CAS as an interdisciplinary field, with a strong focus on intersectionality. The following section considers some areas where CAS has intersected with other critical perspectives and how these core principles underpin the politics of this study.

### CAS Beyond Binaries

The notion of moving beyond binaries and oppressive modes of thinking is a central foundation of this project. Critical theories such as feminism and critical pedagogy have contributed to deconstructing these binary understandings, as has CAS. It is an

emerging interdisciplinary and intersectional field of study, seeking to resist the exploitation and oppression of human and non-human animals (Best, 2009). Here I discuss how CAS has converged with other critical theories, such as critical pedagogy, ecofeminism and post-humanism. These are presented to position this project politically within existing literature and debates; as an intersectional CAS project, informed by a broad base of critical theory.

### Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has influenced this project as it combines a critical theoretical perspective with concerted efforts achieve praxis through social and political action (Nocella, 2004)[13]. Fundamental to critical pedagogy is the idea that those who comment on the social world should acknowledge their place within it, and work to improve it. It strives to experience social issues through empathy and living among the subjects of study (Nocella, 2004). This represents a key idea underpinning this research - that is, my desire to not only study veganism and animal advocacy, but my involvement with animal advocacy movements, and my desire to enact positive social change through the research. This is also reflected in the use of biographical research methods (discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology).

Freire's (1970) work concerned some of the most brutalized, impoverished and subjugated people in the world, and he demands action on the part of all of those who seek to emancipate them, including the social researcher. This builds on Marx's (1845, Note XI) assertion that *"philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it*". Overcoming oppression does not require a simple reversal, whereby the oppressed may oppress the oppressors; instead we must work to restore the humanity of both by removing the dualism between the two. All those involved in systems of oppression and domination face 'dehumanization'.

> *"'Dehumanization', which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human."*
> (Freire, 1970: 26)

[13] O'Neill (2010) uses the term 'purposeful knowledge', to refer to praxis, whereby processes of knowledge production are conceptualized as an avenue for positive social change as opposed to a neutral, objective arena.

This echoes Lorde's (1978) assertion that capitalist society 'dehumanizes' the oppressed and that this process perpetuates their oppression. For Freire, it is absurd to identify injustice and then to do nothing to rectify it.

Freire was influential in the development of critical pedagogy, which rejected the conventional capitalist model of education in which "*the students are... depositories and the teacher is the depositor*" of knowledge (Freire, 1970: 53). Within this rigidly hierarchical one-way framework, the teacher is the all-knowing subject and the students are the no-nothing objects, a process that effectively silences students' perspectives and experiences (Nylund and Tilsen, 2006). Freire instead favoured a symbiotic system in which everybody teaches, and everybody learns. This inspired my decision to ask participants to create comics for the research project (discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology), and to create my own comic, challenging typical researcher-participant dynamics and reinforcing my own subjectivity in the project.

It is the responsibility of social thinkers not only to observe and critique society, but also to work towards its transformation. For Freire, praxis involved engagement in a "*cycle of theory, application, appraisal and reflection*" (Nylund and Tilsen, 2006: 22). Hence, research with emancipatory aims necessarily involves reflexivity and action. It is futile to talk about liberating people from oppression whilst subscribing to the same hierarchical thinking that oppresses them (Freire, 1970: 36), bringing to mind Lorde's (1979: 111) assertion that '*the masters' tools will never dismantle the masters house*'. Emancipation cannot be achieved through supposed 'objectivity', which is meaningless without the idea of subjectivity. They are in constant dialectical relationship (Freire, 1970: 35). Subjectivity is vital in the process of transforming the world. Social research is inevitably part of the struggles against injustice, and subjectivity is not only inevitable, but vital to the process. Efforts have been made to apply these critical pedagogical principles in CAS. This has influenced my decision to engage with biographical research and to utilize autoethnography, a method built upon the need to acknowledge subjectivity.

Strategies for achieving critical pedagogy within animal advocacy activism, particularly the ALF, have been discussed. Nocella (2004) argues that academics engaging with animal advocates can help dispel the dominant media image of the ALF as violent, angry and hateful (a dominant trope both internal and external to the

animal rights movement). As discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy, Nocella's (2011) own research into animal advocacy utilizes autoethnographic and reflexive methods similar to my own, intended to achieve critical pedagogical goals and break down object/subject, researcher/participant dualisms. Moving beyond normative value dualisms, how research is conducted might be reconceptualised. The influence of critical pedagogy can be seen in this project, particularly in the focus on vegans as a marginal social group, the choice of biographical methods to highlight marginal voices and the insider, reflexive and subjective approach. Roberts (2002: 25) has argued that stories of struggle and achievement are found consistently within biographical research, often in connection with an explicit commitment to giving a voice to lives that have previously been marginalized. This sort of biographical research has an important part to play in social justice, and can provide a *"valuable resource for political groups and emergent social movements"* (Perks and Thompson, 1998: 184-185 in Roberts, 2004: 4).

The following section looks at other critical theoretical and intersectional approaches, connected to CAS and critical pedagogy, and explains how they have influenced this project, especially through deconstruction of value dualisms.

### Mapping the Intersections

CAS is informed and influenced by other struggles and critical research paradigms, especially feminism (Gröling, 2014). Carol Adams is one of the world's foremost academic ecofeminist[14] animal advocates. In 'The Sexual Politics of Meat', Adams (1990) unites two disparate movement, feminism and animal rights, into one coherent ethical perspective. Comparing the objectification and depersonalization of animals and women in society, Adams argues that misogyny and animal exploitation are underpinned by the same oppressive logic. Adams also critiques essentialist logic underpinning patriarchy and animal exploitation, whereby both hierarchical social orders are justified as being 'natural'. Adams highlights various gendered aspect of animal exploitation, using literary and cultural texts to highlight how discourse impacts upon human-animal relationships.

[14] Ecofeminism is a philosophical and activist movement that combines the tenets of feminism with environmentalism and ecology (Gaard, 1997; Warren and Erkal, 1997; Warren 2000; Plumwood, 2012).

Adams explores similar ideas in later work, such as 'The Pornography Of Meat' (2003), which examines social representations combining speciesism and misogyny. She points to examples conflating sexuality with consumption, such as novelty restaurants in Germany where people dine off the body of a naked woman; brothels in France nicknamed 'maison d'abbatage' (Slaughterhouses) where young sex workers serve between 80 and 120 customers a night; a family friendly TV show, where young men refer to their romantic interests as 'burgers', 'double burgers' and 'deluxe burgers'; a packet of chicken with the words "*great legs, nice breasts*" emblazoned across it (Adams, 2003: 11). The book is full of these examples, many of them presented in the form of images, of an active (male) consumer, and a passive (female) object for consumption. Animals are divorced from their subjectivities, and are thus objectified and viewed in abstract terms. So, within dominant paradigms, it is permissible to consume meat and the meat industry is seldom problematized.

Adams use of images has been particularly influential on my research design - especially the choice to engage with visual methods within biographical research context. Images can be very important academic and biographical resources, and the complexities of the relationships between images and words have arguably been undervalued in sociology (Roberts, 2011). Images can help us express "*the unsayable*", aspects of our experience that we have difficulty putting into words (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006). This reflects Lorde's (1977) epistemological arguments around poetry, particularly the importance of embracing emotion through artistic and creative modes of representation.[15]

Similarly, Posthumanism (Wolfe, 2010) is a mode of philosophy that moves away from traditional binary conceptions; such as, self/other, mind/body, society/nature, human/non-human and organic/technological. Wolfe's (2003:1) 'Animal Rites' focuses on what he sees as the "*repression of non-human subjectivity*" as a failing of cultural studies, where well-intentioned critiques of racism, (hetero)sexism etc. are almost always "*locked into an unexamined framework of speciesism*". As discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy, 'speciesism' is a core concept in animal advocacy, referring to how members of certain species are valued,

[15] The use of visuals in an academic context and the implications of visual methods in biographical research are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4: Methodology.

and afforded rights and treatment, that other species do not receive (Ryder, 2000). Discourses dominated by speciesism perpetuate the idea that the institutionalised large-scale slaughter of (non-human) animals is entirely, ethically unproblematic (Wolfe, 2003: 7). Posthumanist theories have influenced how this project has conceptualized the place of vegans, within the context of human-animal relations. As opposed to supporting human-animal dichotomy, the project challenged this dualism, instead regarding veganism as a rejection of hegemonic and essentialist understandings of meat.

**Section Summary**

This section examined some theoretical literature that informs the project. It first outlined the constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology that underpins the project, then examined ideas of reflexivity, intersectionality and biography that have developed from this philosophical foundation. Various intersectional critical approaches were discussed, which produced the values and politics that the project rests upon, including how CAS fits, moving beyond value dualisms, and into critical, emancipatory approaches.

The next section outlines the theoretical assumptions that underpin the project, in the form of a theoretical framework. It does this through a critique of value dualisms and the use of the concept of 'normalization' as a central guiding concept for the project. It explains the importance of queer theory, emerging from my engagement with feminist and critical theories, as well as the ontological and epistemological foundations of the project. Queer theory provides an approach to the study of 'normality' and 'identity' that provides a cornerstone for the project's conceptual structure. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the theoretical framework, which provides an explicit statement of the key assumptions that underpin the project.

## Section Two: Theoretical Framework

This project utilizes biographical approaches to study animal advocacy. Biographical research provides a means of doing 'messy' phenomenological research (Law, 2004), which moves beyond binaries and value dualisms, and provides a methodological foundation for the exploration of atypical modes of representation. The following matrix outlines the theoretical foundations of the project and the key concepts emerging from those foundations that guide its trajectory.

**Table 1- Guiding Concepts**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theoretical Foundations | Interpretivist Epistemology; Constructionist Ontology; Intersectional Feminist, Critical and Queer Theories. |
| Guiding Concepts | Phenomenological focus on Specificity and Subjectivity; Law's (2004) Mess in Social Science; Queer Critique of Formal Modes of Representation; Lorde's (1977) epistemological critique; Identity as a fluid 'Relational Achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010); Challenging Value Dualisms; Situated Knowledge; Reflexivity; Normalization. |

Here, I discuss normalization and fluid conceptions of identity as core concepts guiding the project, which are traceable back to queer theory. These theoretical assumptions have emerged from a synthesis of the above conceptual literature, as well as my engagement with critical, feminist and queer theories, and they inform my use of biographical methods.

### Critique of Value Dualisms: Normalization

Post-structural and queer theorists have built upon feminist critiques of value dualisms, to develop ideas around identity and normalization. In critiquing binary dualisms, this project produces a situated biographical analysis of animal advocacy, building upon the work of queer, feminist, and critical theorists, who have challenged essentialism and normative conceptions of identity. The idea of normalization, and the normalization of identity specifically, is thus a central assumption of the project.

'Normalization' is a social process, by which certain behaviours, identities, ideas and actions come to be recognized as 'normal', and consequently, neutral, taken-for-granted and objective. It is particularly associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1977), who theorised normalization as the process by which an idealized norm of conduct is socially constructed, against which all conduct is judged, and rewarded or punished accordingly. Normalization forms part of the process of 'Disciplinary Power'; a tactic used to ensure social control whilst using the minimal amount of force necessary (Foucault, 1977). Foucault argued that the production of knowledge is intrinsically connected to power dynamics in society and that "*every society produces its own truths which have a normalizing and regulatory function*" (McNay, 1992: 25). As discussed in Chapter 2, veganism and animal advocacy are often constructed in certain ways within mainstream discourse, and this can be seen to be part of a normalizing process for vegans and animal advocates.

**Foucault and Normalization**

To understand Foucault's theory of normalization, it is important to appreciate his concepts of Bio-Politics and 'Biopower'. It must first be noted that Foucault's usage of the terms Bio-politics and biopower are not always consistent (Lemke, 2011). How these terms are best applied is debated, but the following definitions describe how I use them in this thesis. For Foucault, Bio-Politics is the control of bodies and behaviour by the state, achieved through Biopower (Foucault, 1997), the specific process by which nation states regulate the behaviour of subjects within a Bio-Political context. This contrasts with how power was wielded historically and involves "*more subtle, more rational mechanisms: insurance, individual and collective savings, safety measures, and so on*" (Foucault, 1997: 243). For example, blood donation could be seen as a facet of Bio-Politics, in particular issues surrounding who is and is not allowed to give and receive blood transfusions. Biopower is realized through "*an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations*" (Focuault, 1976: 140). 'Normalization' is a central component of this process (Tremain, 2002). Foucault's work provides a useful analysis of power, and a prism through which we may view contemporary animal advocacy, especially in relation to contemporary debates surrounding 'terrorism' and direct action.

One centrally important concept is that of discourse, and its role in maintaining social hierarchies, and delegitimizing specific behaviours and identities. Foucault (1977) emphasises the social construction of crime/deviance, thus subverting traditional understandings of how legality and morality operate. In Foucault's analysis laws create criminals/deviants. Furthermore, these laws are fundamentally rooted in social context. They are not necessarily moral or right, but their legitimacy depends on discursive mechanisms maintained through hierarchical, often small-scale, power relationships. It is useful to consider dominant perceptions of veganism, as well as dominant attitudes towards human-animal relations, as being impermanent and discursively maintained, often at micro-levels.

How behaviours and ideas are policed was also of interest to Foucault. The concept of 'Governmentality' was developed in his later writings to describe how external regulation of behaviour gives way to internalized systems of regulation (Reith, 2004). That is, the process by which humans become self-governing agents. The experiences and perspectives of people who exist outside of dominant self-governing norms, whose attitudes and ethics have been, and are being, discursively delegitimized (e.g. through the application of the term 'terrorist'), can be understood to possess what Foucault describes as 'subjugated knowledges' (Jones and Adams, 2010). These 'subjugated knowledges' are of interest to this research, as forms of knowledge that have been disqualified as inaccurate through discourse (Jones and Adams, 2010: 81). This links back to Haraway's (1988) discussions of 'situated knowledge' that focus on the partiality of subjective knowledge, and the centrality of context in epistemology. Subjugated knowledges are necessarily situated, but they are also explicitly engaged in an uneven discursive power relationship.

This project aims to challenge existing discourse surrounding animal advocacy, in the hope of potentially shedding light on subjugated knowledges. For example, in challenging and examining the use of the term 'terrorist' when applied to animal advocacy, I do not claim that animal advocates have never adopted problematic methods to further their aims[16]. Nevertheless, discursive attitudes towards behaviour are contingent. They can shift and alter over time and in different locations and contexts. This is part of a complex process of normalization of certain

[16] See the timeline in Appendix 1. Selected Timeline of Contemporary Animal Advocacy, for examples of problematic tactics used by animal rights activists throughout history.

sorts of political activism, so of interest to this project. According to Butler (2004: 48) a norm only persists *"to the extent that it is acted out in social practice*". If this project challenges the social practices surrounding veganism and animal advocacy, it hopefully dismantles or 'troubles' some of the problematic norms that vegan identities are subject to.

Normalization is an important topic within the field of queer theory. The following section discusses how queer scholars have theorised normalization, in particular, in relation to identity.

**Queer Theory**

The term 'queer theory' was originally coined by de Lauretis (1991), and is frequently associated with particular works by Butler (1990, 1993a, 1993b), Halperin (1995), Sedgwick (1990), Fuss (1989, 1991, 1995), Warner (1993, 2000), Halberstam (1998, 2005) and Foucualt (1977), who has been described as the first queer theorist (Halperin, 1995). As an academic discipline, queer theory is at best only partially and loosely definable. It emerged from LGBT studies, Queer Studies and Women's Studies in the 1980s and 90s, and focuses both on theorizing Queerness, and on producing Queer readings of texts (Giffney, 2009). Queer theory is closely linked with post-structuralism, and the idea of deconstruction, as a means of social analysis. In particular, queer theory has been concerned with how normalized 'straight' identities are constructed and maintained in opposition to 'queer' identities. For Giffney (2009: 3) 'queer' denotes "*a resistance to identity categories or easy categorisation, marking a disidentification from the rigidity with which identity categories continue to be enforced and from beliefs that such categories are immovable*". Building upon foundations laid by Foucault, Halperin's (1995) provides a definition of 'queer':

> *"Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer'… demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative".*
> (Halperin, 1995: 62)

Instead of accepting and embracing fixed notions of identity classification, those who find themselves on the periphery of society may better acknowledge and assert the inevitable relativity of all notions of identity. It is important that we call into question

the legitimacy of all conceptions of normalcy. *"To 'Queer' something is to question normalcy by problematizing its apparent neutrality and objectivity"* (Manning, 2009: 2). Any debate can be 'queered' to reflect its underlying assumptions. Emphasising the temporal, spatial and contextual components enables an identity of 'queerness' to be constructed; thus we acknowledge that no one exists in a vacuum. Veganism can be considered as a 'queer' categorization, in the context of a predominantly meat-eating culture and discourse.

Warner's (2000) analysis of 'normality' seeks to critique the conflation of an identity's ethical status with its statistical frequency.

> *"If 'normal' just means within a common statistical range, there is no reason to be 'normal' or not. By that standard we might say that it is 'normal' to have health problems, bad breath or outstanding debt"* (Warner, 2000: 54).

It is simply inaccurate to suggest that a heterosexual, cisgender, monogamous, meat-eating etc. lifestyle is ethically favourable to homosexual, transgender, polyamorous or vegan one, simply because the former are more common. It is also rare to be born into enormous wealth, or to possess an extremely high level of intelligence. Aspects of one's character must be engaged with on a deeper level than simply calculating their likelihood relative to alternatives. Warner's queer analysis of normality is valuable in considering the experience of participants in this research, with veganism as statistically uncommon and thus potentially a 'queer' phenomena.

**Beyond Essentialism; Beyond Binaries.**

Queer Theory has been important in critiquing essentialist tendencies within feminist and critical theory, as well as in mainstream culture (Giffney, 2009). Queer Theory is a form of resistance against fixed identity categorisations. This stands in contrast to ideas within feminism and LGBT studies, which tend to rest on stable ideas about identity. Butler (1993b) argues that 'queer' as an identity must never fully describe those that it wishes to represent. In other words, the term must remain fluid, flexible and contingent to an extent. Consequently: "*the operations of queer critique can neither be decided on in advance, nor depended upon in the future*" (Eng, Halberstam and Munoz, 2005: 3).

Queer Theory has also been concerned with challenging formal modes of representation in academic contexts, embracing unusual methodologies and means of

representing academic work (Jones and Adams, 2010) thus linking it to Lorde's critique of reason/emotion dualisms (1977). Judith Butler is a key thinker associated with queer theory, and offers an anti-essentialist challenge to binary dualisms.

Butler's (1990) 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity' has become a central text for queer and post-structural theory, despite Butler's own insistent distancing of herself from 'queer theory' itself. The central thesis of the book is perhaps best summed up in the following quotes:

> *"The foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken. My argument is that there need not be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler, 1990: 194-5)*

> "*There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results*." (Butler, 1990: 34)

Butler argues that feminism's focus on an objective female 'subject' rests on the same underlying logic as patriarchy, that is, an ontology that bolsters essentialism. She challenges the notion of a universal, pre-existing subject altogether, and thus presents an argument for a more flexible ontology, which eschews essentialism and acknowledges the culturally contingent character of identity, thus linking to Law's (2004) constructionist ontology. Identity is flexible and fluid, and is not connected to any 'essence'. Butler also challenges the analytical framework of subject/object on similar grounds. Though favoured by feminists and other critical theorists, these discourses in fact entrench the idea of identities, which precede reality and culture. One cannot 'be' a woman, Butler argues, one can merely 'do' or 'perform' womanhood. This idea of performativity is centrally important to the text, both as an analytical tool for conceptualizing identity, and as a potential practical tool in the subversion of Gender norms. This compliments Connell's (1987) idea of 'hegemonic masculinity', whereby the dominant social position of men, and subordinate social position of women, is sustained through gender practice.

Butler argues that identities such as male and female are always contingent and thus constructed; this principle could also be applied to categories like human and nonhuman, vegan and meat-eater etc. Whilst feminists accept gender as a culturally contingent construct, they do not necessarily recognise the construction of

'sex'. Butler's argument is radical in that it conflicts with the accepted essentialist logic that sex is biological and corporeal, and gender is social and cultural. For Butler, bodies cannot signify 'sex' without a cultural context, and the idea that 'sex' could possibly exist prior to culture is in fact an example of gender as a function of society, as a means of structuring and limiting behaviour. This can also be applied to human-animal relations. A body cannot signify sex without a cultural context, likewise, the consumption of flesh cannot signify 'human' outwith the context of essentialist understandings of behaviour. When we describe meat-eating as a natural facet of humanity, we ignore and dismiss the context; chiefly, human traits of self-awareness, compassion, empathy and ethical agency. Central to Butler's thinking is the conception of identity as being fluid, contingent and constituted in social interaction.

**Identity as a 'Relational Achievement'**

Queer Theory's conception of identity, as fluid is not entirely new or unique. Scholars across a variety of fields of social inquiry have highlighted how identity is '*interactionally achieved or performed*' in social contexts (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006: 107). These perspectives are arguably traceable back to the pioneering work of Symbolic Interactionist theorists such as George Herbert Mead (1934), Herbert Blumer (1962) and Erving Goffman (1956), who challenged prevailing essentialist ideas about self-identity as an innate, private human trait, instead arguing that self-identity is formed through social interaction. For Goffman self-identity is manifest in myriad performances, whereby we continually monitor the impressions we give to, and make upon others (Elliot, 2001). Goffman (1956) saw the process, by which an identity succeeds or fails, as occurring in interaction with others through performance. Identity is therefore best conceptualized as a 'dramatic effect', rather than an innate character trait. Goffman used the dramaturgical metaphor to develop the idea of identity being constructed through performance.

Butler (1990) draws influence from Goffman's Dramaturgical Metaphor and the notion that identity is achieved through performance, applying these principles in the context of gender identity. For Butler, identity performances always have the potential to disrupt dominant power structures (Elliot, 2001). Giving the example of subcultures and the use of 'drag' and 'gender bending', Butler explores how performance can be used to disturb as well as reinforce notions of identity, throwing

light on its socially constructed nature. Butler examines how one may 'achieve' an identity through performance.

Queer theorists have also sought to conceptualize identity as a 'relational achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Garfinkel, 2010/1967), thereby removing it from essentialist and/or constructionist debates (Jones and Adams, 2010: 204). That is, we may step outside the typical dichotomous question of 'is one's identity 'innate' or is it rooted in macro-social conditions?' Queer theory, like biographical research, acknowledges the importance of broader social debates/contexts, but focuses deliberately on the specificity of the individual experience, in particular identities of transgression. Placing context, as opposed to social structures, at the fore; queer theory acknowledges that one may differentially 'pass' as straight, gay, male, female within the same social structure (Jones and Adams, 2010). Identity is something accomplished through maintaining continuity, consistency and coherence across different, evolving social contexts.

For Heckert (2010: 48), the individual is '*a multiplicity interconnected with other multiplicities*'. Jackman (2010:125) pursues a similar argument, deconstructing the notion of the research 'field' within a queer prism, challenging the conventionally accepted binary field/academy dualism. Jackman argues that whilst ethnography has been useful to queer studies, due to its sensitivity to subjectivity and specificity, it is equally important that we work to undermine the inherently normative (e.g. 'heterosexual') nature of the field. Jones and Adams (2010) support the value of an autoethnographic approach, as a means of achieving the potentially disparate dual ends of conducting practically achievable, applied research and conducting research which is firmly embedded in queer theory. The application of queer theory within this project's biographical methodological approach of is discussed more in Chapter 4: Methodology. The next section considers how the trajectories CAS has engaged with and queer theory have overlapped, and the implications of this for this project's theoretical framework.

**CAS and Queer Theory**

There is a growing body of work within CAS, which seeks to explore intersections between anti-speciesist and queer theoretical paradigms (Grubbs, 2011) This growing body of work informs this biographical project, in particular the work of

Potts and Parry. Potts and Parry (2010) explored the idea of 'vegansexuality'. That is, the previously unnamed or unexplored phenomena, whereby there is a greater likelihood of sexual/romantic attraction between those who share similar beliefs on animal advocacy, and, concomitantly, a sexual aversion to the bodies of those who consume animal products. The term 'vegansexuality' emerged in popular discourse following a study by the New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies (NZCHAS, 2006). The research used a large scale, open-ended survey exploring the "*perspectives and experiences of 157 cruelty-free consumers in New Zealand*" (Potts and Parry, 2010: 54). Interestingly, 'vegansexuality' was not central to the study, but it was seized upon by the media and generated a great deal of interest. The authors considered media reactions to the notion of 'vegansexuality', after it came into public consciousness, specifically the aggressively derogative online reaction to media coverage of the phenomena.

> *The idea that [vegan] women might reject sex with meat-eaters seemed to engender considerable anxiety among omnivorous heterosexual men. Here, meat's close association with sex in the minds of many male internet users became especially apparent, and the distinctions between veganism (the rejection of meat and animal products), vegansexuality (the rejection of sexual partners who eat meat) and celibacy (the rejection of sex altogether) were thoroughly blurred. (Potts and Parry, 2010: 59)*

Linking to the concept of 'vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011), the authors argue that the dominant negative discourse surrounding 'vegansexuals' (and vegans in general) positions them as sexual losers, deviants and failures. The exaggerated hostility shown to vegansexuals (particularly from meat-eating men) is evidence of the powerful links between meat-consumption, masculinity and notions of sexual dominance and prowess in western societies. The authors highlight several unpleasant examples of hostile media responses to vegansexuality. These illustrate the need for an intersectional approach to the interconnected processes of misogyny, heterosexism and speciesism. The hostile reaction of Sydney Morning Herald writer Jack Marx, quoted below, exemplifies the necessity of an intersectional approach.

> *"All this talk of veganism, meat eating and sex is making my mouth water. Like those corn-fed pigs that you can order at some fancy restaurants, vegans are sort of primed with the luscious fruits and vegetables on which they've stuffed themselves. Picking up a vegan, then, is the perfect recipe for a hot and tasty evening for two, and a delicious memory for one . . . a table set only for one; a 'bed' of roast vegetables*

*in which a space has been cleared just for my 'guest'; a reach around to gently plant an apple in the mouth."*
*(Jack Marx quoted in Potts and Parry, 2010: 60)*

The quote objectifies both the non-human animal and the human choosing not to consume meat. It is sexually aggressive and conflates eating meat with sexual domination/violence. Rhetoric of this nature is not uncommon. I am particularly interested in exploring the relationship, apparent here, between the discursive operations of heternormativity through meat-eating. CAS engagement with queer theory (and concepts such as 'Vegansexuality' discussed in Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism), alongside the theories of normalization and critiques of value-dualisms, represent core conceptual assumptions underpinning this study. This is drawn together in the theoretical framework summary presented below.

## Summary of Theoretical Framework

This chapter has elaborated the theoretical framework of this biographical research project, which combines constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology with intersectional feminist, critical and queer approaches to the study of society. This means that the project rests on the assumption that, contrary to positivist orthodoxy, social scientists have a duty to acknowledge the subjectivity of human experience and how individual understandings of the social world are diverse and situated in context. Hence, any attempt to describe reality must take into account the complexity and subjective of human experience.

I have discussed the need to explore new modes of representation as a means of generating different forms of knowledge and exploring ideas as influenced by Lorde's epistemological critique (1977). I also explained the critical ontological approach whereby 'mess' is accepted as an inevitable aspect of social research, which should not be made invisible through representations. I explore how our descriptions of reality can help to enact certain realties (Law, 2004). A focus on subjectivity and a biographical approach is suited to the reflexive aims of the project. I discussed critical theories, in particular intersectional and critical pedagogical perspectives, which critique the traditional role of the researcher, and argue for a praxis (or 'purposeful knowledge') oriented research processes (Freire, 1970; O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006).

Having outlined these philosophical foundations, I presented ideas that have emerged from intersectional feminist, critical and queer approaches, explaining how these have become core conceptual assumptions of the project. These concepts include situated knowledge, reflexivity, and the principle that researchers have a duty to acknowledge their role in, and impact on the project. Further, a critical approach to value dualisms, and the related concept of normalization, as a force structuring people's behaviour and identity, was identified as centrally important.

Similarly, queer resistance to essentialism and conceptions of identity as a fluid 'Relational Achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010) also underpin the conduct of this project. I explained normalization as a centrally important idea with regards to structuring our understandings of identity, in particular the identities of 'abnormal' social groups such as vegans. I identified queer theory as a means of transgressing these normalizing processes, and of producing fluid understandings of identity. Finally, I examined some theoretical overlaps between queer theory and CAS, and how other authors have theorised aspects of veganism and animal advocacy in queer terms- particularly through the concept of 'vegansexuality' (Potts and Parry, 2010).

The theoretical assumptions underpinning the project mean that the questions that it seeks to address are rooted in specificity, subjectivity, and fluidity and therefore lead us towards an engagement with biographical approaches, as a field well suited to achieving such aims. Developing from constructionist ontology, the project focuses on the subjectivities of participants, and the experiences and events that they feel have been most important. The interpretivist epistemology allows focus on the social construction of identity and how vegan identity can be seen as fluid. The intersectional feminist/critical theories, underpinning the project, invite a focus on the expression of political and ethical beliefs within participants' lives.

Having established these ideas as constituting the core conceptual assumptions and theoretical framework, the next chapter returns to the research questions and how the biographical approach of the project enable me to best address them. I examine biographical research as an interdisciplinary methodological field, compatible with the critical and queer theories underpinning the project. I discuss autoethnography and the use of comics in social research as biographical means of achieving the aims of reflexivity, as well as exploring the importance of the

visual to biographical research. I also explain data analysis, and the ethical issues encountered in the research design.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

## Introduction

As touched upon in Chapter 1: Introduction, this biographical project represents a point at which three previously separate aspects of my life have coalesced. It reflects an investment in my academic, personal and political actualization. Having been raised vegetarian, and having made the decision to go vegan almost seven years ago, I have had a lifelong exposure to and interest in the ethics of animal consumption. Thus, the research takes place from a situated vegan perspective; it is deeply rooted in my subjective self and personal biography. I have been involved in political activism since infancy, as discussed in my autoethnographic comic (See Insert). My parents were political activists throughout my childhood, involved in campaigns such as Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, End Apartheid in South Africa, The 1984 British Miners' Strike, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and more. My political development started at a young age, designing campaign leaflets for Neil Kinnock's Labour Party during the 1992 general election.

Growing up, I maintained an interest in politics. I got involved in environmental and peace campaigns, such as Stop the War on Iraq, and Palestinian Solidarity. Having been raised vegetarian, I have had an atypical perspective on human-animal relations throughout my life, eventually embracing veganism as an adult. I have connections with various activists in animal advocacy groups, as a result of me being involved in radical social spaces, being a member of various communities and making friends. These personal and political networks meant I had access to vegans in various locations and contexts, which might have been inaccessible to other researchers.

This chapter outlines the methodology of the research, explaining how it is compatible with the theoretical framework, and how this methodology has enabled me to answer the research questions. I begin with a recap of the research questions. I then discuss biographical research and why this is an appropriate methodological approach in relation to the theoretical framework. I then explore some key narrative concepts that have emerged from biographical research, as well as the importance of queer theory in influencing the methodological character of the project. Following on from discussions of reflexivity in Chapters 2 and 3, I discuss autoethnography as a reflexive biographical research strategy, looking how it connects to the theoretical

framework. Next, I consider comics, and how they fit into the project, emphasizing the importance of the visual to biographical research. Finally, I outline the research design and discuss ethical considerations important throughout the research process.

First I offer a recap of the research questions guiding the project, and provide a succinct summary of the project.

### Project Summary

As discussed previously this project sought to answer the following questions:

1. *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*
2. *To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*
3. *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?*
4. *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*

From the interpretivist epistemological and constructionist ontological basis of the project, it follows that the research questions are suitably focussed on the specificity and subjectivity of experience. So a methodological framework is required that places subjectivity and specificity at its centre, i.e. biographical research.

In order to answer the research questions the project used three specific and distinct techniques drawn from the interdisciplinary field of biographical research. These are (1) Biographical Interviews; (2) Participant Produced Comics; and (3) Visual Autoethnography (my comic- see Insert). This chapter explains the reasoning behind use of these particular techniques, vis-à-vis the biographical research field, theoretical framework and research questions, and explains exactly how these methods were used, and explains the way in which data has been analysed.

The matrix below (Table 2) offers a brief summary of the theoretical foundations of the project, the central concepts guiding the project, and the research questions. Later in this chapter, I outline the research design of the project in-depth.

## Biographical Research

As discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework, this biographical project emerged from an interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology, in which subjectivity and specificity are key concerns. Scholars within the field of biographical research have described storytelling as an "*ontological condition*

*of human life*" (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2009: 219). This means that storytelling is important to how individuals give meaning to the reality of lived experience. Biographical research concerns itself with examining these stories and, in contrast to objectivist approaches, places value on subjectivity. This section offers an overview of the field of biographical research, and explains my motivations for employing biographical research methods. Biographical research provides the project with a means of exploring the lives of vegans from a situated, reflexive standpoint. The ideas and arguments presented by biographical research scholars such as Bornat (2008), Roberts (2002; 2004; 2012), Sparkes (2000; 2002; 2007; 2009), Reissman (1993, 2002), Plummer (1983), Denzin (1970, 1989) and O'Neill, Roberts and Sparkes (2014) have been instrumental in shaping the methodological character of this research project.

**Table 1- Arriving at Research Questions**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theoretical Foundations | Interpretivist Epistemology; Constructionist Ontology; Intersectional Feminist, Critical and Queer Theories. |
| Guiding Concepts | Phenomenological focus on Specificity and Subjectivity; Law's (2004) Mess in Social Science; Queer Critique of Formal Modes of Representation; Lorde's (1977) epistemological critique; Fluidity of Identity as 'Relational Achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010); Challenging Value Dualisms; Situated Knowledge; Reflexivity. Normalization. |
| Research Questions | 1. Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?<br>2. To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?<br>3. How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?<br>4. Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation? |

Based on the principle that life stories represent a rich interpretive ground for the formulation of substantive theories, biographical research focusses on lives (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984). Roberts (2002: 1) describes biographical research as

> *"An exciting, stimulating and fast-moving field which seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future".*

Bamberg (2006) highlights the significant critical challenge that biographical and narrative research has posed for the role of the researcher in data gathering and interpretive processes. This critical engagement with the subjectivity and 'situatedness' of the researcher is a key facet of the field, which links back to concepts of Reflexivity and Situated Knowledge discussed in Chapter 3. A variety of methods have been used under the broad heading of biographical research. Various authors have placed focus on the collection and interpretation of 'personal documents' or 'human documents', including interview transcripts, diaries, autobiographies (Denzin, 1970; Plummer, 1983; Roberts, 2002). These are used to try to understand individuals' life narratives, and to view events, actions, value systems etc. from the perspective of the participant (Roberts, 2002: 1, 3).

Bornat (2008: 344) describes 'biographical methods' as:

> *"[An] assembly of loosely related, variously titled activities: narrative, life history, oral history, autobiography, biographical interpretive methods, storytelling, auto/biography, ethnography, reminiscence*"
> Bornat (2008: 344)

The emphasis biographical research places on 'the biographical' entails a focus on individual lives, and attempts to understand specific life stories within their broader cultural, historical, political and social context. Furthermore, like the theoretical framework of the thesis (Chapter 3), biographical research entails a questioning and rejection of rigid, fixed dualist distinctions between structure and agency; individual and collective. These binary oppositions present an overly dichotomised view of social life, which has problematic implications for sociology in general. Or, in other words no "*single self*" can truly be *"understood in isolation from networks of interwoven biographies*" (Stanley and Morgan, 1993: 2 in Roberts and Kyllonen).

The origins of biographical research have been traced to James Boswell's 18th century biography of Samuel Johnson (Boswell, 1986), and early 20th century projects such as mass-observation (Hinton, 2010), and the Chicago school of sociology, particularly Thomas and Znaniecki study of 'Polish Peasants' (1918/1927). Thomas and Znanieki drew influence from phenomenological approaches (see Chapter 3) that explore how people understand experiences and how those experiences transform into consciousness, both on an individual and on a collective level (Patton, 2002:

104). This entails an in-depth qualitative methodological approach focused on first hand individual experience, looking deeply into the ways individuals perceive, describe, understand and feel about experiences (Patton, 2002).

Biographical sociology continued to develop in West Germany during the 1970s, in connection with symbolic interactionism, pragmatism and hermeneutics, particularly through the work of Fritz Schutze (1977 in Apitzch and Siouti, 2007). Schutze's model for an open narrative form of interviewing and his procedure for analysing narrative texts, within the area of sociolinguistic theory, became a central interpretive approach in biographical sociology. often described as the 'Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method' as developed by people like Wengraff (2001), Rosenthal (1991). More recently, biographical research has grown in popularity.

### Biographical Research in the Mainstream

Biographical methods have become 'mainstream' research practice (Roberts, 2014: 11). This is evidenced in the wide variety of programmes related to biographical methods on offer in UK universities, as well as the various centres (e.g. Centre for Life Writing and Life Writing Research, Mass-Observation, Centre for Narrative Research, Working Lives Research Institute, Centre for Narrative and Auto/Biographical Studies), study groups and conferences (including the International Sociology Association's (ISA) Research Committee on Biography and Society, the European Sociology Association's (ESA) Biographical Perspectives on European Societies group, the British Sociology Association's (BSA) Auto/Biography Study Group and bi-annual conference), alongside the growing abundance of published material available (e.g. Auto/Biography Study Group annual yearbook).

As this non-exhaustive list illustrates, biographical research spans various academic disciplines, and its reach has expanded beyond the traditional boundaries of academia into professional practice, for example the prevalence of biographically influenced practice within health and welfare professions (Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, 1998; Hyden, 1997). This trend only looks set to continue, with increasing focus on the biographical dimensions of life experience, that include the sensual, emotional, performative and visual, coming to the fore in academic research (Reissman, 2002). This is coupled with a problematisation of traditional researcher/participant, author/audience relations, and more awareness and acknowledgement of reflexivity

within research projects. Outside of the academy, one might also note the sustained popularity of celebrity biography and autobiography in bestseller lists, which points to continuing public interest in, and engagement with, the life narratives of notable individuals.

**The Process of Biographical Research**

The interdisciplinarity of the biographical research field is significant, Bornat (2008) highlights how the use of these methods have at times run parallel with one another across various disciplines, often without the acknowledgement of the overlap between, and direct comparability of, many of these techniques. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinarity of biographical research as a field implies an approach in which "*theory and empirical investigation are interwoven… during or at the end of field work rather than as a precursor to it*" (Bryman, 1988: 81). In doing so it attempts to view social life in processual as opposed to static terms (Bryman, 1988: 61). Generally, in biographical research, data analysis is not a chronologically separate stage of a project, but it enmeshed in the research process from the beginning.

Denzin (1989, 11) espouses a process of 'Interpretive Biography' as "*creating literary, narrative, accounts and representations of lived experiences… Telling and inscribing stories*". This frequently entails a focus on 'turning point' moments in individuals' lives (Denzin, 1989). Lincoln and Denzin (2003: 241) see biographical interpretive methods as resting on *"the collection, analysis and performance of stories, accounts and narratives that speak to 'turning point' (liminal, epiphanic) moments in people's lives… Significant biographical experiences are recorded, told and retold in narrative form"*. For Denzin (1989) meaning is not fixed and stable in the lives of individuals. This notion prevails in social science, and is referred to as a '*metaphysics of presence*' by Derrida (1982: 250, in Denzin, 1989). Denzin supports Derrida's assertion that there is no unobstructed way to look into the inner life of individuals, our observation is always mediated by language, culture and meaning, all of which are in a state of constant flux.

Drawing from Mills' 'The Sociological Imagination' (Mills, 1959/2000), Denzin (1989: 25) argues that the true challenge of sociology is to connect the specific biographical experiences of individuals within society to the broader cultural and social processes and structures, and to attempt to understand each in relation to and

in interaction with one another. Furthermore, we must trust those we study as the true experts on their own experiences, and we must value the meanings they give to these experiences. For Denzin (1989) the process of constructing a biography involves the collation and construction of disparate parts into coherent narratives. We must be aware of the subjective processes that go into eliciting accounts of real lives.

Biographical research is appealing because it gives precedent to individual accounts of life experience, within a given social and cultural context; it charts and records social and cultural developments, not just at a broad general level, but at a personal and intersubjective level (Roberts, 2002: 5). The next section focuses on some specific ideas emerging from biographical research that have particularly influenced this project. Specifically, 'Turning Points' as discussed by authors such as Roberts (2002) and Denzin (1989), and the principles of 'intersectionality', associated with Crenshaw (1989) and 'standpoint', associated with Haraway (1988).

**'Turning Point' Moments**

Roberts (2004:8) identifies 'significant moments' as a common theme of life narratives, particularly when looking at political narratives. These can be defined as moments that produce shifts in outlook, commitments and behaviour. Denzin (2001: 145 in Roberts, 2004: 8) describes these moments as 'turning points'.

> *"Meaningful biographical experience occurs during turning-point interactional episodes. In these existentially problematic moments, human character is revealed and human lives are shaped, sometimes irrevocably"*

'Turning Points' have been a focus of much research and have particular significance within the field of biographical sociology. For example, scholars within 'Desistance Theory' have looked to 'turning points' as being crucial to understandings of desistance from crime (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002). Laub and Sampson (2001) argue that various factors, including transformations of identity, can also have an impact on desistance from crime. Citing Vaughan's concept of 'uncoupling' of relationships, which is used to describe the process of separation that occurs, before, during and after a divorce (Vaughan, 1986 in Laub and Sampson, 2001), the authors suggest that desistance should best be understood as a process not a discrete event (Laub and Sampson, 2001). These ideas are instructive when

conceptualising the process by which someone goes vegan, or stops being vegan, as well as the process by which someone gets more or less involved in radical activism. The crucial point is the focus on these processes and their relation to turning points in life narratives. This idea has influenced the data analysis process of this project.

### Biography and Reflexivity

I am vegan; my biography is important to producing a reflexive research process (Oakley, 2004). The idea of generating knowledge from within a particular identity is fundamentally linked to feminist theory, particularly that of 'standpoint' (Smith, 1987a, 1987b; Hartsock, 1983). Feminists have acknowledges the importance of women's experience, as a source of expert knowledge, and of respecting women's specific locations within social and political frameworks (DeVault, 1990). This does not imply that all women share a single homogenous experience, but accepts the identity category as meaningful and important to the heterogeneous experiences of those to whom it applies. This project applies these principles to those who identify as vegan. In acknowledging my own biography, the project aims to contribute towards the goal of reflexivity.

Haraway's (1988) concept of 'situated knowledge' is relevant to reflexive biographical research principles. 'Situated knowledge' (discussed in Chapter 3), is knowledge particular to one's situation or context, e.g. one's place in society or identity categorisations. It is distinct from knowledge produced through empiricism and scientific methods, as it is generated through experience, rather than through hypothetico-deductive methodologies. Haraway (1988) favours situated knowledge as embodied and conceivable, outside of the realms of scientific objectivity; it can be held accountable in ways that certain forms of empiricism cannot. Situated knowledge can provide a valuable and instructive window into the experience of the subjugated. This project has attempted to draw out the voices of vegans, in an often unsympathetic and at times hostile discursive context. It values the situated knowledge of the research participants, and indeed my own situated knowledge as a vegan.

### Why Biographical Research?

I chose to utilise a biographical approach in this project for four main reasons. Firstly,

biographical research is appropriate to address the research questions. Biographical research is a participant-centred approach to research, focussing on the meanings and understandings participants give to their experiences (Roberts, 2002), this means that it is ideal for answering the research questions, in particular number 1: *which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*

Secondly, biographical research is compatible with the critical theoretical approach, discussed in Chapter 3. The focus on specificity and subjectivity is compatible with the project's underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions. Furthermore, biographical research seeks to highlight the voices of marginalized (Muncey, 2010) and to produce counter-narratives to dominant hegemonic power relations (O'Neill, 2010); this is a cornerstone of the critical theories underpinning the project- such as feminism and CAS.

Thirdly, biographical research is compatible with the intersectional and reflexive theoretical framework of the project. Researchers are not expected to achieve objective outsider status in biographical research (Oakley, 2004). This contributes to the project's reflexive aims, in acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher and the impact of this subjectivity on the research process. It contributes to the aims of intersectionality by highlighting the situatedness of the researcher, and how intersecting social factors impact upon the lives of participants.

Fourthly, biographical research is compatible with the aim of deconstructing binary dualisms through the research process. A core theme of the project has been moving beyond binary understandings. Biographical research contributes to this, through its commitment to breaking down conventional binary modes of thinking about methodology, dismantling and challenging researcher/participant and academic/non-academic binaries. For these key reasons, biographical research was an appropriate approach to use in the project, due to its compatibility with the underlying theoretical framework.

The three key theoretical approaches informing the project are shown in Figure 1, a Venn Diagram. Each is founded on the interpretivist epistemology, constructionist ontology and phenomenological philosophy of the research. These are three separate but often overlapping traditions, and this project highlights the overlap. Critical theory approaches, such as feminism, have sought to address

injustice and pursue emancipatory aims. More recent developments in critical theory have united previously separate struggles into one intersectional struggle against oppression and domination. This intersectional approach unites feminist, critical Pedagogical, CAS and other approaches. This project takes the necessity of a unified emancipatory politic as one of its core conceptual assumptions, and builds upon methodological approaches that have developed from these critical theories. Queer theory developed out of post-structural critical theories, and has sought to build upon their challenge to binary value dualisms. In particular, this queer tradition has critiqued essentialist notions of identity, moving beyond fixed, objective categorizations towards fluid, and contingent conceptions of identity. Queer theory's focus on normalization, as the process by which identities are mediated, and within which their fluidity is evidenced, is a core assumption of this project. Biographical research draws from the same tradition of practice as feminist research, especially through the focus on the marginalized and the importance of storytelling and subjective lived experience. The use of biographical research (incorporating visual and autoethnographic elements) and the use of reflexive narrative practices tie the project together conceptually and methodologically.

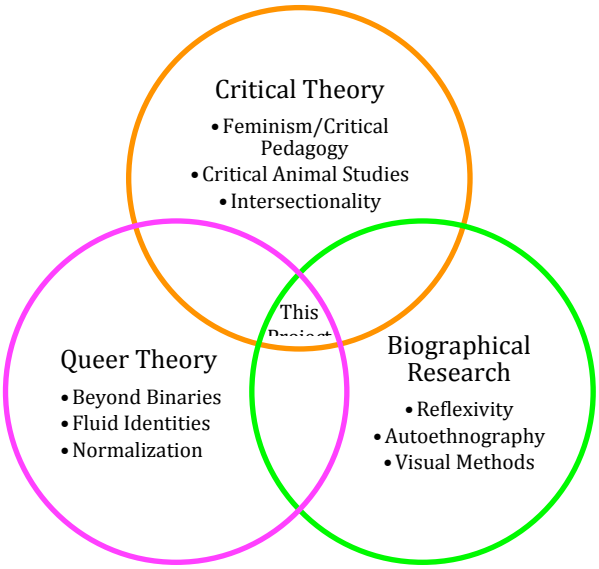


**Figure 1- Compatibility of Biographical Research with Theoretical Framework**

The next section focuses on autoethnography as a biographical research technique, to explain my decision to use it.

## Autoethnography

The previous section provided an overview of biographical research, explaining some key concepts, and discussing how biographical research is compatible with the theoretical framework and research questions of this project. This section discusses autoethnography, one specific biographical method used in the project. It explains my motivations for using autoethnography in this project, as a reflexive, dynamic method of biographical inquiry.

Sociologists have long since been concerned with "*turning back the experience of the individual upon [themselves]*" (Mead, 1934: 134). What is now known as, 'reflexivity' is evident in the emergence of autoethnography as an approach to social research. Many authors have highlighted the reflexive strengths of autoethnographic methods (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Muncey, 2010; Chang, 2008; Spry, 2001; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000). However, others, most notably, Sara Delamont (2009), view it less favourably. This section explores autoethnography and why I chose to use it in this project.

### Defining Autoethnography

Autoethnography developed from biographical research (Muncey, 2010). The decision to incorporate an autoethnographic element in this research is underpinned by the coalescing impact of many different bodies of literature on the project; primarily, a constructionist ontological stance (with a focus on subjectivity); Lorde's (1977) epistemological critique; biographical methods (through their focus on narrative); and the tenets of theories of normalization in particular queer theory (through its critique of formal modes of representation).

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011: 273) define autoethnography as "*an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (graphy) personal experience (ethno)*". It entails the use of autobiographical and ethnographic techniques, and should thus be regarded as both a process and a product of research. Autoethnography strives to challenge the conventions of social research, placing the human being behind the research at its centre. It provides an accessible way of representing research, which is "*grounded in everyday life*" (Plummer, 2003: 522). Autoethnography focuses on specificity and subjectivity, and represents a

bourgeoning and exciting methodological apparatus in social research (Sparkes, 2002; Jones, 2005). Autoethnography has been defined as "*a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others*" (Spry, 2001: 710).

Like biographical research, autoethnography offers opportunities for accessing silenced and marginal voices, particularly where authors belong to groups who have been subject to oppression and domination. Muncey (2010) studied the emergence and progress of autoethnography, grounding the study in her own context, gendered experience and professional experience as a nurse. Pointing to various trends, like recent academic focus on subjectivity, and the importance of 'having a voice' in healthcare contexts, she argues that the relevance of narrative inquiry is growing. Next, I explain how autoethnography is compatible with the queer aspects of the theoretical framework of the project.

**Queering Biographical Methods**

Queer research and biographical research each entail a deliberate focus on fluidity, intersubjectivity and 'the particular', and each seek to question and challenge normative discourses (Jones and Adams, 2010; Giffney and O'Rourke, 2009). Butler's (1990) rejection of value dualisms, and focus on fluid identities presupposes an engagement with non-typical methodologies and ones that might embrace a flexible epistemological position, as well as working towards a form of positive praxis or "*praxis as purposeful knowledge*" (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006, p12).

One significant way that so-called 'abnormal' lives are controlled and normalized is through being written about. People who do not belong to a dominant ideology tend be seen as homogenous, or the heterogeneity of their experience is underrepresented. This produces accounts that are not just inaccurate, but also limiting to the people whose identities are being "*re-inscribed, often in subtle, but damaging ways*" (Richards, 2008: 1720). An example of how this occurs is through stories of illness, which have a tendency to reduce individuals to stories of the disease itself, instead of stories of how a disease has impacted on a person's life or biography (Sullivan, 1986 in Richards, 2008). Richards (2008: 1726), argues that autoethnography is a suitable means of addressing this problem of representation, and can also help to open up academic accounts of particular groups and experiences to laypersons.

There is a tendency for authors working within 'queer' conceptual frames to ignore or skim over any inconsistencies that may arise between their methodology and the 'queer' theory underpinning the research (Browne and Nash, 2010). Queer theory's commitment to challenging normative frameworks, and to hearing the voices of those on the fringes over dominant discourse, has methodological implications. However, the practicalities of this dynamic are often overlooked in queer literature. For example, queer theory has challenged the notion of fixed identity categorisations, instead arguing that identity is fluid and fleeting; how then can we, as social researchers, succeed in accessing data from such unstable sources, and what conclusions can be drawn from data which is necessarily momentary in nature? (Browne and Nash, 2010: 5).

Rook (2010) argues that methods associated with ethnography offer worthwhile insights into the formation and reformation of queer identities. Rook (2010: 25) challenges the assumption that it is possible for a critical research to achieve a level of 'distance' when writing up a piece of research. She echoes the work of other queer scholars in challenging the notion of a fixed 'self'. Reflexivity, is central to ensuring that our work acknowledges the fluid and changing boundaries of the 'field'. As such, reflexivity is central to my own project, for example, through the use of a research diary.

There are many important overlaps between biographical research and queer theory. Biographical research seeks to understand both the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, and to provide interpretations of these accounts (Roberts, 2002). Alheit (1994 in Apitzch and Siouti, 2007) describes biography as a design template for subjective self-representation and self-authentication; this coincides with the anti-oppressive principles of queer theory, as well as its deliberate focus on 'the specific'. Biographical sociologists and queer scholars have similarly conceptualized identity as a social, relational or interactional achievement (Butler, 1990, 1993a; Connell, 1995; Jones and Adams, 2010).

Plummer (1983: 55) argues that "*biographies are in a constant state of becoming and as they evolve so their subjective accounts evolve*", lending further support to queer focus on fluidity. Plummer's (1995:50) discusses the transformative power of 'coming out' narratives, in particular those of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer (LGBTQ) people, and of survivors of rape and sexual

abuse. 'Coming out' represents a "*shift in consciousness, a recovery through which negative experience is turned into a positive identity*". Whilst these narratives are invariably heroic in nature, Plummer also considers the more prosaic and mundane 'coming out' narratives, similar to Denzin's (1989) work on 'turning point' moments. Plummer's work unites queer studies and biographical research; his focus on sexual stories repositions narratives, previously considered to be private and personal, as increasingly drawn into a political context and having an important role in social change.

**'Autoethnography is a Queer Method'**

Jones and Adams (2010) argue that autoethnography is a queer method. Both refuse received notions of orthodox methodologies and focus on fluidity, intersubjectivity and responsiveness to particularities (Plummer, 2005; Ronai, 1995; Spry, 2001 in Jones and Adams, 2010). Both refuse to close down inventiveness, refuse static legitimacy (Foucualt, 1981; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005 in Jones and Adams, 2010). Both embrace an opportunistic stance towards existing and normalizing techniques in qualitative inquiry, choosing to borrow, refashion and retell methods and theory in inventive ways (Hilfrisch, 2006: 218-19; Koro-Ljungberg, 2004; Plummer, 2005 in Jones and Adams, 2010) Both place selves at their centre, whilst simultaneously working against a stable sense of experience. Both are deeply political, displaying a clear commitment to refiguring and refashioning, questioning normative discourses and acts, and undermining and refiguring how lives (and lives worth living) come into being (Denzin, 2006: Warner, 1993; Yep, Lovaas and Elia, 2003 in Jones and Adams, 2010). Jones and Adams, (2010: 209) explore the multiple possible uses of autoethnography, especially in '*journeys of self understanding that are relational and not restricted by the limits of categories, while proposing challenges to normative ideologies and discourses'*. Thus, autoethnography is compatible with the queer theoretical framework of the project.

**Criticisms of Autoethnography**

A convincing and impassioned argument is made against the use of autoethnography in social research, the recent expansion of which Delamont considers detrimental to the current trajectory of qualitative inquiry. "*I see [it] as almost entirely pernicious.*

*Autoethnography is essentially lazy – literally lazy and also intellectually lazy.*" (Delamont, 2009: 2). Delamont (2009: 59) argues that autoethnography betrays Becker's (1967) classic question "*whose side are we on*?" by focussing on the wrong people. It focuses on privileged, powerful academics, instead of the oppressed and the marginalized. For Delamont (2009: 61) it is narcissistic and an "*abrogation of the honourable field of the scholar*". She argues that sociologists are simply not interesting enough to warrant valuable space in research papers, where those in positions of less privilege should be our focus. Delamont suggests that rather than authors wishing to engage in autoethnography, they should instead focus on autobiographical reflexivity, as a similar but superior methodological approach. Acknowledging that the difference between what she calls 'reflexive autobiographical writing' and 'autoethnography' is complicated, due to the large areas of overlap, Delamont sees autoethnography, as defined in her terms, as *"an intellectual cul de sac"* (Delamont, 2009: 51).

However, Delamont's (2009) position that autoethnography focuses on the 'wrong' people, is arguably reductive of the experience of marginalized academics. For example, one reason queer theory has embraced autoethnography so willingly, is that many of those who use it do not inhabit such objectively 'privileged' identities, and find the assumption that research is universally produced from positions of privilege must be picked apart. For example, Nordmarken (2012) used their academic expertise and their personal experience to inform a performance autoethnography on the emotional experience of someone undergoing a sexed transition. Nordmarken's transgender identity and gender-ambiguous body placed them in a unique position to produce valuable first hand data from a position of subjugation. Similarly, Richard's (2008) work on illness is greatly benefitted from the researcher's own experiences of chronic illness, and the autoethnographic insights that this experiential knowledge helped produce. Nevertheless, it is important to engage with these debates and critiques, and they have influenced the design of the research.

**Why Autoethnography?**

I have decided to utilize autoethnography, within this biographical project, for the following four key reasons. Firstly, autoethnography provides an appropriate means of meeting the project's aims, specifically producing reflexive research, limiting distance and hierarchy between researcher and participant and acknowledging

subjectivity. In producing an autoethnography about my own experiences, I participated in the project in a similar way to participants. My own experiences are not regarded as above the project, nor do they contaminate the research.

Secondly, autoethnography is compatible with the tenets of queer theory, which in turn provides many of the conceptual assumptions underpinning the project (such as normalization and fluid identities). As discussed earlier, autoethnography has been described as a queer method, due to its refusal of received notions of orthodox methodologies and focus on fluidity, intersubjectivity and responsiveness to particularities (Jones and Adams, 2010).

Thirdly, autoethnography is compatible with the project's reflexive aims. In giving the researcher a narrative presence within the research, autoethnography turns a mirror on the research process, highlighting the subjectivity of the author. The autoethnographic comic I produced is presented alongside the thesis (see Insert). In it I was able to reflect on aspects of the project that had not gone according to plan, as well as other forms of 'mess' that occurred. For example, I encountered suspicion from potential participants possibly as a result of heightened awareness of police infiltration into activist movements. The comic provided me allowed me to reflect on this, and to discuss it in relation to my own biography as a life long vegetarian and long-term vegan.

Fourthly, autoethnography is compatible with the epistemological and ontological ideas that underpin the research, chiefly, the idea that knowledge is fundamentally contested, and that our descriptions of reality are not benign and have an impact on reality itself (see Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework). This project entails a personal autoethnographic journey, as well as a more conventional data collection process. In conducting and writing up the research, I hoped to work to trouble boundaries between research/researcher, field/academy and data/theory as I conduct and carry out the project. Performative social research also undermines assumed binary dualisms in research (such as researcher/researched and writing/representation). The next section discusses the use of comics and visual methods, as a biographic approach to studying veganism and animal advocacy.

## Comics and Visual Methodologies

Biographical research represents an appropriate methodological approach for addressing the research questions, which is compatible with the theoretical framework. This section considers visual methods, in particular comics, as being another useful biographical research tool to utilize. I explained earlier that I have a longstanding personal interest in comics as a medium. Ever since I was a young child I have loved reading comics, and have at certain times created my own crudely drawn comics to express myself. This section looks at my motivations for using comics, especially in relation to visual methods more broadly, linking back to biographical research principles, and elements of the theoretical framework.

**Visual Methodologies**

> *"It is perhaps to the tools of the novelist, the poet and the artist that the social scientists should turn"*
> (Plummer, 1983, p. 106)

For some authors, 'the visual' is the most significant human sense (Rose, 2012). According to Berger (1972: 7), "*seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak*". Jay (1993) has used the term 'Ocularcentrism' to describe the centrality of the visual to contemporary Western life[17]. Berger uses the expression 'ways of seeing' to signify the complex process by which we engage with the visual; "*we never look just at one thing, we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves*" (Berger, 1972: 9, in Rose, 2012: 13).

> "*Visual imagery is never innocent, it is constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges. A critical approach to the visual is therefore needed: one that takes into account the agency of the image, considers the social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences, including the academic critic."* (Rose, 2012: 17)

Accepting the significance of the visual, this project intended to explore the use of visual material- specifically comics- in an academic context. Academic inquiry is typically restricted to certain pre-approved established modes of representation presented, and this tends to mean that we, as academics, work within strict guidelines when it comes to presenting our work. Building on Lorde's (1977) 'epistemological

[17] The dominance of the visual has been challenged as problematic, particularly through feminist critiques of the 'male gaze', wherein, heterosexual male experience is assumed to be universal and women are objectified and disempowered (Mulvey, 1975).

critique' and queer challenges to formal representation, this project intended to contribute to the broader social scientific task of "*exploring means of (re)presentation that embrace the humaneness of social science pursuits*" (Jones, 2006: 67). Therefore, the project took inspiration from the use of visual methods in its research design and methodology (Rose, 2012; Pink, 2009; O'Neill and Giddens, 2001; O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006; O'Neill, 1999, 2008, 2010; O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010).

Visual methods are, arguably, attuned with biographical research. Denzin (1989: 69) argues that within biographical research "*it is necessary to get as close to actual experience as possible*" in order to "*capture, probe, and render understandable problematic experience*". This focus on specificity and in-depth analysis also lends itself well to visual methods, where a clearer image of the subject in question frequently relies on proximity and specific focus (Rose, 2012).

**'Purposeful Knowledge'**

O'Neill (2010) highlights the value of visual and biographical methods in creating space for the voices of the politically marginal, thus challenging negative stereotypes, raising public awareness around social issues, and producing political 'texts' with real potential for social transformation (O'Neill, 2010: 22). Since the early nineties, O'Neill's work has focused on the use of critical theory and combining art and narrative approaches (O'Neill and Giddens, 2001; O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006; O'Neill, 1999, 2008, 2010, 2012; O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010). Novel approaches such as 'ethno-mimesis' combine visual and participatory methods in order to transgress dominant narratives surrounding marginal social groups, and give participants a platform to tell their stories from, within a hostile discourse and power/knowledge axis (O'Neill, 2010).

This can generate 'purposeful knowledge' as a form of praxis (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006: 12). That is, acknowledging the political context and significance of the knowledge produced, and ensuring that the knowledge produced served a positive purpose in the lives of participants, rather than treating the knowledge produced as neutral or benign. This partly visual approach inspired my own use of comics as an arts-based method in order to create space for vegan experiences to be documented within academia, and to challenge dominant knowledge/power axis

surrounding human-animal relations in the hope of producing 'purposeful knowledge'. However, comics are uncommon in academia.

### Comics in Academia

Here, I briefly explain some background to the use of comics in this project. I begin by defining comics, before discussing the changing perceptions of comics. I then consider comics as a distinct artistic medium, before finally discussing how comics have been used in an academic context. My personal interest in comics led me to explore the potential use of comics in an academic context, in relation to visual research practice, this is something I have explored previously in the form of academic comics, and posters, which combine arts practice, such as illustration, with academic methodologies (Stephens Griffin, 2012). I have also demonstrated the value of comics as a source of biographical data (Stephens Griffin, 2014). In particular, I draw inspiration from Harvey Pekar (quoted in Duncan and Smith, 2009: 17) "*It's words and pictures, you can do anything you want with words and pictures*".

### Defining Comics

For clarity, this research has opted to define comics in broad terms. I acknowledge that, much like any other artistic mode of expression, debate ensues as to the nature of the medium. Indeed, other terms have been suggested to distinguish particular types or genres of visual/textual productions, such as 'graphic novel' and 'cartoon', but the term 'comics' is the one I have chosen. For Magnussen and Christiansen (2000), comics are "*a narrative medium utilizing visual and/or textual modes of expression".* Eisner (1985) has defined the medium more broadly as "*sequential art*". Heeding these definitions, the term comic is used within this project to refer to '*a literary medium using words and images to tell a story or communicate ideas*'.

In the past comics have suffered from a poor reputation. They have been assumed to be a childish and unsophisticated medium (Duncan and Smith, 2009), forever equated with disposable superhero stories and repetitive four-panel cartoons in newspapers. Some even saw comics as a "*dangerous products of culture*", which threaten society and produce "*negative effects*" in the reader (Duncan and Smith, 2009: 270). However, increasingly comics are being accepted and embraced as an expressive, dynamic and multi-faceted medium with which to communicate (Dziedric

and Peacock, 1997). This is evidenced in the increasing critical acclaim of comic creators in literary and journalistic circles. Despite this, comics remain relatively underrepresented as a topic for academic consideration.

**Comics in Academic Contexts**

The potential for complex messages to be conveyed through comics, and for simultaneous, complimentary or conflicting narratives operating via words and images, is discussed by Duncan and Smith (2009 :287). Recent developments in comics scholarship has seen a greater focus on establishing a language and discourse, in which comics can be critiqued on their own terms, that is, not as an appendage to literary prose or animation. Comics remain marginal in an academic context, although not altogether absent. They have increasingly found their way into academic thinking, as both a useful method and occasionally as a mode of representation. The following section discusses some selected examples.

Comics have been used in a therapeutic context, as a means of enabling individuals living with illness to express themselves. Art therapy is an established mode of psychotherapy that uses visual art media, as its primary mode of communication, to facilitate change and personal improvement, through the use of art materials (BAAT, 2014). Similar therapeutic uses of comics can also be seen in the 'better, drawn' project (Better, Drawn, 2011). Comics have also been used in academia in a more functional context. Plowman and Stephen (2008) used comics to represent video data in a static print journal (Figure 2 below). This example highlights some advantages of the medium in simultaneously presenting visual, verbal and descriptive data. It is evidence of the strengths of comics, and of their potential academic legitimacy.

**Figure 2- Pictorial Representations (Plowman and Stephen, 2008)**

Comics have also been used as a means of literally and symbolically emphasising the 'messy' parts of a research process, which are usually deliberately hidden (Jones and Evans, 2011); see Figure 3. The use of comics in research has the potential to allow for greater researcher reflexivity. Likewise it may help to better emphasise the contribution and creativity of participants in the research process.

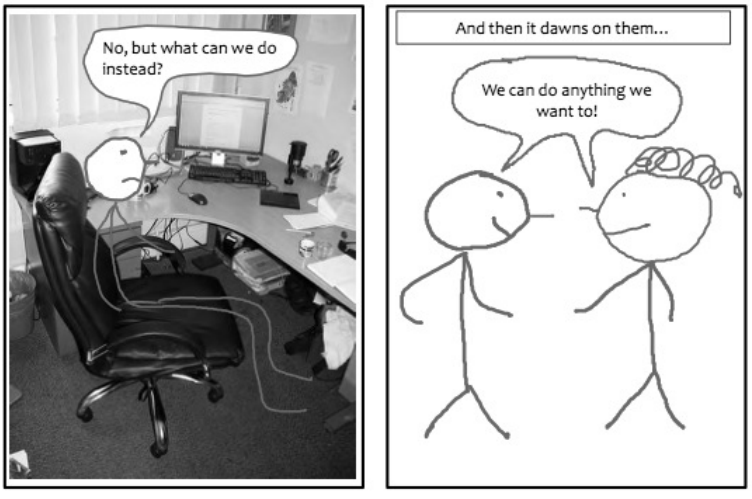


**Figure 3- Creativity and Project Management (Jones and Evans, 2011)**

Han (2008) produced a comic called '*Missionary*', as an attempt to experiment with new forms of academic presentation. Comics, Han argues, are an '*accessible media for readers inside and outside of academia*' and can produce a "*provocative blend of intimate self-reflexivity and incisive social criticism*" (Han, 2008: 58). In the

author's field of Geography, charts, maps and even illustrations are important and accepted aspects of academic representation. However, Han wanted her comic not to simply '*illustrate the writing*' but to "*play with successive images and their productive coexistence with words*" (Han, 2008: 58). Focussing on the narrative and storytelling aspects of the medium, Han's comic was not focussed on realism or style of drawings. The comic itself is a 24 page explanation of the author's PhD research, and was produced in 24 hours-as part of a 24 hour comic creation challenge (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4- Excerpt from 'Missionary' (Han, 2008)**

'Collectif De Recherche Sur L'Autonomie Collective' (CRAC) describes itself as an "*anti-authoritarian feminist queer anti-racist anti-colonitalist research collective in Montreal that engages in Participatory-Action Research of Montreal anti-authoritarian groups and networks*" (Daring et al, 2012: 243). The CRAC collective "*queer the script*" by producing comics exploring conversations about gender and sexual politics within

radical communities, and how gender, sexuality and sex relate to direct action and daily life as an anarchist (Daring et al, 2012: 16). CRAC's (2012) use of the comic medium aligns with queer theory's commitment to challenging formal modes of representation in academic contexts (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5- A Diversity of Sex Tactics (CRAC, 2012)**

Within arts disciplines such as graphic design, comics are far more prevalent as a mode of representation. In 2014, Nick Sousanis completed his PhD thesis at Columbia University, entirely in comic book form (Sousanis, 2014). The thesis itself is a study of comics in the field of 'Interdisciplinary Studies', and argues- both literally and through its very form- in favour of visual thinking and for the value of visual forms in teaching and academic contexts. Tavares (2011) produced a graphic novel for her Masters thesis in Art and Graphic Design at Auckland University of Technology. Entitled *Carnival Land: a performance of metaphors*, she draws from the field of autoethnography to produce a fictional narrative on the topic of identity and bilingualism. Whilst these examples are not drawn from the field of biographical sociology, they demonstrate a precedent for further use of comic autoethnography of the kind represented by this project, and each have informed my use of comics.

**Why Comics?**

I decided to utilise comics in this project for four key reasons. The first is that it helps me to answer a core research question; specifically *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?* In using comics as

a method, and a means of representation, the project itself is subject to the benefits and pitfalls of the medium, and this provides an ideal means of exploring the question (see Insert). Having conducted an extensive literature and database search, this project is, to my knowledge, one of the first of its kind to specifically utilize comics and autoethnography in this way within a biographical sociology paradigm.

Secondly, it allows the project to be reflexive. I produced an autoethnographic comic about my experiences, thus, simultaneously challenging the perceived objectivity of the researcher, as well as the dominance of written form in academic contexts. As an attempt to dispel the "*myth of the invisible, omniscient author*" (Tierney, 2002: 66), the inclusion of a visual representation of the author within the research works towards that same end. It underlined my own subjectivity as a vegan, conducting the research, but it also allowed me to explore my own reflections on the project, in a non-typical medium, producing insights and ideas that might otherwise be absent.

Thirdly, comics fit within the project's biographical research paradigm. O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) stress the importance of the visual to the field of biographical research, especially in representing the "*unsayable*". The authors have argued that biographical work, represented visually as well as textually, can help to illuminate the experience of individuals, and "*bring us into contact with reality in ways we cannot forget*" (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006: 49-50). This in turn can provide a forceful counter narrative to the hegemonic understandings of power and knowledge in society (Chapter 3), and thus, might allow the transgression of dominant understandings of veganism and animal advocacy, and potentially human-animal relations more broadly. Comics may eventually sit alongside other more established biographical methods. For example, the use of comics shares some of the advantages of photo-elicitation methods, particularly in allowing participants to engage in a project visually, as well as through interviews. Harper (2002: 23) argues that "*photo-elicitation mines deeper shafts into deeper mines of human consciousness… than word-alone interviews*"- the same can arguably be said for this approach. However, where photographs capture moments of reality, comics have the capacity for potentially limitless imagination; this approach sits happily alongside photo-elicitation as a valuable visual biographical method.

Fourthly, I feel that the use of comics 'troubles' the process of reading academic work, and in this sense is compatible with Lorde's (1977) epistemological critique and queer theory's commitment to novel and challenging academic forms. Comics will be accessible to diverse and non-academic audiences, and will challenge the nature of formal modes of academic representation through the use of a non-conventional narrative medium. Furthermore, the expectation placed on participants to produce a comic and the responsibility this implies, indicated that their role was active rather than passive, and that they had agency and a degree of autonomy within the project. This relates to the idea of 'performance narratives' in research; which mute the voice of the narrator and amplify the participant's voice (Chase, 2005: 665). The use of comics also ties in neatly with the methodological and theoretical foundations of the research (discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework).

### Section Summary

This project is a biographical, visual and reflexive study of animal advocacy, conducted from situated vegan perspective. I utilise biographical methods in the form of biographical interviews, autoethnography and comics created by participants about their lives. In this section I have examined the field of biographical research in relation to the theoretical framework of the project. I have explained how biographical research is compatible with the conceptual assumptions that underpin the project, and with the research questions.

The project is built upon interpretivist epistemological and constructionist ontological foundations; from this starting point there are three main conceptual fields represented (as illustrated in Figure 1). Firstly, critical theory, incorporating intersectional feminist and CAS approaches. These provide the political impetus for the project, as seeking to challenge dominant hegemonic understandings of human-animal relations. Secondly, queer theory, which builds upon this to produce an analysis of oppression, focussed on deconstructing and challenging value-dualisms, identifying normalizing processes and reimagining identity as fluid and contingent. Thirdly, biographical research provides a methodological means of investigating animal advocacy that is both compatible with the focus on specificity and subjectivity, as well as being appropriate in terms of the critical and queer values of the project.

The matrix below (Table 4) builds on Tables 2 and 3, explaining the connection between theoretical foundations of the project, through the concepts that have guided it, to research questions, methodological paradigm and actual methods.

**Table 3- Linking Theoretical Foundations to Methods**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theoretical Foundations | Interpretivist Epistemology; Constructionist Ontology; Intersectional Feminism/Critical and Queer Theory. |
| Guiding Concepts | Phenomenological focus on Specificity and Subjectivity; Law's (2004) Mess in Social Science; Queer Critique of Formal Modes of Representation; Lorde's (1977) Epistemological Critique; Fluidity of Identity as 'Relational Achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010); Challenging Value Dualisms; Situated Knowledge; Reflexivity. Normalization. |
| Research Questions | 1. Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans? 2. To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid? 3. How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs? 4. Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation? |
| Methodological Paradigm | Biographical research; autoethnography; visual methods |
| Methods | Biographical interviews; participant produced comics; autoethnographic comic |

## Research Design

The project focused on vegan animal advocates. Subjective accounts of vegan biographies in different situations were elicited from my own situated vegan perspective. I discussed earlier biographical research as a methodological field appropriate to the theoretical framework and research questions, this section outlines the practical design of the project.

### Research Questions

As discussed previously this project sought to answer the following questions:

5. *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*
6. *To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*
7. *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?*
8. *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*

The following matrix matches the four research questions with the specific method primarily intended to address each one.

**Table 4- Linking Methods to Research Questions**

| RQ | Research Question | Method |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans? | Biographical Interviews; Participant Produced Comics. |
| 2 | To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid? | Biographical Interviews; Participant Produced Comics. |
| 3 | How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs? | Biographical Interviews; Participant Produced Comics. |
| 4 | Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation? | Participant Produced Comics; My Comic. |

In outlining the research design, I describe the methods used, discuss the data analysis process, and consider some of the ethical questions raised by this particular research project, and how these problems have been navigated.

**Access**

Due to recent high profile cases of police infiltration of radical activist communities (Lewis and Evans, 2011; Walby and Monaghan, 2011), many activists approach an invitation to participate in a research project with justifiable trepidation. This can be a fundamental flaw of 'outsider' studies (discussed earlier), with many activists avoiding participation due to a lack of trust. While my status as a vegan, with connections to the animal advocacy movement granted me 'insider' status, trust was still a significant obstacle to navigate with potential participants. This apprehensiveness is understandable. Therefore, I prioritised establishing trust.

Participants were usually approached in person (with a few exceptions), and informally asked about their interest in participating in the research. Some participants were contacted via email. Once they had expressed an interest in participating, contact details were exchanged to organize a formal introduction to the research. Before the interview, participants received a 'participant information sheet' and a 'consent form' (usually via email), which explained the research, and offered a set of example questions, so that they knew what to expect, and how the discussion may progress (see

Appendix 3 and 4). I answered their questions and addressed their individual concerns, as well as key ethical issues, so that participants could give informed consent.

### Insider versus Outsider Research

This project is very much framed as an 'insider' study of veganism and animal advocacy, due to the fact that I am vegan and have involvement with animal advocacy causes. However, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of such terms, and to pick them apart a little.

There are well-documented advantages of 'insider' studies, such as those discussed by Oliver (2010); the insider will tend to be familiar with the research field already, which often makes it considerably easier to select a sample for the research. Furthermore, as insiders will normally appreciate many of the subtleties of the research field, they can often collect richer data than the external researcher. They may be aware of various elements of the research field, and hence will be able to take advantage of this knowledge in order to pursue the research aims (Oliver, 2010). For these reasons, and the issues surrounding 'access', it made sense for me to conduct insider research. However, this is not to say that there are not problems associated with 'insider' approaches.

It is important to note that 'insider' studies such as this are not without their disadvantages. Oliver (2010) notes that whilst useful, familiarity with the field can result in researchers overlooking aspects of the data that an outsider would have acknowledged. For this reason, it is important to take a step back and see the particular social world as an outsider where possible, in order to observe and document aspects of the social world that one might have otherwise taken for granted. Insider studies can also present their own unique ethical issues. Taylor (2011) highlights the potential problem area of 'friendship' within 'insider' research. This is something that researchers have to negotiate carefully, and this dynamic has been neglected in the methodological literature since the turn towards 'insider' studies (Taylor, 2011). As a researcher pursuing the methods I had chosen, it was perhaps inevitable that friendships were formed in the process of the research, and certain people who prior to the research were acquaintances of mine, are now, having completed the research, friends. This changes the dynamic of the research, and

strengthens the need to view ethics as a fluid and ever changing process, and not something that disappears from our minds once ethical approval has been granted by an institution. These disadvantages of insider research can therefore be repurposed as advantages of Outsider research, especially, the idea of being able to see the research field in a relatively clear and precise manner (Oliver, 2010). Whilst this study is very much situated within a qualitative, insider paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that being 'removed' and 'distant' is not always a bad thing. The data produced and its usefulness may differ significantly, but it is important to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and indeed, the potential for a false dichotomy to be constructed between the two.

Merton (1972) challenges the idea of researchers as either insiders or outsiders as being overly simplistic and ignoring the complexities of identity and status within a project. Hodgkinson (2005) highlights the potential dangers of too simplistic an understanding of insider/outsider status, citing white feminists positioning themselves as 'insiders' when conducting research with women, and thus ignoring important differences between the experience of white and black women (Carby, 1982). Building on this, Mercer (2007) has argued that the insider/outsider dichotomy can be better characterised as a complex, multi-faceted continuum that researchers move along in a plurality of ways through a research project. So whilst I describe myself as an 'insider' in this project, by virtue of my veganism and involvement in animal advocacy, this status was fluid. For example, when talking to Kaya a member of the Seventh Day Adventist faith, I was very much an outsider regarding her religious beliefs and community, but an insider as regarding our shared experience of adhering to veganism within a predominantly meat-eating society. Similarly, I might be an insider when it comes to veganism, but as a cisgender white man, I cannot claim to have experienced life outside of those relatively privileged categories. It is important to acknowledge this complexity when discussing these terms.

**Sample**

Delamont (1991) stresses the importance of explaining how a research sample was drawn, in ensuring the reflexivity of a research project. This must also be balanced

with the necessity of preserving the anonymity[18] of the participants, especially in sensitive cases.

The project uses veganism as its primary selection criteria, within which participation in animal advocacy activism was another factor. All but one participant identified as vegan[19]. This study takes the vegan as its subject, but includes vegans who have taken part in legal or illegal direct action in defence of animals, as well as individuals who simply follow a vegan lifestyle.

The research used purposive, opportunistic snowball sampling (Lovell, 2009). Initially, the project aimed to recruit twenty (20) participants, but this was reduced to twelve (12) once the project was underway, due to the quality of the data being elicited, and to allow the richness of this data to flourish through the research. In total I conducted eighteen (18) initial biographical interviews, with data from twelve (12) being included in this final project. Data from six (6) of the initial interviews were not included for various reasons. With one participant, after discussion we decided it was best for them not to participate due to on-going legal constraints relating to their prior activism. In two cases, I felt that the data was not sufficiently biographical to warrant inclusion. Both participants were wary of the potential for their anonymity to be jeopardised, and I agreed with the participants to omit their interviews from the data analysis process. Three further interviews were analysed but the data was excluded from the final project. I plan to use this data, as well as other omitted material, in future articles about the research. I was able to conduct satisfactory follow-up interviews with five (5/12) of the participants. The low number of follow-up interviews was a frustrating and meant that aspects of my planned methodology were not fulfilled as intended. I received comics from seven (7/12) of the participants. All seven comics are presented (see Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism).

The sampling process was implicitly purposive; I used my personal discretion in deciding whom to involve in study (Patton, 2002: 240, 230). One acquaintance -a participant in an earlier pilot study conducted as part of my MA thesis- agreed to act as a gatekeeper to members of the animal rights community in their city, and was willing to court potential participants and vouch for me personally. This, coupled with

[18] Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis, to preserve participants anonymity.
[19] Claire was forced to stop being vegan due to some medical issues (See Chapter Six).

my reputation as a vegan probably reassured people about the purpose and integrity of the research.

The sample was not intended to be representative of vegans or animal advocates in general, instead my focus on personal narratives required specificity of experience before generalizability. I tried to ensure diversity within the sample, although my success was limited. I interviewed a greater number of people who self-identified as female (8/12) than those who self-identified as male (4/12). Eleven (11) of the people interviewed identified as White, one identified as Black. Nine (9) participants identified as 'heterosexual', two (2/12) identified as 'queer', and one as 'bisexual' (1/12). One (1/12) participant identified as being 'impaired'. All participants identified as cisgender (12/12). Nine (9/12) participants were aged between twenty and thirty, one (1/12) was over 30, and two (2/12) were over 40.

## Methods

### Overview

The research was comprised of three key methodological elements; biographical interviews (A1) and follow-ups (A2), comics created by participants (B1) and autoethnographic comics (B2), alongside the data analysis process (C1 and C2).

**Research Process**

- A1: Biographical Interviews
- B1: Participant Produced Comics
  - C1: Initial Data Analysis
- A2: Follow Up 'Participant Checking' Interviews
  - C2: Final Data Analysis
- B2: My Comic [Autoethnography]

### Biographical Interviews [A1]

The main method utilized was semi-structured biographical interviews conducted with each of the participants. Interviews generally took place in settings the participants chose, public spaces (such as cafes or libraries), or at the participant's residence. The interviews themselves generally lasted between one and three hours and focussed on the person's biography.

Participants were asked to discuss their life stories, moments, experiences and perspectives with a particular focus on issues of ethics, activism and animal advocacy.

Following the principles of biographical research, these interviews sought to place the participant at the centre, and allowed them to dictate the topics discussed. An interview guide (see Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet) provided starting points for discussion, mainly centred on life stages (such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood). These provided a rough structure, but in the interviews I endeavoured to enable discussion to flow organically and to allow participants to introduce new topics, or ignore my topics as they so-wished.

Thus, I attempted to ensure that *"theory and empirical investigation were interwoven*" (Bryman, 1988: 81). I sought to focus on the specificity of the life in question, and the interviews were flexible enough to allow participants to lead the discussion, whilst still structured enough to ensure focus on animal advocacy/ethics. Generally, questions asked encouraged participants to focus on perspective and experience rather than 'hard facts'.

Taking seriously the claim that the individual is '*a multiplicity interconnected with other multiplicities*' (Heckert, 2010: 48), the interviews displayed sensitivity to narratives and stories as they emerged, and the discourses and 'voices' present within these narratives. I sought to establish trust, respect and reciprocity between researcher and participant and thus, achieve a less-hierarchical relationship and, theoretically, draw out richer accounts. Implicit within this was an awareness of my influence on the research process as interviewer, and how my subjectivity impacted upon what was said and how (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

With each interview I sought an informal, conversational atmosphere. These principles link to some of the critical pedagogical and feminist theories underpinning the project (discussed in Chapter 3). They aim to break down the conventional barriers between researcher and subject to access the voices of the marginalized (O'Neill, 2010). I feel I had some success in limiting the hierarchical power dynamic between researcher and participants. This was through a flexible and conversational interview style, where I did not shy away from offering my own perspective where appropriate, and where I encouraged participants to lead the discussion in areas that were most interesting and important to them. Naturally, this was not always completely successful, but my efforts had some positive impact, and produced a better dynamic than might have existed had I adopted a more typically formal, objective researcher persona.

**Participant Comics [B1]**

Participants were asked to produce their own comics about their lives, for the research project. These are presented in Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism. Every participant was given an information sheet about the process of comic creation (see Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet). This included simple instructions on producing a comic, based on principles, such as combining images and words, and using panels.

I discussed comics with participants in person at various stages, most frequently immediately following our first interview. I used these moments as an opportunity to offer support, guidance and answer any questions. Some participants expressed concern at their lack of artistic skill. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the 'quality' of the illustrations was not the focus, but the comic story itself, regardless of how 'realistic' the illustrations were. Participants could interpret the instructions, and indeed 'comics' generally, in a way meaningful to them. This allowed participants to express themselves outside of the interview context, and via an atypical medium. I explained that they could expand on ideas discussed in the interview if they wished, but that they were not required to. Participants retained the copyright to the visual materials they produced, but agreed to let me reproduce them for academic purposes. Each participant approached the task in a different way, and the results were varied and visually appealing (see Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism).

I asked participants to produce comics partly with the aim of asserting their autonomy within the project, and thus producing a less hierarchical power relationship between myself, and the participant. I feel this was partly successful, and this is evidenced in the diversity and quality of the comics produced by participants. Nevertheless, this sometimes had the unintended consequence of positioning me in a more hierarchical role. For example, where participants had not produced a comic, I found myself emailing or calling to ask how they were progressing. Although I had stressed participation was voluntary and that I was thankful for any time they could give, at times I felt like a teacher chasing up homework from a student- yet this was the very last thing I wanted this part of the project to resemble. Consequently, I deliberately did not 'nag', and tried to strike a tone of friendly reminder. Ultimately, the number of comics received probably reflects how uncomfortable I was 'reminding' people, but equally, the quality of the comics I did receive demonstrates

how enthusiastically some participants were about the project. Overall, I think a good balance was struck, and the comics are something I feel very excited about.

Having conducted initial interviews and received participant-produced comics, I began the first stage of data analysis.

**Data Analysis [C1]**

I used a form of simple thematic analysis for both the interview transcripts, and for the comics. Denzin (1989) influenced the interview analysis. Rose (2012) influenced the comic analysis. Both processes are discussed below.

***Interview Analysis***

A simple form of thematic narrative analysis, was informed by Denzin's 'interpretive biography' (1989). This focussed on the content of the conversations, rather than how ideas were expressed: what was said rather than how it was said (Reissman, 2002). I was interested in discovering the perspectives of the participants, rather than on establishing factual accounts of events (Miller, 2000). In particular, I was looking to identify 'turning point' moments in their narratives (Denzin, 2001), as well as identifying themes. I read through each conversation transcipt, making notes about what I perceived to be the dominant themes/turning points. I did this several times, reading and re-reading, and note-taking. These notes were then developed into mini-biographies for each participant. Consistent with Roberts' (2004), ideas on political biography, the analysis process deliberately focussed on establishing specific participant-centred themes before overall general themes (for an individual interview, and later for all interviews). This reflected my desire to first understand the separate, often disparate, parts of individual biographies, before collating or organizing them into 'coherent' narratives (Roberts, 2004). The thematic analysis focused initially on the separate parts of the individual participant's story, before attempting to move this analysis into a coherent set of themes for the 'whole story'.

I used a simple thematic analysis because of the relative simplicity of the approach, as well as its flexibility and intuitiveness. I felt that a more laborious mode of analysis might have the unintended consequence of creating distance between myself and the data, especially given the project's focus on subjectivity and reflexivity, I wanted to engage with the transcripts and data in as organic a way as

possible. Other modes of analysis were appealing, for example Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Discourse Analysis and in particular Narrative Analysis. However, I feel with each of these approaches, I would have had to plan to use them from the start and to have them ingrained in how the data collection took place, but they were not.

***Comic Analysis***

Once I received the participant created comics, I identified key themes, informed by Rose's (2012: 15-16) critical approach to analysing visual data. This involves three key stages of analysis: 1. Taking images seriously: look very carefully at visual images. 2. Thinking about the social conditions and effects of visual objects: especially as visual representations both depend on and produce social exclusions and inclusions. We must consider social, cultural, geographical, temporal context. 3. Thinking about one's own way of looking at images. This involves an engagement with reflexivity and the situatedness of the researcher.

In practical terms, this involved reading and re-reading the comics through, and noting dominant themes. The themes were organized, combined, synthesised, divided (etcetera), throughout the process. Whilst similar to analysing interview transcript data, analysing visual data and images required a slightly different approach. I opted not to utilize a semiotic analysis, or other such established social research framework, instead opting to read participant created art as 'comics'. That is, looking for narrative themes, and turning points, through words and images, as well as looking for apparent tensions between images and words.

I decided to separate interview data and visual data in both analysis and presentation, rather than integrate the participants' comics and interview data throughout, for two key reasons. Firstly, some participants wished to remain anonymous in their interview, but be named in relation to their comic. This created concerns over jeapardizing anonymity of participants through connecting visual and interview data. This was further compounded by only seven participants submitting comics. Separating visual and interview data meant that anonymity could be preserved more easily. Secondly, in focussing on the comics, rather than the specific authors, I was able to devote a substantive chapter to the analysis and discussion of comics together, including my own, rather than integrating comics throughout, in

what might have been a fragmented way. The discussion is divided into three chapters, two focussing on interview data (Chapters 5 and 6), the third focussing on the comics (Chapter 7).

Once the initial data analysis was complete, these themes and codes were participant-checked[20] in a follow up interview.

#### Follow-up 'Participant-Checking' Interviews [A2]

Once the initial interview had been transcribed, the participant created-comic had been submitted and each of these data sources had been analysed and coded, a short follow up 'participant-check' interview took place (in person or where necessary over the phone or internet video chatting software such as Skype). Due to attrition from the project, only five follow up interviews occurred. Some participants dropped out, some were unable to find time for the follow up interviews. Participants received a transcript, in advance, and a short explanation of how I had coded the interviews/comics. The focus was on getting feedback from the participant about the research process, and reaching agreement on the themes of the interviews/comics. These follow-up interviews were conducted similarly to the initial interviews. The interview guides concerned the key themes drawn out through the analysis process and the 'turning point' moments that I had identified. This afforded participants an opportunity to discuss the themes/turning points, offer their own perspectives, and clarify, or expand upon other areas of the initial interviews. I brought my interpretations to participants, and they had their say on my reading of the data. The follow up interviews were not concerned with identifying the author's 'true' intended meaning of the comics, instead, I told participants how I had interpreted the comics, and asked them to comment. Data from follow-ups is included, where pertinent, but most data presented in this thesis came from the initial interviews.

Follow-up interviews were an attempt to ensure a collaborative and consultative research and data analysis process, in which participants had more say than they may ordinarily have in a research project, following the tenets of critical pedagogy. It also symbolically acknowledged the queer principle of flux, in that, during follow-up interviews, people may choose to revisit ideas, and may even

[20] 'Participant-checking' are follow-up interviews that give participants an opportunity comment on the accuracy/authenticity of a piece of research, after the point at which their formal involvement in a research project has ended.

disagree with themselves. We are ever changing and evolving, and queer methodologies seek to highlight this complexity. Still, on reflection, I feel that this was one of the least successful aspects of the project. The intention to give participants a chance to read over transcripts, and have a say on how I had analysed them, was done with the intention of increasing their role in the project and limiting researcher/participant hierarchy. But, due to time constraints and attrition, this became a largely one-way process. Those who did participate in follow-ups did not generally disagree with anything I said, offering comments and further information, where there was disagreement or changes in analysis based on follow ups, I have indicted as a footnote (See footnotes 40/p172 and 49/p**Error! Bookmark not defined.**). I managed to conduct five (5) out of a possible twelve (12). So this attempt to limit hierarchy was only minimally successful.

#### Final Data Analysis [C2]

Once the second, 'participant-checking' interviews had taken place or been ruled out, the final data analysis process was conducted. This meant drawing together the themes of the interviews and comics, and collating/compiling biographies, using the same thematic analysis process described earlier. In the two instances where participants had disagreed with or negotiated an element of my data analysis, I opted to go with their reading of the interview, and used footnotes to explain and contextualise these discussions (see footnotes 40 and 49). I felt it important that they should have a meaningful say on how I organized the data, and that if I had overridden disagreement, the participant-checking process would have felt a little redundant and tokenistic.

This final stage of data analysis was also an opportunity to look at overall themes. Whilst personal narratives were never intended to be generalizable or reliable in the strictest sense, it was still worthwhile to identify recurring themes and, in keeping with Roberts' 'specific-to-general' rule of thumb, this occurred at the final stage of data analysis.

#### Autoethnographic Comics [B2]

I produced my own comic about the research process (see Insert). I used this autoethnographic comic for self-critique and to reflect on the often messy research

process. Like biographical research, autoethnography offers opportunities for accessing marginal voices, particularly where authors belong to groups who have been subject to oppression and domination (Muncey, 2010). I produced a comic about my own biography as a vegan, and about my experiences of doing the research. Using comics is arguably an extension of the logic of autoethnography. If autoethnography attempts to dispel the "*myth of the invisible, omniscient author*" (Tierney, 2002: 66), then including a visual representation of the author in the research works towards that same end.

Throughout the course of the research I kept a research diary, which I developed into a single narrative comic. The aim was to contextualize the research process for the reader, through an informal and expressive visual-textual, narrative medium. These autoethnographic comics allowed me to maintain a degree of reflexivity; I am a vegan, and I was doing research on the experience of vegans, and so to discount my own experiences would have been an oversight. I was an active participant in my own research project. In drawing upon my own, highly personalized experiences I aimed to extend sociological understandings of veganism (Sparkes, 2000: 21). Roberts (2004) argues that autobiography cannot be divorced from its social and political context. Thus autoethnography was an attempt to tie together many themes of the project, eroding the researcher/researched dichotomy (Roberts, 2002), challenging normative ideologies and fixed epistemologies/ontologies (Jones and Adams, 2010), acknowledging 'mess' and subjectivity in research (Law, 2004).

The research aimed to set itself both within a broader social and political context, but also within the inter-personal politics of the research process, the everyday ins-and-outs, and ups-and-downs of conducting research. Queer theory asks us to pursue emancipation and challenge oppression, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the fragility and fluidity of identity and knowledge. In conducting and writing up the research, I hoped to work to dismantle the received boundaries between research/researcher, field/academy and data/theory (Jones and Adams, 2010). Richards (2008) illustrates how those who do not belong to dominant ideology have their experiences under/misrepresented through discourse. Producing a comic autoethnography underlined that I am vegan and that, in this respect, my ethics run contrary to society's dominant values.

The autoethnographic comic is presented separately [see Insert], and is deliberately written so that it can be read as a stand-alone work. The comic is not presented as an appendix, but included within the body of thesis. However, formal constraints mean that including it within the main body of the bound thesis would limit the extent to which it could be read as a standalone piece. For this reason it is presented as an insert. It is not hierarchically secondary to the main body of the thesis. It is simply separate, removable, and most importantly, a self-contained comic. This separation allows the project to avoid some of the critiques of autoethnography, whilst also adhering to the tenets of the approach**.** In presenting this comic, I hope to trouble the conventional process of reading and engaging with an academic text, and to present the case for comics in academic contexts.

The following section discusses some of the ethical issues I faced when conducting this research.

## Ethics

### Ethics as a process

This project received ethical approval from the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University, before data collection began. However, in conducting the research, I sought to view ethics as a constant and on-going process. Ethics do not 'stop' when ethical approval is granted or even when the project ends. In fact they necessarily precede and supersede the research project. Ethics require reflexivity, on-going reflection and a level of self-awareness and constant questioning: What is being done? How might this impact on participant/others? What are the effects of this impact?

As far as was possible, ethics were treated as a collaborative process; participants were consulted and kept informed about the research process, and given a chance to contribute to decisions made, especially those concerning their own place in the research. Ultimately, there is not one set of rules for a research project (Pink, 2007: 50). We may look to ethical guidelines provided by institutions, funding bodies, research councils etcetera. But eventually, situations will arise that are not covered in these 'rulebooks', and decisions must be made, and we must be held accountable (Downes, Kelly and Westmarland, 2014).

This research presents particular challenges in following the general principles for ethical research. Ethical codes usually state that the interests of the participants should be protected (they should suffer no harm or repercussions), deception and misrepresentation should be avoided (the participants should understand what the aims of the research are, what outcomes they can realistically expect and what their involvement will entail) and participants should give their informed consent (based on a clear explanation of the above and their rights to withdraw or decline). There is also an obligation to avoid harming others, not just the research participants. Feminist methodologies have problematized areas of research practice that were previously seen to be benign, and have thus identified areas of ethical concern that otherwise might not be considered (DeVault, 1996). This necessitates reflection on how involvement might impact on the participant in complex ways, and not simply regarding participation as a fixed and final event. Thus ethics are best regarded as a process. Feminist research has a long tradition of engaging with the complexities of ethics in research, and this is especially important when focussing on specific and biographical narratives (McCormick, 2012). Harding (1987 quoted in McCormick, 2012) argues that women's experiences represent an important empirical and theoretical resource for researchers. However, using these experiences as a resource presents various ethical challenges, not least, how best to preserve the anonymity of research participants.

The purpose of the study was not to draw out factually specific accounts of illegality or 'unusual lifestyles', but to discover the experiences of those involved. However, I was aware that I would interview and engage with individuals who may or may not have taken part in 'criminal' behaviour, and that information about such 'criminality' could emerge during the research process. Guidelines on interviewing perpetrators of sexual violence, drawn up by Hearn et al (2007), provided a useful reference point with regards to anonymity, in particular the section on protecting the research subject. Within these guidelines, participants can talk with a greater degree of confidence in their own safety and anonymity, having discussed and agreed to pre-arranged parameters (e.g. do not mention names or places). Special care should always be taken to ensure that filling out research paperwork and signing consent forms, does not ultimately undermine anonymity. This was an issue I encountered when I had a chapter published in an edited volume (Taylor and Twine, 2014). The

publisher asked me for evidence that I had permission from the copyright holder to reproduce the images created by a participant. Having spoken to the participant in question, I responded by sending a blank consent form, with the explanation that I was unwilling to send the appropriate signed form, because I did not want to jeopardise the participant's anonymity. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study, to preserve the anonymity of participants. Other details have been changed for the same reason, for example the names of cities and small organizations that could give away information about the participant.

All participants were strongly advised against discussing the specifics of any 'crime' they may have witnessed or committed. They were advised fully and explicitly on the potential legal ramifications of describing or admitting to illegal acts, and on my legal responsibilities as a researcher privy to illegal events. No currently imprisoned animal rights activists were included in this study, due to the very strict restrictions placed upon them.

Participant information sheets included written, verifiable contact details about my identity as researcher, and about my supervisors/institution/funding (see Appendix 3). The sheets also provided information about the aims of the research, how it would be conducted and what benefits would be likely to emerge from it. What participation would involve, how data would be secured confidentially and only presented anonymously and participants' right to withdraw at any stage, was also be explained. Individuals signing to give their consent also confirmed that they were over eighteen. The sheets were presented in user-appropriate language.

It is always vital that we, as researchers, recognise the general and particular ethical ramifications of research. Ethical issues were addressed at every stage- from drawing up the interview guides, eliciting the consent of participants, to planning the dissemination of my findings. I discussed these issues fully with subjects before (and if necessary during) the interviews, and with an awareness of such risks, the ultimate decision whether or not to take part, rested with them. Participants had the right to withdraw or alter their level of anonymity, participation as the project is conducted, and I have maintained contact and dialogue with everyone who participated.

Rose (2012) identifies three key interconnected areas of ethical concern relating to visual research; confidentiality/anonymity, consent and copyright. 'Copyright' refers to the ownership of a specific object, in this case, visual images. The

creator of an image usually retains copyright to it, unless they are contractually precluded from doing so. To use images created by participants, I need their consent. Therefore, the issues of consent and copyright are fundamentally entwined. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms informed participants that they will retain copyright to any drawings, images, artworks, other documents (etcetera) they submit to the project. They also give the choice of whether or their real names are with their artistic contributions. These factors have been continually considered throughout.

## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodological underpinnings of the project, and detailed how the research was undertaken. It was divided into two broad sections; the first section covering the research design and the second explaining the methodological approach. I have considered literature pertaining to methodological theory and outlined how these theories are manifest in my research. I have discussed key texts in biographical, autoethnographic research and the application of queer theory in methodology; exploring the ways queer theory has been, and can be, used to inform the practical research process. I have also considered the use of visual methods in academia, contextualising the use of comics in my own research. With regards to research design, I have described my methodology, in terms of the three key methods used; biographical interviews, participant-created comics and researcher-created autoethnographic comics. I also explained the data analysis process, as well as the particular ethical questions raised by this research, and how these problems have been navigated. Having discussed these aspects of the project, it is helpful to return to the Venn diagram from earlier in the chapter (See Figure ). This shows the compatibility of biographical research methods to the underlying critical and queer theory assumptions that underpin the project. These three distinct but overlapping traditions form the basis for the methods used and are built upon the interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology of the research. This project takes the necessity of a unified emancipatory politic (intersectionality) as one of its core conceptual assumptions, and builds upon methodological approaches that have developed from these critical theories. Queer theory developed out of feminist and post-structural critical theories, and has sought to build upon their critique of binary

dualisms and essentialist notions of identity. The use of biographical research (incorporating visual and autoethnographic elements) ties the project together, conceptually and methodologically, by incorporating a reflexive, creative approach informed by critical and queer theories.

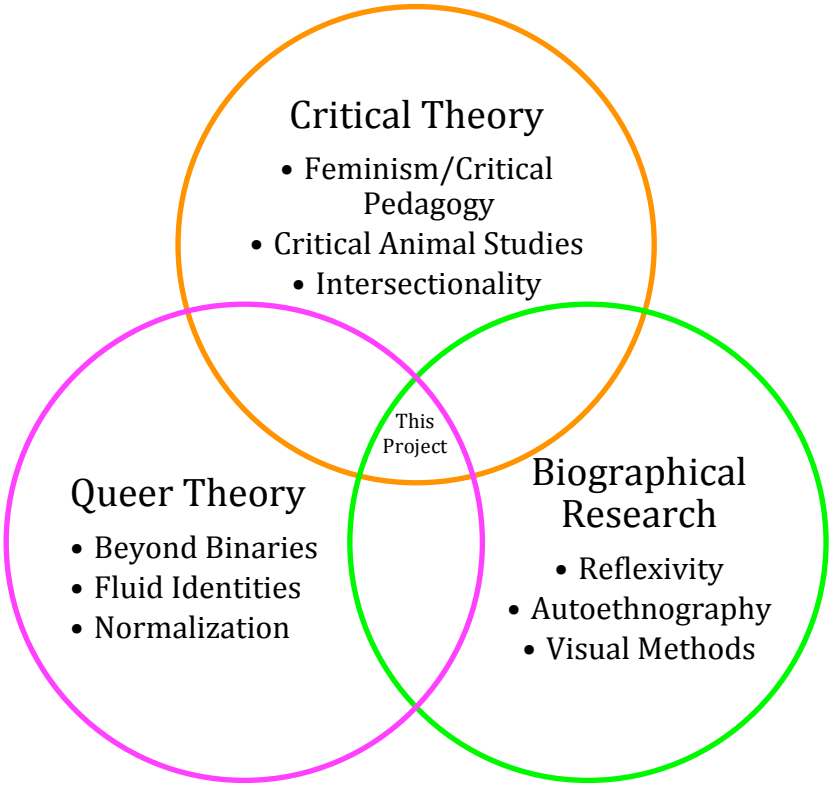


**Figure 6- Biographical Research Compatibility (Recap)**

The next three chapters present the research materials collected through the project. These chapters are structured as follows: Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism- looks at processes of normalization in the stories of the research participants; Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism- looks at activism and resistance narratives in the lives of participants; Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism- examines the comics produced by the participants, and the key ideas emerging from these comics. Chapters 5 and 6 are structured around the key themes that emerged from the research materials. Chapter 7 is structured around the individual comics, in order to preserve anonymity of the participants.

# Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism

## Introduction

To address research question 2: "*To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*" this chapter focuses on processes of normalization in the lives of vegans, and if and how these processes contribute to the fluidity of vegan identity. The chapter is structured around three narrative themes that I identified within the research data. These themes are 'Coming Out Vegan', 'Vegansexuality' and 'Faith and Veganism'. 'Coming Out Vegan' considers vegan identity as something fluid, and changing, especially in contexts where veganism is deliberately kept a secret. 'Vegansexuality' looks at the ways vegans may be attracted to others who share an ethical value system. 'Faith and Veganism' explores some of the non-secular narratives that emerged from participants' stories and ties this to normalizing processes. Within this structure, I evidence and discuss processes of normalization and performativity in the narratives of participants, illustrating how vegan identity is fluid. This chapter also addresses the overarching research question: *which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?* It does this by presenting a number of narratives of significant events, experiences and turning points that have shaped the biographies of the participants.

Building upon queer conceptions of identity as a 'relational achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010)[21], I argue that vegan identity is necessarily fluid, but that this fluidity is constrained and mediated by normalizing processes. Vegans demonstrated that they are careful about who they talk to about their veganism, because of hostility and fear of negative responses. I discuss evidence of processes of normalization in the lives of vegans, as a key process by which vegan identities are mediated. As explained in Chapter Three, normalization can be understood as the process by which behaviours are punished or rewarded relative to their similarity to an idealized norm for a given behaviour (Foucault, 1977; McNay, 1992). For Foucault normalization was part of the process of 'Disciplinary Power' in society, whereby social control can be maintained efficiently and through the governing of people's bodies, through what he called biopower (Foucault, 1977). In the past, power was exerted bluntly (for example, through public executions). This has given way to, what

[21] Discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Foucault (1997: 243) describes as, "*more subtle, rational mechanisms*". Insurance policies and health and safety legislation are examples of such mechanisms, which govern our bodies in small often-unnoticed ways on a daily basis. Foucault argued that normalization also occurs through the production of knowledge, linking power and knowledge at a fundamental level; hence, the dominant understandings and values of a society perform a regulatory function (McNay, 1992: 25). Thus, forms of knowledge that exist outside of dominant societal norms are subjugated. We might describe a vegan perspective on the ethics of meat consumption to be a form of 'subjugated knowledge', vis-à-vis dominant understandings of human-animal relations (Jones and Adams, 2010). Within this conceptual framework of normalization, individuals are punished or rewarded for conforming to or deviating away from the norm. I found these processes were evidenced in many of the participants' stories.

## 'Coming Out' Vegan

A central concept within queer theory, discussed earlier [22], has been the fundamentally contested nature of identity (Plummer, 2003; Halperin, 1995). Identity is not fixed or objective. This is evidenced in Butler's (1990) work on gender as a 'performative construct', and the challenge posed to the 'universal female subject' as a central assumption of the feminist movement. Building on Symbolic Interactionism, Butler (1990: 195) argued that one's identity is formed and reformed through actions, as opposed to being something innate to the individual. Thus, identity is unstable, flexible and contingent. Throughout the project, participants described the processes by which their identities were necessarily malleable across social contexts, that is, the different ways they presented themselves, or felt they were being represented. Although often linked to experiences of hostility towards their ethics, this was not limited to participants' animal advocacy. Processes of normalization and regulation occurred in the lives of all of the participants in myriad ways and, to varying degrees.

A recurring narrative theme was that of concealing or managing perceptions of their veganism, for strategic purposes. This section looks the 'coming out'

[22] See Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework,

narratives that emerged from a selection of the participants' accounts. As Plummer (1995) discusses, 'coming out' can represent a shift in consciousness, akin to Denzin's (1989) idea of 'turning point' moments. 'Coming out' moments can be important aspects of a biographical narratives, in particular in relation to LGTBQ experience. Simonsen (2011) compares declaring one's veganism to the experience of queer individuals 'coming out'. As discussed later in this chapter, Potts and Parry (2010) have looked at the sexual experiences of vegans who only sleep with vegans ('vegansexuals') and have explored this in terms of 'coming out' discourse. Several participants, in this study, referred to experiences of having concealed and/or revealed themselves as animal advocates. In many cases, they did so using terminology that directly invoked LGBTQ experience, that is, 'coming out', 'closet' etc[23]. This section offers some examples of participants having 'come out' as vegan, and the significance of these coming out moments as 'turning points'. The section thus offers evidence of normalizing processes on the lives of vegans, and illustrates how power dynamics cut across social and political issues.

**The Professional Closet**

Julie[24] is a white woman in her mid-forties. On a professional level, Julie is a holder of a high profile public position, and she has been vegan for more than two decades. Julie's professional life has been characterised by a level of secrecy regarding her political and ethical beliefs. Below we see the story of Julie publically 'coming out of the closet' as a vegan to her colleagues.

> *There was quite a long period of not being quite open about things… [I still] don't like going to formal lunches now, but it was always that I didn't want to say to people that I was vegan, and you'd just be desperately hoping there was something on the menu that you could eat…*

[23] It is important to note that in using 'coming out' and 'the closet' as points of comparison here, I do not intend to equate being vegan with being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer (LGBTQ). LGBTQ people, including some of those who took part in this project, face very serious risk when 'coming out' in society, in a way that vegans do not. Trans people in particular are at a disproportionately high risk of physical violence and abuse (Turner, Whittle and Combs, 2009). These are very important issues, and not ones I wish to trivialize in my analysis. The concept of 'the closet' is however, something that repeatedly came up in conversation with vegans, and is, I feel, useful in considering veganism as a normalized lifestyle.

[24] Pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis to preserve the anonymity of participants. Other details (e.g. place names, names of organizations) have also been changed where necessary, for the same reason.

Julie's workplace is a politicized arena, and her awareness of various 'normalized' expectations (particularly, linked to her age and gender), and working face to face with the privileged conservative establishment, exacerbated her anxieties around revealing her vegan identity at work.

> *…Or you'd try and pretend you were allergic to something or whatever, so I think there was a real sense of… thinking that being on the Left was wrong but also, being a vegan was something that wouldn't get you taken seriously, so I was a bit 'in the closet' if you like (laughs)… and even as a [professional], like when I did my [first big] speech [in front of colleagues], I referred to, two [influential people], they were both vegetarian and both teetotal, and I made the comparison… and somebody started booing when I got to the teetotal bit, just for a joke, but I knew then that I didn't have the courage to say that I was vegan….*

Julie dreaded being dismissed, pigeonholed, ridiculed; she feared hostility when she eventually 'came out' as vegan.

> *I was very worried about getting stereotyped and that was compounded by the fact that, you know, well obviously several years ago… [I was a] younger, female [professional], and not one of the sort of louder more strident types, that I would be seen like, I was this little fluffy thing that all I cared about was bunny rabbits or whatever, so I really steered clear of doing too much, you know?*

This is evidence of Julie's perception of 'vegaphobia'; that is, the ridicule and dismissal of veganism in mainstream discursive contexts (Cole and Morgan, 2011).

> *I supported things... but I didn't do too much on it, and that was um, sort of, through fear of not being taken seriously… I think, and being sort of pigeon holed as a certain sort of caricature of what you're like, and people do that don't they, people are always saying to me, "you don't look like a vegan"… but then gradually, it was partly just getting a bit more confident that I'd covered a few more bases, done some serious work… and partly just getting frustrated…*

Slowly, Julie's confidence built and she became more open about her ethics, buoyed by the arrival of more vegans at work. She also reflected on the performative aspects of her behaviour when she first got the job.

> *So I had a [meeting on] the Livestock Sector and the Environment… and my opening [comments] there were, basically, "I wish it wasn't me doing this because I'm vegan and everyone will say that I've got a hidden agenda, and that it's just because I'm against the livestock industry full stop, BUT, no one else is saying it, so therefore I've got to do it"…*

There is an intersection here with issues of gender and veganism. Julie refers to her anxiety over being viewed as "*this little fluffy thing"* by her male peers in the male dominated work environment, and as such, she kept her veganism secret.

> *So I did a [speech] on World Vegan Day… on November 1st, and I just got a really hideous response… [some people] really got angry with me about it… but I wouldn't have done that when I first got [the job], and… so it took me quite a while to get to that point, and now I sort of, in some ways actually, I was thinking this the other day cause also, when I got [the job] I'd just turned forty, and I went through this whole thing where I'd had my hair cut in this… bob, I was wearing like brown trouser suits and I even sometimes had those little scarfs round the neck that, and it was really sort of, "right I've got to be 'grown up' and 'serious' and 'middle-aged'" and all of this, and its only like, again, in the last few years that I've chilled out a lot more about that…*

She talks about feeling the need to perform a certain way, and this is tied to gender performance, in particularly through her discussion of "*trouser suits*" and her "*bob*" haircut. This is how she felt she had to behave to be a woman in her profession, and it was only after a relatively long time in her post that she got the confidence to perform outside of those strict boundaries. The negative reaction of Julie's 'coming out' to her peers vindicates her initial hesitance to be open about her animal advocacy, but in telling the story, we have an example of normalization and resistance in action.

> *I suppose what I was saying that in the early years it was the politics that was suppressed as well, and then the politics was allowed to 'come out'… I think that yeah, people appreciate the fact that, people, like vegans want to know that there is a [higher profile] vegan.*

Julie's increased confidence in her value as someone in a high profile public position, and in having made a contribution in other arenas made her feel more comfortable in revealing herself as an animal advocate, an aspect of her identity that might have otherwise caused opponents to dismiss or belittle her.

> *Now that there's more vegans [at work], and partly because of social media, you just end up, you know, uh, on my blog I've actually got, on the sort of pages down the side, I've actually got a sort of 'vegan stuff' [section]… because with social media you're actually being a lot more open about yourself, um, that just tends to, that gradually filters into the public domain and everyone knows that you're a vegan…*

Julie's engagement in social media has also allowed her to feel an increased sense that the 'non-traditional' aspects of her identity are appreciated in the outside world, even

as they are being derided at work. Making speeches on livestock and on World Vegan Day can be understood as turning points in Julie's narrative, as they represent a symbolic departure from her initial reluctance to be open about her vegan identity. Her story illustrates her growing confidence in the value of the work she has done, and in 'coming out' and representing other vegans professionally.

Other participants produced similar 'coming out' narratives, such as Diane.

**A Fresh Start**

Diane is a white woman in her late twenties. She described her first experimentation with a non-meat based diet, during her mid-teens, as something tied very closely with her bourgeoning interest in alternative music and culture.

> *I think for me like, alternative music and stuff like that was a big influence, and I'd always been listening to like metal bands and stuff, when I was like, quite young and when I was a kid I was always into like indie music and stuff, but I was always seeking something more and more alternative, and um, gradually I think I started listening to more and more bands that kind of had more kind of veggie or kind of 'animal-rightsy' lyrics and stuff like that..*

Diane also framed her experience in terms of a 'coming out' narrative. At that time she was subject to a fairly unsympathetic school environment, and the confusion of her grandmother (who was her legal guardian) contributed to her difficulty in exploring vegetarianism and veganism. Diane decided to keep her vegetarianism a secret from her school friends out of embarrassment. She feared they would not understand, or would make fun of her, particularly were she to ever 'go back on it'.

> *I was probably about 15-16, I was quite old when I started thinking about vegetarianism although I had kinda been very…. anti- causing cruelty as a kid, I didn't like the fact that I ate meat and stuff and I always felt quite guilty about it, um, but never did anything about it… It was only when I was watching Newsround[25] or something like that when I was 15 or something and I saw these hens that had been genetically modified to grow without feathers, and it kind of made me feel really sick whilst I was tucking into my chicken dinner you know, watching the TV… I couldn't finish my meal…*

Diane was worried about being perceived to have failed were she unable to maintain her vegetarianism.

[25] 'Newsround' is a BBC Children's news show.

*I was too embarrassed to tell my friends to start with, uh cause I didn't want anyone judging me and I didn't want it to be that if I couldn't carry on with being veggie for any reason, if my willpower wouldn't allow me to, I didn't want it to be like, "ooh yeah, you were veggie for like a week and now you're not", so I didn't tell anyone for a while…*

She did eventually 'come out' to her school friends, who were generally supportive.

*Gradually I was like "look I'm vegetarian" and actually my friends were, they were, they were alright about it…*

But after her GCSE exams, she changed schools. In this new school environment, Diane felt much more comfortable being open about her diet and ethics. In fact, the change of school meant that she felt a peer pressure to be more socially and morally conscientious.

*I moved to another school to do my A-Levels… and made a completely new, different group of friends. My friends at my previous school were very, kind of, working class, and like me, from a really similar background to me… but when I moved to the new school, all the friends I made there were like the metal-heads and the greebos[26] and… very middle class, and it was something that I'd never come across before really, and so, I had to really change what I was like, and I had to become more of aware of certain issues and things…*
*We never talked about politics or anything at home, my nan doesn't even know, she reads 'The Sun' bless her… so I was like 'oh God' I feel really out of my depth with these new friends…*

Diane's change of school also meant a change of context, in which her political and social conscience could flourish. Her new friends were supportive and understanding regarding Diane's diet and political attitudes, in a way that her old school friends had not been. The processes of normalization became less significant.

*I felt really intimidated by their intelligence and everything… it was a steep learning curve for me, and so going round to their house and they were having like Olive Tapenade and all these like incredible foods, stuff that I'd like never even heard of, and …I loved going round to their house really, because I'd have all these amazing foods, and they were really amazing at doing veggie food ……they were really switched on to different diets and stuff, so it was like a refreshing change, even though none of my new friends were like veggie either, they were like "oh yeah that's cool, we can make you a lentil soup" or whatever… It was really nice because I actually started to meet friends who were thinking in*

[26] 'Greebo' is a colloquial (and often pejorative) term to describe people belonging to metal/rock/punk music subcultures.

*a similar way to me in a way, because I'd always thought about politics and stuff like that um, but I'd never met anyone I could talk about it with, so these people who were thinking in the same way that was quite nice and a bit refreshing.*

*They were actually much more supportive of me being veggie and actually quite interested in it and actually thought they would dabble in it themselves, or at least try being veggie whenever they were with me or whatever, but my friends in the other school were a bit more like "oh whatever, not bothered"….*

Thus, changing schools represented a turning point moment in Diane's journey towards being open about her vegetarianism, and eventually becoming a vegan. There is also a class dimension to Diane's story that I touch upon later.

Dolly spoke of a similar journey, but framed it in terms of being 'strategic' about how she presented her identity to her parents.

**The Strategic Self**

Dolly is a white woman in her late twenties. Having initially become vegetarian without much conflict from her parents, Dolly nevertheless decided to keep her move to veganism a secret from them. She feared repercussions and subsequently waited until she had left home to go vegan.

*I thought, "I'll go veggie first, and I'll wait to leave home till I go vegan cause my mum will kick off"… There was a couple of times when I went home [after going vegan] and I didn't tell my parents, cause I was too scared, but eventually I broke the news. At first they were like okay, but I think they were thinking that if they kicked off about it that would make me more into it… but it wasn't about pissing them off at all, it wouldn't have made a difference, but then I remember a bit later my mum said something about it being a bit extreme and just thought it was a bit crazy, I think they thought it was a cult or something.*

*They just thought it was just a phase or they did for years and then when my mum had cancer, that made her open her mind a bit, and now, if not understanding why I do it, she at least realizes that I'm not gonna fall down dead of rickets or whatever, and I think since then they've just gotten used to the idea, my brother takes the piss out of me, they don't really get it.*

The notion of a 'phase' is a trope typical of homophobic and transphobic narratives around gender and sexuality (Martin and Hetrick, 1988).

*But they're alright about it… Although my mum always gets peppers in for me when I'm at home, so she's like "I know you're vegan, so I've been to Safeway and I've got you some peppers". And there's two red peppers at the bottom of the fridge.*

Dolly's decision not to tell her family about going vegan initially, has some parallels with her sexuality. Dolly identifies as 'queer' (an umbrella term for people that are not-heterosexuals and/or have none binary gender/sex identity). Growing up in a fairly isolated rural area, in a very religious family, Dolly found few people with whom she could relate, but her childhood was not entirely bereft of contact with other queer people.

> *On the one hand, I was in contact with a lot of queer culture through the internet and zines and stuff, but my day to day reality was just this crazy straight place… in my sixth form there were over 600 people and there was no one that was out and there was just rumours about one teacher in a really horrible way, where people said he was probably paedophile as well, kind of thing… no one in my family is out, I just didn't have anyone… I had a pen friend actually, who had come out at school same age as me, and he was just waiting to leave, cause he'd thought, you know I'll come out and it'll be an important thing to do, and he just got bullied every day until he left home basically, so he was pretty much the first gay person I'd really talked to. I remember talking to him about being queer, but not really anyone else, even my best friend like, I kind of dropped hints and stuff but I never really had that chat, I think partly because I wasn't sure what to come out as.*

University provided a turning point for Dolly where she could be more open about her sexuality and interest in women, but it also posed its own problems.

> *When I left home, like my first week at uni, I went to LGBT and got a girlfriend and then we went out for a few months, and then we broke up and ages later I got a boyfriend and that lot all stopped talking to me, and I was like I never actually said I was a lesbian. But there wasn't much space to have any kind of fluidity, so it kind of took me to like come across a queer scene.*

Heteronormative mainstream culture positions heterosexuality as its desired and most valued identity, whereas, within the LGBT community at her university, a form of 'homonormativity' seemed to be in place. Rosenfeld (2009) defines homonormativity as the mainstream acceptance of certain limited forms of gay/lesbian experience, which sit in line with the values of neoliberalism, patriotism and free market capitalism. Within this, old heterosexual norms are replaced with homosexual norms, under the assumption that there is a correct way to be non-heterosexual. Dolly's bisexuality did not fit into that framework and she felt alienated once again. Dolly's struggle against the proscriptive boundaries of her university's LGBT culture, which was characterised by narrowly defined categories, albeit ones

that exist outside of heterosexuality, was something that continued until she discovered radical queer communities.

> *I remember there was a flyer for [an event called] 'Queer Uprising'. One of the first ones they did, but the flyer said "for queers, gays, lesbians… and bisexuals… and anyone else… and all their friends… and anyone else" and it was just super, super inclusive, and I think it wasn't really till I discovered 'queer' as an identity that I didn't really constantly have to define myself, that I relaxed and just started chatting up whoever I wanted to chat up, before that, just feeling trapped into defining as a lesbian or straight and not being comfortable with either and also not being in a monogamous relationship, and either like you're going out with a girl and everyone thinks you're a lesbian or going out with a boy and being totally seen as straight. Yeah so like finding a queer scene and open relationships has let me be more at ease with myself… trying to work out your sexuality in a vacuum is just impossible.*

Despite being more comfortable with being open about her queerness in certain contexts, Dolly remains careful about what she tells people about her life and the way that she presents this information.

> *I definitely played my cards very close to my chest when I first started. Just because I didn't want to stick out, I didn't want to be the weird one, I just wanted to keep my head down. Whereas now, because I'm qualified people give you the time of day a bit more…*

In her professional life (as a paramedic), Dolly does not always discuss her sexuality, or indeed her diet, openly with her co-workers.

> *I just wanted to get down and get on with people, but now I'm qualified I don't know it kind of gives me a bit more confidence to be myself a bit more and also, I feel like I've proved myself as a paramedic a bit more. I guess I like to meet people and get on with them and then just drop stuff in, and it not be an issue at all. When I first started my current place, I'd get to know people, and craic on with them, and then just casually mention girlfriends and just see them and be like, "yeah you know you can't have a problem with this, because you know you get on with me"…especially if you can bring it in in a funny way or a casual way. So I think there's a bit of an art to it, and definitely with the veganism thing, … you tread a line, cause at work you know if someone offers me a sweet I won't be like "oh no, I'm vegan, I'm not gonna eat that cause it's got milk in". I'll just say "no thanks". I tell people I'm veggie and then if it comes up more, I'll be like "Actually I'm vegan" and I think by that point people think you're alright and they'll have a bit of a chat about it.*

Dolly describes this process as being herself 'strategically'.

> *I am myself, but strategically so. Like I definitely don't like giving my life story and there's definitely things I can't talk about but I think largely its unhealthy if you try to have a separate identity totally. I also think like people need to be around queer people and vegans and left wingers and us not just be like stereotypes in the papers. Yeah, I quite like that people talk about veganism with me and come away with a completely different idea than the preconceptions that they had.*

In the interconnected normalizing contexts of heteronormativity and hostility towards veganism, Dolly is self-aware and pragmatic about her identity. Whilst she sees parallels between her veganism and her sexuality, her parents are aware of her veganism, but are unaware of her sexuality.

> *I've never actually come out to [my parents] partly because I didn't want there to be a conflict. Largely it's because I've no idea how they'd react at all, like there's no precedent in my family. No one else is out, I've got a lot of cousins and none of them are 'out'. I only really see them at Christmas, and the rest of the year I kind of… I just take the path of what's easy really. And um I've never really discussed it with them. I think if I ever had a serious girlfriend I'd talk to them about it, but I haven't really.*

This highlights the fluidity of Dolly's identity with regards to her sexuality.

> *So there's not been conflict but that's cause I haven't brought it up. My mum knows a lot of gay men because a lot of male priests are gay but it's always, nothing that relates to her family, it's something these other guys are doing. So yeah, I think there's potential conflict there. We'll see…*

Dolly's experience illustrates a number of normalizing forces, initially from a heteronormative mainstream culture in which she had few queer reference points, to the frustratingly restricted LGBT scene at university, where she was berated for entering into relationships with men, having previously been in relationships with women.

The significance of performativity to identity in the experiences of vegans is evident in Dolly's account. There is a long tradition of focussing on the way in which identity is constructed through interaction[27]. Drawing influence from Symbolic Interactionism, Butler (1990) focuses on performances of gender, and attempts to radically decouple social constructions of gender, from essentialist understandings of sex. One may achieve a desired gender identity through a performance, which conforms to normative standards. The identity is thus imbued through achievement,

[27] As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology,

rather than preceding interaction. For Dolly to achieve non-heterosexual status, her performance must pass as non-heterosexual. Thus, regardless of prior same-sex relationships, or attraction, or how she feels, Dolly does not achieve an acceptable non-heterosexual identity within her university LGBT group, by virtue of being in a relationship with a man.

**Section Summary**

'Coming out' narratives emerged in a number of the interviews, and this evidences and guides our understanding of veganism as a normalized identity. The experiences of the participants mentioned, some of whom define themselves as LGBTQ, provide valuable insight into both life as a vegan, and the notion of identity as being fluid. In a career context, Julie found herself concealing her veganism, due to fear that it might limit or obstruct her professional trajectory and success. This threat, she felt, was compounded by her being female; she feared being perceived as a '*little fluffy thing'* who only cared about *'bunny rabbits'.* This example shows the intersection of veganism and gender. Adams (1990) argues that hegemonic understandings of masculinity position it positively in a contrasting dualism with femininity. The discursive pejorative conflation of femininity, homosexuality and veganism are highlighted similarly (Adams 1994). Hence, eating meat is normalized within a hyper-masculine professional context, and Julie felt that she needed to mask her veganism in order to not be dismissed.

Diane's experience differed significantly, but the processes of normalization were still in evidence. Moving from a working class area to a middle class area, Diane felt pressure to change her identity, to fit in with the more socially conscientious, and 'alternative' middle class crowd she befriended. Ultimately, she found this a more sympathetic and understanding context for her to explore not eating meat. Despite being working class and interacting with middle class people who were not vegetarian, she did not feel as constrained in her identity and used the fresh start to explore vegetarianism, eventually leading her to veganism. To an extent, this highlights the intersection between veganism and class, and how veganism may be subject to processes of normalization in certain contexts. Similarly, Dolly described being 'strategic' about how she presented her identity, depending on the context. Dolly's queer identity meant that at home, with her family, she was in 'the closet'

regarding her sexuality, but 'out' regarding her diet. Dolly comments on the possible damaging effects of having to manage one's identity too strictly, especially where it means hiding how one really feels or wish to be perceived. This highlights the intersection between veganism and sexuality. As we see from these three short narratives, processes of normalization are evidenced in the lives of the participants, and participants have responded to these processes by managing their identities.

Cole and Morgan (2011) critically examined discourses surrounding veganism in UK, and use the term 'vegaphobia' is useful to describe the tendency to ridicule, misrepresent and discredit veganism. Vegans, Cole and Morgan, (2011) argue, are often stereotyped as ascetics, faddists, sentimentalists, or terrorists and extremists. This is a normalizing system of prejudice, which serves to reproduce speciesism, and reinforce culturally ingrained attitudes surrounding meat-eating. Thus, we can see how and why vegans might wish to conceal this aspect of their identity. This is relevant to these narratives, whereby vegans feel the need to conceal their diet in society, to avoid the 'vegaphobic' consequences of being perceived as vegan. This supports Richards' (2008: 1720) claim that 'abnormal' lives are controlled and 'normalized' through being written about.

The next section considers the ways that traditional boundaries of intimacy; attraction and relationships can be blurred beyond the lines of sexual attraction, into lifestyle and politics, and how normalization factors into this dynamic within potentially unsympathetic, 'vegaphobic' discursive contexts.

## Vegansexuality

The term 'vegansexuality'[28] has been used to describe individuals who are attracted to other vegans. Potts and Parry (2010) define 'vegansexuality' as the previously unnamed or unexplored phenomena, whereby there is a greater likelihood of sexual attraction between fellow vegans, and, concomitantly, a sexual aversion to the bodies of those who consume animal products. Though 'vegansexuality' is used relatively rarely, it describes an intuitive principle of relationships; that is, the idea that romantic and sexual attraction is often tied to values and beliefs, as well as more traditionally accepted factors like physical appearance and personality.

[28] Discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

I asked several participants about 'vegansexuality', and what is meant to them. None of the participants had previously encountered the term 'vegansexuality' but most were able to guess what it meant.

**Romance**

Darren is a man in his mid-twenties. He is currently in a relationship with a woman, although he is keen to assert that he identifies as 'queer', and does not see himself as heterosexual. Darren's sexual attraction extends beyond typical heterosexual boundaries of male-female, monogamous relationships, despite how his current relationship may be perceived. Darren's first relationship was with someone who held radically different views to him, specifically on issues of animal rights.

**First Love**

Darren's '*first love*' was with a supporter of hunting from a rural farming background. Darren was a vegetarian at the time, and was increasingly becoming interested in Leftist politics.

> *I mean I remember when I was sixteen, I went out with… a girl who used to do like horse riding and that kind of stuff, and she was from a… farming family and so they were like really pro-hunting and I remember being like "ugh"… like so horrified by it all, but it was weird… I did love her as well, but there was just this massive like ethical tear in me…*

He has since reflected upon the significance of this political divergence, but it was a subject that they rarely broached at the time.

> *I mean, she didn't hunt, but she was pro-hunting… so it was just a subject we never went near, because I knew how she felt about it and she knew how I felt about it… I don't think it contributed to the deterioration of the relationship, but it was just always there and like "I don't know how this is going to work"*
>
> *I guess that's like contrast with the different place I was in then… just like a small town, you just kind of clung onto people that shared your like music tastes or things like that, and if they had things you found repulsive you just sort of ignored it, because you didn't want to lose them as a friend. Whereas now, where you know so many people who are on the same sort of level and have the same sort of views as you, who are nice and stuff, then if I met somebody who was, like my ex-girlfriend, pro-hunting, I probably wouldn't give them the time of day, which is kind of weird, because obviously I did love her, but if I met her now, I probably wouldn't hang out with her, I wouldn't even bother.*

Paradoxically, Darren's reflection that he would probably "not bother" with someone who was pro-fox hunting today, does have parallels with the tenets of vegansexuality, that is, the idea that one's ethics and world view impacts upon one's decisions about who to enter into romantic relationships with. However, Darren does not see himself as 'vegansexual'.

> *['Vegansexuality'] is probably going a bit far for me I guess, although I understand where it comes from. I know going round friends' houses if they're cooking meat, I do feel kind of repulsed by it, and sickened by it. But, I guess that's more the smell, and the fact I can sense it so close …*

Darren is resistant to the rigidity of vegansexuality, as, had his current partner been strictly vegansexual, their relationship may never have started in the first place.

> *[It]'s kind of weird. I can understand where it comes from… because I've come across a lot of people who are like "so and so is a meat head, I won't talk to them, because he or she eats meat" but like… I've been with Ruth [Darren's partner] for three years… she's been a vegan for five years, but when we started going out, I wasn't vegan, I was barely veggie, so I guess [vegansexuality] didn't apply from her point of view, towards me, and so I can't really say because I've only been vegan for two and a half years or so, I guess she was kind of an influence on making me vegan.*

Darren also addresses the notion of non-sexual relationships and veganism.

> *In regards to non-sexual relationships, it wouldn't really bother me if a person ate meat or not, and I wouldn't really, actively try to convert them to the cause, just because I'm not really into that kind of preachiness…*

Darren's experience throws up an obvious tension in the idea of 'vegansexuality'. Had his partner been strictly 'vegansexual' (knowingly or not), then they would never have got together, and by extension, Darren would probably have never adopted veganism. It is not surprising then, that the idea of 'vegansexuality' is troubling to Darren, being someone who has (relatively) recently become vegan, and who has no desire to exclude others from his life.

> *…people who are interested in social justice and that kind of thing, and like animal rights and things, people obviously have that kind of they go to the extent of giving up a whole group of foods or changing their actions to like avoid harming other beings, obviously they're going to be like nicer people, or you'd hope they would be, so that kind of works as an attraction I guess, the fact that they're a committed person in doing something that prevents harm…. it's kind of*

> *bullshit, but you hang out with people and become interested in people who have the same sort of music tastes as you, slightly shallow taste I guess, but it works in the same way with politics to some extent, like something you both have an interest in and are involved in, and it works in forming a friendship..*

The purported 'queerness' of veganism is in this instance less significant. It is something that Darren and Ruth did not share at the beginning of their relationship, but now they do. His relationship with Ruth represents a 'turning point' in his life, but Darren conceptualises his veganism in line with his taste in music and films. It is something that will draw him to certain people, but it will not preclude his ability to make friends or relationships outside of that circle.

Luna's response to the idea of 'vegansexuality' was framed more in terms of the appeal of those 'think critically' and embrace an 'alternative' position to mainstream culture.

**Alternative to Mainstream**

Luna is a heterosexual woman in her mid-twenties. For Luna 'vegansexuality' seemed a reasonable idea, and she could understand why someone might apply it to their own experience. When discussing her own attitude towards relationships, she discussed being attracted to other vegans in the same terms as she finds herself attracted to other people from within her academic discipline at university.

> *I feel really proud of the fact that I'm like… alternative in, the blandest possible way to put it, that I'm alternative to mainstream culture.*

Luna finds herself most attracted to people who think critically, and who are likely to have similar interests and ideas about the world to her.

> *I'm not a norm, I'm not ignorant about absolutely everything, and it links into other parts of my personality, like I work really, really hard and I expect and am attracted to people who work really, really hard as well, in their job or mentally, and … I'm definitely attracted to people who have like thoughts about the wider situation… I'm attracted to anthropologists, and I'm attracted to vegans, because they do more thinking (laughs) than most people…*

For Luna, it is reasonable that some people will be 'vegansexual', because being vegan can tell give you an about someone's character, and about your own compatibility with them.

*I think [vegansexuality] makes sense because… well I dunno, you could explain it from a number of different disciplines or viewpoints, my personal one is it makes sense, like, you want to be in a happy relationship with someone who is gonna provide for you, and want to do the same fun things whatever they might be, and if you are vegan, then they're probably gonna be the same things.*

Eddie is a white, heterosexual man in his thirties. He is originally from the East coast of the USA. Eddie did not feel comfortable with wholeheartedly embracing the term vegansexuality, but acknowledged its relevance to his experience.

*I've tried to explain to some folks, like especially my mom, and I've explained to other peers as well… Because my mom was wondering about me having kids and if like my kid would be vegan, and I was just like, well, most likely, if I was to ever have a child, most likely the mother of that child would be vegan, because, most likely I would be dating someone who was vegan, or pretty darn close to vegan.*

He also feels that veganism can tell you about someone, and in that sense it is instructive in guiding relationships. However, it is important not to get too carried away with this; veganism (or a lack thereof) is no guarantee of compatibility.

*The way I've looked at it, is not so much that I'm more attracted to other vegans, I'm not sure I agree with that… I feel like if I was dating someone and they weren't at least vegetarian, I wouldn't want them to… completely change their mind, but I'd like to think that if we spend a lot of time with me and we fell in love with one another… they would see my passion, and I think if they ended up, not really thinking the same way, then I think we just wouldn't be compatible, not because I want them to be the same, but because veganism and the morality, that I kind of based around that, is so important to me, that I would want to share that, that's on the kind of ethical, moral side.*

Eddie's response factors in normalizing contexts, like work, where vegans might feel alienated.

*And then on the just eating side, since food is so important when you want to go out to dinner or cook a meal together… or if you just wanna complain… at work or something people bring a tray of food and you can't eat anything… if your partner can't understand why that's a pain in the butt…..then, you can't bond on it, you know? I really like being able to share my life with whoever I'm partnering with, and I think that makes it kind of important'*

Eddie perceives predictable conflicts with others about meals as a potential source of bonding within a relationship, or at least a point at which sympathy and support is important. For these reasons, vegansexuality makes some sense. Dolly found the concept of 'vegansexuality' is useful and relatable.

> *There was a time when everyone I knew was vegan, and I think it ebbs and flows in terms of how fashionable it is and I think it's a bit out of fashion at the minute, so there's that extra thing where like if people are vegan maybe they're really into it and they weren't just doing it cause everyone else was. I quite like that, when people are still sticking with it.*

Still, for Dolly, 'vegansexuality' is less about feeling attracted to vegans, especially as finds overly 'preachy' vegans to be difficult to deal with, but as a way of measuring a person's propensity for compassion.

> *There's definitely been times when I've been more fundamental about it like "I can't imagine ever being with someone who wasn't vegan" but I think I'm a bit more flexible now, but I think at the heart of it, I do have a problem with people that eat meat. I'm not fundamentalist about it with friends and people I work with, and I'm not gonna throw meat in their face if they're eating it. But I do question that lack of empathy.*

Meat eaters, Dolly feels, have either decided against caring about the issues of animal exploitation, or they do not regard them to be issues in the first place.

> *Like either, they know it's fucked up and they don't give a shit or they refuse to accept that it's fucked up, like neither of those things I can really deal with. I went out with a pescetarian[29] for a while. He'd been vegan and then he was vegetarian and then he was eating fish, cause he thought it was sustainable, but he never did it around me, because he knew that I thought it was shit.*

For Dolly, lack of compassion is an unattractive trait.

> *I wouldn't only go out with vegans but it I think it just says something fundamental about your kind of empathy and compassion levels and how prepared you are to do something about it as well. I guess, so it's definitely biased towards it. That said if they are really fundamentalist vegans, I find that quite difficult to put up with as well.*

**Section Summary**

Vegansexuality is a useful concept to consider in relation to the intimate lives of vegans, especially in the context of normalized behaviour. Belonging to the same marginal social group or movement can be a catalyst for romantic attraction, and it can also be a prerequisite. Ultimately, the participants in this project tended to take a fairly flexible attitude towards the prospect of intimate relationships with non-

[29] A pescetarian is someone who does eats seafood, but not the flesh of other animals.

vegans. Vegansexuality can be seen to resist processes of normalization, positioning veganism as a valued norm of behaviour, against non-veganism. Participants who themselves have been subject to pressure from others in relation to their veganism, resist the idea that vegans would cut themselves off from non-vegans romantically. Vegansexuality, if strictly adhered to, contributes to a different form of normalization, characterised by rigid understandings of identity, and as such positions non-vegans within a normative framework, outside of the potential for romantic/sexual relationships.

As discussed earlier, vegans move in and out of their identity with a degree of fluidity, often as a means of avoiding conflict in normalizing contexts (as with the case of Julie's decision to hide her veganism professionally). This challenges the notion that vegans may only be attracted to other vegans. Julie's decision to remain 'in the closet' about her veganism, in certain contexts, removes her from the potential romantic or even social relationships with other vegans, who do not know her about her veganism. This ignores the justifications for concealing veganism and for maintaining a fluid vegan identity in the context of hostility.

We might apply the vegansexual views on romantic relationships in terms of Foucault's (1997) idea of biopower[30] and the way that intimate relationships are mediated by social norms. For example, mainstream heteronormativity discursively positions 'heterosexuality' as normal, in contrast to 'homosexual' or other 'queer' intimate relationships (Foucault, 1976). This is an example of biopower, in the sense that individuals' decisions over who they are sexually intimate with are mediated by values surrounding 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexual behaviour. Applying this in terms of veganism, a vegansexual perspective resists and reverses a mainstream process, by which vegans are seen as abnormal, and places stigma on the embodied act of eating meat. Thus, vegans may, directly or indirectly, avoid intimacy with non-vegans, due to the underlying implications regarding shared values-for example, Darren's assertion that he would now "*not bother*" with someone who was pro-fox hunting. Attraction is embodied, and in this sense, attraction to vegans/non-vegans is an embodied experience, in the same sense as not eating meat, and typically takes place within a normalizing context. The next section explores the example of religious vegans, as

[30] Biopower is discussed in Chapter Three

well as vegans who adhere to 'straight edge'[31] subculture, exploring the tension between the rigidity of religious and other doctrines, and the fluidity of vegan identity.

## Faith and Veganism

Having considered processes of normalization and the ways that vegans perform and navigate various identities in their day-to-day lives and relationships, this section looks at veganism in non-secular contexts. Typically veganism and animal advocacy might be conceived of as socio-politically 'progressive' phenomena, where adherents are critically engaged in and motivated by compassionate understandings of the relationship between human and non-human animals, informed by rational and scientific knowledge about the world (for example, the ability of animals to feel pain). However, this may be too simplistic an analysis, as it ignores those whose veganism has developed differently, for example vegans of faith. The tension between the rigidity of veganism as a strictly delineated lifestyle, and queer conceptions of identity as being in a state of constant fluidity, is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In this chapter I have attempted to explore vegan identity and biography through the prism of normalization but individuals, approaching the topic from an atheist or secular viewpoint, have presented the bulk of the experiences considered so far. Globally, many religions have rules about what followers can and cannot consume (for example, kosher, halal) and different faiths promote the benefits of drug and alcohol free lifestyles. Incipient forms of veganism can be seen to have emerged from religious understandings of the world (Rankin, 2006). Furthermore, many non-religious vegans choose to eschew drugs and alcohol, in particular those who identify with 'straight edge' culture, which has found favour among Christians and Mormons (Haenfler, 2006). There are significant areas of overlap in the lives of secular and religious vegans, and this is something that may help us to illuminate the tension between veganism, as both a progressive emancipatory position and as a form of conservative asceticism.

[31] As touched upon in Chapter 1: Introduction, 'Straight Edge' is a clean living youth subculture in which adherents eschew alcohol, taking drugs, smoking and promiscuous sex. In the 1990s, this developed further with some suggesting that straight edge lifestyle should also include vegetarianism/veganism (Haenfler, 2006).

**Seventh Day Adventism**

Kaya is a black woman in her thirties. In contrast to most of the people I interviewed, Kaya's path to veganism began with, what she described as, a religious experience. Kaya is a follower of Seventh Day Adventism (SDA), a Protestant Christian denomination. SDA promotes and recommends vegetarianism and veganism to members of the church, and promotes healthy living and compassion towards non-human animals. A 'turning point' in Kaya's life came when she converted to SDA at age seventeen, along with the rest of her family, after they began to regularly attend a SDA church (which observes Saturday as the Sabbath).

> *We started going when I was seventeen, and I thought yeah it's okay, I like it. Bit odd… because we go to church on a Saturday, and I used to go to town with my friend, I had to come back a certain time, you understand. But then the whole kind of message started to mean more to me, and then I got baptised.*

Initially Kaya's dietary changes focussed on moving towards a healthier lifestyle, embracing plant-based and non-processed foods.

> *Now we only have first pressed olive oil, because we don't do the butter, even though we've heard that butter is better for us than margarine, we stick to olive oil, even on toast… We're moving to a higher stage, where the church has promoted non-processed food. So we're moving to non-processed, raw food. The church promotes the original diet, which is nuts, grains, fruit, and pulses. And that's what the orthodox Adventists are going back to, nuts, grain, fruit and pulses. And the manufactured soya products have their place, but we're encouraged to reduce those as well, to maybe three times, twice a week.*

Kaya's traces her decision to remove animal products from her diet altogether back to two 'turning point' moments in her life.

> *I became a vegetarian first when I went for an interview at University, and I was going up the hill; I'd had a really nice time, and it was a really odd experience, I saw a cow. It was just chewing grass but it was looking right into my face. And it was chewing and looking at me and a voice came from nowhere and said "look at that! At this time you're looking at that cow minding its own business and the next minute that cow is on your plate" and then in an instant I became a vegetarian because of that experience and the voice that I heard.*

For Kaya, her whole transition to veganism is rooted in what she describes as a 'religious context'. The significance of the voice heard by Kaya is absolutely crucial to the story, particularly the fact that this was a message from God, rather than a

personal decision or the voice of her own conscience. This on-going direct connection and discussion with God continued, as she moved closer to veganism, and "closer to Christ".

> *And then two years after, gradually, the dairy products went as well. I had a very bad experience with eggs, which rocked my stomach and had me on the floor… it's all in a religious context for me… I was so ill, really, really bad. And I screamed out and I said "Okay God, I get it, the eggs have to go" and as soon as I said that, the pain stopped. And then all the dairy products went as well…*

Kaya ascribes particular significance to these 'turning points', due to the profound connection she felt with God at these times. Consequently, her veganism and faith are firmly entwined.

> *The more you get closer to Christ, the more your diet changes. I know that sounds really odd I know, but in a spiritual context [other Adventists would] understand that. As you get closer to the church and closer to Christ, the things you really want to eat, you really look at them and you think "this is not for me" and your diet changes according to that; the closer you are to Christ. As soon as we converted we started making changes to our diets.*

Whilst Kaya's journey to veganism was very different from many other people I spoke to, there were commonalities in experience. For example, processes of normalization can be seen in the way people make assumptions about Kaya's diet, and assume it is excessively restrictive, dull or unhealthy.

> *We have Kosher laws as well, not like [Judaism], but… if I cooked meat, I would never use that pot to cook for you, because that's against your ethics isn't it? So I say to the [people I live with], 'you can't use my stuff, because you'll use it to cook meat and pork'. But the assumption is you're a vegetarian. And you have to say, 'no, no, no, a vegan is someone is only has a plant based diet, and everyone says…' "well, what do you eat then?" And then you have to go through there's plenty to eat… that's the initial assumption. They… look at you weird like, 'well, how do you survive?' and 'I bet you're anaemic'… And you say to them, 'a scoop of marmite, in a stew, or on a piece of toast, and that's vitamin b12 covered right there'. And they say, 'you're never ill', and 'that's just fresh garlic. Crush it'. And they're always ill… and my skin's purer than theirs. Yey! But they only see disadvantages, but I think I have advantages, by a different perspective.*

Normalization can also be understood in how Kaya describes herself as posing a practical 'hassle' to meat eaters, possibly as a function of vegaphobia on their behalf (Cole and Morgan, 2011). This is rooted in a lack of engagement with the complex structural processes that allow meat and dairy to be so widely accessible, and vegan

food to be regarded as 'unusual', contrary to the disparity in effort needed to produce the former, relative to the latter. This is something that many other vegans also experienced, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

> *Being a [professional], you're invited out to eat at restaurants, and they invite you out, but you're seen as a hassle, because you have to ring them up and say, "I'm not a vegetarian, don't give me quiche, I'm a vegan, can I have butternut squash risotto, no wine, no cream, and that sounds nice for me" but on top of that, I go one step further, I take my own cutlery as well. It's seen as a hassle. Because I don't think I want to eat from cutlery that has touched pork. It's a hassle to other people, but you're talking about the way we live our lives, and this is the way we live our lives… I can put a piece of towel on the plate, and then it's acceptable to me then.*

Kaya's account of how other people perceive her diet as a 'hassle' is a good example of the normalizing processes that impact on vegans

> *But I think [eating meat] is a hassle, you have to spend so much money, and spill so much blood to put meat on people's plates. I think they're a hassle. They never see it from our perspective; I see it as a waste of money and it's cruel.*

But Kaya's experience must also be considered in relation to intersectional analysis of race, ethnicity and religion. As a black women, and member of a relatively small 'racialized' faith, perceived to have a relatively large black membership (Taylor et al, 2011), the response of her white colleagues to her religious and ethical food choices can be understood as 'microaggressions'[32] (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). When considered in isolation, the attitudes of her co-workers might just seem rude or ill-mannered, but taking into account racial and religious dimension, they form part of Kaya's cumulative experience of normalizing processes, exacerbated by the cumulative nature of such events[33] (Delgado and Stefancic, 2011). As with Dianne's experience as a working class vegan and Dolly's experience as a 'queer' vegan, Kaya's experience as a vegan member of a racialized faith can be understood within an intersectional framework of normalization, whereby differing forms of oppression intersect with cumulative and unique effects.

[32] 'Micro-aggressions' are small acts of conscious or unconscious racism or prejudice that occur in the lives of People of Colour on a daily basis (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000).
[33] Viewed in isolation microaggressions are often dismissed as insignificant, but they can have a very damaging affect, exacerbated by the cumulative nature of such events (Delgado and Stefancic, 2011).

Of the people I interviewed, Kaya was the most religious. However, others discussed their relationship with their lapsed faith, for example Daniyah's Muslim upbringing.

**Faith**

Daniyah is a woman in her early twenties whose family had, what she describes as, a fairly conventional white British background historically. However, before Daniyah's birth, her parents converted to Islam, and raised Daniyah and her brother as Muslims. Much like Kaya, Daniyah's journey to veganism stands out from many of the other participants, due to the direct and indirect influence of religion on her worldview.

> *My parents had me relatively late I guess, my mum was 37 when I was born. At some point in the 70s, I don't know the precise date, my parents converted to Islam, so that's why my name is Arabic and my brother's isn't. My dad's Welsh, his side of the family was in farming and also they had an abattoir (laughs), which is quite interesting in relation to this topic um, they used to provide the meat for Chester Zoo [and] take away expired animals…*

It is striking that Daniyah's paternal family once operated a slaughter house, especially when considering that her father would later go on to adopt a vegetarian diet.

> *[My parents are] both white British, they were vegetarian for fifteen years and fell off the wagon when my brother was about two or three. He got chicken pox and asked for a fish finger, and they brought a packet of fish fingers home because they felt so bad, because he was so sick, and that was the descent….They were quite serious about Islam when I was growing up, they didn't drink alcohol, we were Halal, there was no pork in the house, but I was raised eating meat, um, but since I've moved home, I've kind of managed to convince my parents to go vegetarian again, so that's really nice.*

For Daniyah, the declining visibility of her parents' faith was an important factor in her story, as it underlined the tension between her largely Western experience outside of her home life and her Muslim upbringing.

> *…my dad, probably more so than my mum, [is] just quite, ambiguously religious… I just think he was quite susceptible and wants to believe in something and found a lot of friends who were involved in the [local] Mosque and I think just the more they learned the more involved they got. But we moved away… when I was about eleven, and that's when we stopped going to the Mosque more regularly because*

*there wasn't one near us, and now, I mean they let me make my own decision at that point…*

This tension has come into particular focus since she has moved back in with her parents, having spent several years studying at boarding school and university. Daniyah is no longer religious.

*I'd describe myself as Agnostic… I don't really feel like I'm in a position to know either way, I'm not religious, I'm very wary, I suppose of religious structures and the kind of, I know there's a lot of positive things that can come from being involved in religion but ….I'm also aware of the kind of negative side of things, so it's not something that really interests me at all, religion, let's put it that way (laughs)… My dad, in particular, still throws things into conversation, he's still quite… quite Muslim, but not in the sense that, we used to pray a lot, but that doesn't happen anymore, so I don't know the precise circumstances, I just think it was a gradual thing.'*

Daniyah's father's involvement in humanitarian work has had a significant impact on her worldview and interest in social justice.

*They did get very heavily involved, especially, I remember when I was growing up, kind of, finding it really exciting that we were going to go out and stay up all night on a vigil for Bosnia, and my dad drove to Bosnia with medical supplies and [was] quite involved in that way.*

Daniyah's family's focus on concern for others was an important aspect of her upbringing. Her parents did spend many years as vegetarians before lapsing before she was born. This meant that Daniyah grew up eating meat (whilst observing the Muslim principle of a Halal diet) and did so until she became vegan as an adult. Daniyah decided to go vegan after finishing university and moving to a new town. This was a turning point for Daniyah, both in her changing her diet, but also in her now encouraging her parents to re-adopt aspects of the lifestyle they once adhered to themselves.

*Having been raised eating meat, I actually went straight from being a full on meat-eater…I only made the switch to veganism like a year ago, and that was obviously whilst I was away, and I'd started having some really interesting discussions with my parents about it, and obviously asking why they'd stopped being vegetarian*

Her parents have been largely supportive of her decision. Daniyah associates this with their beliefs and values.

> *We never ate much meat…Obviously pork was out because of the Muslim thing. We weren't like a super meaty family, we didn't eat it all that much, I suppose that was a hangover from the fact that my parents were vegetarian for fifteen years, so it wasn't like in everything we ate, and we didn't buy like processed meat and things like that, because my parents still… I'm still trying to drag them out of that like, oh if it's free range it's fine, or if it's 'farm assured' it's fine, but we never really bought uh, like, Tesco value chicken or whatever..*

Growing up, Daniyah remembers openly questioning aspects of the family lifestyle, what she saw as inconsistencies and interesting discrepancies between different faiths.

> *I do remember asking as a kid, why do we have these rules, like you eat with one hand but not the other, and why not pork? And I do remember thinking at some point as a child that it was really weird that Hindus didn't eat beef because of like a positive reason, like they were too good to eat, and it was really funny that like in Islam you didn't eat pork because of a negative reason, because they were too bad to eat, that was something I found weird.*
> *I think you're quite malleable as a kid and you believe whatever narrative is presented to you, and I just was told, pigs are dirty don't eat pigs and I was like okay, I think, I'd like to consider myself as an intelligent person but I don't really think I've started engaging critically with any kind of thought, I don't really think I matured intellectually until, very recently, even when I was at University I don't feel like I made the most of it…*

Daniyah was also brought up in an alcohol free environment, due to her family being Muslim. This was rare within the sample of vegans I spoke to, and almost all of the people I interviewed drink alcohol. However, a few do not, such as Kaya and Dianne. With Kaya this is for religious reasons, but with Dianne, it was because of her engagement with Straight Edge culture, and in particular the notion of 'Straight Edge' veganism.

**'Straight Edge' Veganism**

Though 'Straight Edge' culture emerged from the hardcore punk scene, and has typically been conceptualized as a lifestyle tied firmly to youth counter-culture (Haenfler, 2006), there are interesting areas of overlap between the experiences of those who arrived at veganism with an awareness of straight edge, and those for whom religious faith was more significant. Many faiths, including Islam and SDA, promote alcohol/drug free lifestyles, and consider certain types of meat to be

unacceptable. The basis for these beliefs can be linked to religious teachings in and so-called sacred texts. For straight edge adherents, alcohol/drug, meat free lifestyles can be traced to the lyrics of hardcore punk bands such as Minor Threat, Youth of Today and Earth Crisis (Haenfler, 2006). Dianne was one participant for whom straight edge has been significant. Her interest in and adherence to straight edge began at university, where she was studying Art, and ties in another normalizing context relating to alcohol consumption.

> *I went to Uni to do an art foundation course… thinking I was gonna be doing an art degree, [but I] couldn't stand my art foundation course, I thought it was very contrived… I think actually a lot of it was to do with moving to [a big city] from such a rural area, was just a bit too much to take in …and I couldn't really focus on anything…*

Then, when first living away from home and having experimented with alcohol in her teens, Dianne started to regularly binge drink, which took its toll on her wellbeing. A big 'turning point' moment came when she eventually decided to stop drinking altogether. It was also around this time that Dianne decided to go beyond vegetarianism and take up a vegan diet.

> *I just couldn't be arsed with the kind of bullshit… of everyone getting hammered all the time, I was like there's more to life than getting absolutely hammered… I got fed up of waking up in my own vomit, I was like yeah, I might not be able to cope with how intense this all is but at least I can try and cope with it myself, rather than having to take loads of drugs.*

Dianne was interested in punk and hardcore music and through this, was aware of straight edge. The overwhelming majority of people at her university drank to excess regularly, and this is seen as typical, acceptable behaviour (often encouraged informally by institutions themselves through initiation ceremonies, 'fresher's week' events et cetera). For a teetotaller, this may represent a normalizing context, in which drinking alcohol is positioned as superior and normal. Dianne's involvement with punk subculture provided a different set of options, and ultimately led her down a path towards straight edge and veganism.

Smith and Sparkes' (2012) concept of a 'cultural menu' can be applied here. This is the idea that whilst individuals understand and construct narratives about their lived experiences, in ways that are personally meaningful to them, these stories

are often heavily directed by the 'cultural menu' of narrative resources that is open to them (Smith and Sparkes, 2012: 82). Narrative understandings of experience are rarely created exclusively by the story teller, these narratives tend to be co-constructed within relational networks and in reference to narratives that precede their own, and that are popularly understood in a given culture. The mainstream narrative of university is one in which students get together and get drunk regularly. There are not many other narratives available on the menu, as it were. In fact, the idea of 'freshers' week' has become synonymous with wild partying and drinking to excess, in many people's understandings. The idea of not drinking is regarded as not having fun, therefore, those who do not drink are forced to combat a stereotype that they are boring, conservative or miserable. Straight edge provides a counter narrative, associated with youth experience, whereby young people can be alternative, rebellious, radical, cool and fun, and also not drink or take drugs. In her awareness of straight edge, the number of options on the menu increased for Dianne. Her decision to stop drinking alcohol might not have occurred had she not discovered straight edge counter-culture, and it almost certainly would not have occurred exactly how it did. It allowed her to resist the normalizing context of binge drinking at university, and embrace an identity that was meaningful to her experience and ethics.

**Section Summary**

Kaya and Daniyah's experiences of veganism represent an interesting contrast to the predominantly secular context of many of the other participants in the research. Processes of normalization are present in these stories, for example in Kaya's struggles with maintaining a normal social life, being invited out for meals, but having to take her own cutlery, and feeling like a 'hassle' due to her vegan diet. The idea that vegans are somehow inconveniencing others through their desire to avoid animal products is evidence of the subtle normalizing processes, and these intersect with other systems of oppression, such as racism, in damaging ways. Faith narratives surrounding veganism also highlight differences between approaches to the ethics of animal consumption. Kaya's story of her direct conversation with God, illustrates a commitment to veganism rooted in both ethical, but also spiritual beliefs. Dianne's adherence to straight edge introduces a secular, but similarly doctrinal approach to ethics, and one rooted in youth music culture. Straight edge promotes sober living to

young people and as such, might be understood as a conservative movement (Haenfler, 2006). But Dianne's progressive politics underpin her sober lifestyle, as well as a desire to react to normalizing processes in her experience of university (the binge drinking culture). In finding straight edge subculture, Dianne was given access to a cultural narrative in which she could fulfil the identity of vegan, non-drinker, and a member of an alternative music subculture simultaneously.

To return to the question of whether vegan identity is fluid, these people's experiences are examples of rigidity and fluidity in tension. The rigidity of religious or other doctrines, such as straight edge, limits fluidity, and poses questions relating to normalization. Straight Edge, and its resistance to alcohol and drug abuse, has been constructed as a conservative movement, for its advocacy of clean living and popularity among religious youngsters (Haenfler, 2006). Yet, in the context of a mainstream drinking culture, we might reconceptualise the rigidity of straight edge as radically transgressive. Mainstream culture positions alcohol consumption as an acceptable norm, and this was very clear for Dianne as she started university. Her wish to resist this led her to embracing straight edge lifestyle, and this was compatible with her veganism.

It is important to acknowledge the complexity of fluidity, and the processes by which fixity impacts upon vegan identity. Dianne may be able to move between identities, (non-vegan to vegan, drinker to straight edger), but this fluidity is mediated by the similarly fluid context. A religious upbringing might position sober lifestyle as a norm, against which drinking is abnormal, but mainstream culture at Dianne's university was quite the opposite. This meant that straight edge provided a means of resistance and radical transgression through ascribing to a fixed doctrine and identity.

The way that themes of faith emerged through the research project served to underline Mercer's (2007) argument that the traditional insider/outsider dichotomy should in fact be conceptualised more as a complex, multi-faceted continuum that researchers move along in a plurality of ways through a research project, as opposed to being a simple binary dichotomy. The fact that I am vegan means that I share experiences with Kaya, but my atheism, and different upbringing means that I can not claim to be an 'insider' when discussing SDA.

## Chapter Summary

In order to address question 2 "*to what extent can vegan identities be said to be fluid?*" this chapter discussed processes of normalization in the lives of vegans, and the ways that vegans have managed their identities in various normalizing contexts. I have argued that vegan identity is necessarily fluid, and this is apparent when we see evidence of normalizing processes in the narratives of the participants. It is interesting to apply Warner's (2000) critical analysis of 'normality' (as discussed in Chapter 3) to the experience of vegans in meat-eating society. It is certainly statistically uncommon to be vegan, but all too often this statistical frequency is rendered objectionable in societal discourse. This may take the form of portrayals of vegans as having a "*phobic relation to food*" comparable to an eating disorder (Simonsen, 2011: 67); or as *"joyless pleasure-deniers, many of whom secretly long to sate their carnal appetites by indulging in both meat-eating and sex with meat-eaters"* (Potts and Parry, 2010: 60). Indeed, vegans tend to be aware of, and active in trying to dissuade, these perceptions of abnormality. Sneijder and Molder (2009) highlight the tendency for vegans to use language and other discursive devices, which directly or indirectly stress their 'ordinariness', in an attempt to avoid being dismissed due to their veganism. Simonsen (2011) draws a parallel between this performative self-awareness and the tendency for "*stigmatized individuals*" to present themselves as "*ordinary [people] although not necessarily making a secret of their 'failing'*" (Goffman, 1986: 31; quoted in Simonsen, 2011: 68). Simonsen (2011) resists attempts to 'normalize' veganism; instead aiming to emphasize its 'queerness', in order to problematize what Edelman calls the "*privilege of heteronormativity as the organizing principle of communal relations"* (Edelman, 2004:2 quoted in Simonsen, 2011: 69). Parry's (2010) concept of 'carnonormativity' (discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy) might be meaningfully applied here.

Veganism is 'abnormal' in a context in which meat-eating is continually positioned as 'normal'. This frequently rests upon essentialist ideas about nature and what is 'natural', linking to ideas around gender, sex and sexuality. The way meat eating has been positioned as 'normal', healthy and natural in discourse, parallels how heterosexuality has been positioned. Veganism is therefore frequently regarded as 'abnormal' and 'unhealthy'. Within this framework, veganism emerges as a queer category, posing an indirect challenge to essentialist ideas about what humans can

and should eat. Evidence to support this is reflected in the stories in this chapter, especially in the 'coming out' narratives, and conversations surrounding 'vegansexuality'. Furthermore, the necessary fluidity of vegan identity, in social interaction contexts, is supported by queer conceptions of identity as something in perpetual flux (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Having considered processes of 'normalization' in the lives of participants, this chapter explored the narrative themes of 'Coming Out Vegan'; 'Vegansexuality' and 'Faith and Veganism', providing evidence of the fluidity of vegan identity. Julie's discussion of framing aspects of her identity in her professional life, highlighted interesting dynamics at work, whereby she felt unable to be outwardly vegan, and still progress in her career and be taken seriously. Similarly, a change of schools allowed Dianne a fresh start in which she could be more open about her views on animal consumption and in which social pressures and expectations were not as much of a constraint on her desire to explore beyond meat-based diets. Dolly's story presented parallels between her sexual and her political identities. She discussed her strategic approach to allowing her parents to know about her decision to go vegan, as well as her decision to keep her queer identity hidden from her parents due to the possibility of conflict.

Potts and Parry's (2010) work on the concept of 'vegansexuality' provided a framework for understanding some of the narratives presented relating to relationships. For example, Darren's discussion of his past relationship with someone who held very different values, and his current relationship with a fellow vegan, and how he feels his outlook has changed within normalizing contexts. Foucault's (1997) concept of biopower is also instructive, particularly in relation to the way the intimate relationships of vegans may or may not are mediated by or in response to social norms and values. Decisions over sexual intimacy may be mediated in certain ways by the values vegans hold surrounding 'normal' and 'abnormal' ethical behaviour. A vegansexual approach stigmatises eating meat. This may create a context where embodied choices over intimacy and romantic relationships are guided by whether a person is vegan. This tension was reflected in Darren's story of no longer wanting to be around 'fox-hunting' supporters, in spite of the fact his first intimate relationship was with a hunt supporter. Issues of embodiment and biopower

are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, especially in relation to protest and direct action.

Finally, the narratives surrounding faith and veganism highlighted a non-secular experience of veganism. Daniyah's Islamic upbringing and experience of a non-mainstream relationship with animal products (through kosher rules), provided a basis for her eventual decision to become vegan. Kaya's adherence to the teachings of SDA was central in her decision to go vegan, and this process was compounded by her spiritual experience of food poisoning from animal products. Dianne's introduction to straight edge culture provided her with a counter-narrative to typical student binge drinking behaviour, and allowed her to maintain and subcultural, non-mainstream identity whilst eschewing drink and drugs.

Drawing on the ideas surrounding normalization discussed here, the next chapter examines some more turning point moments in the narratives of vegans, this time in the context of activism, crime and punishment. This provides a basis from which to further explore veganism as a normalized identity.

# Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the concept of normalization in relation to the lives of vegans, as a means of illustrating the fluid and fundamentally contested nature of identity and answer Research Question 2: "*To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*" (Foucault, 1977; Halperin, 1995; Plummer, 2003). Continuing with 'normalization' as the central analytical thread, now I explore the contested nature of vegan identity further, within the context of political expression, through considering the significance of performativity within narratives of political engagement and activism.

This chapter first addresses research question 3: *how have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?* I present a variety of different cases of vegan expressions of political engagement, activism and resistance and demonstrating that the political expression of vegans is mediated by normalizing contexts. I identify the importance of access to alternative narratives in allowing people to discover and engage with animal advocacy. I highlight intersectionality as a key concern of some participants and I also argue that the political and ethical expressions and performances of veganism are often embodied experiences.

I structure the chapter around three themes; 'political engagement', 'activism and direct action' and 'criminality'. I begin by examining Julie's experiences within the formal political system through party membership and activism, then Bea's experiences of other forms of political activism, such as street demonstrations and petitions. I also consider Claire's experience, and how impairment has presented obstacles to her ability to 'perform' veganism. Issues of embodiment have thus framed her ethical and political expression. I discuss this, in connection with Butler's (1990) concept of 'performativity' and Foucauldian Biopolitics (Foucault, 1997). Next, I explore Jamie and Geoff's experiences of activism and direct action, for example through membership of grassroots and established activist groups, stalling[34] and

[34] 'Stalling' refers to setting up an animal advocacy stall, replete with leaflets, information, petitions, collection tins in order to promote causes and/or raise funds. This is often done on busy high streets/city centres.

hunt sabbing[35]. Finally, I focus on narratives of political crime and criminal justice, through the experiences of Eddie and Dolly, applying the concepts of normalization and Biopower. Throughout, the chapter I consider the significance of normalizing processes, fluid identities and performativity within the narratives. In presenting these narratives, the chapter also contributes to the research question 1; "*which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*"

## Political Engagement

This section addresses research question 3: *how have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?* by presenting narratives of political expression. It begins by discussing experiences and perspectives on activism, in various forms, discussed by participants, first returning to Julie's story. As discussed in Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism, Julie is a professional who holds a high profile and politically charged public position. She discussed her introduction to politics, her relationship with her stepfather being a point of political conflict from an early age.

### Family Politics

Julie believes her professional career is fairly unusual within the context of her family background. Though her parents both had firmly held views, they were neither overtly political, nor did they hold progressive political views. But Julie highlights both as very important aspects of her identity, which have shaped her professional career.

> *My stepfather was your sort of classic working class right wing[er]… you're far too young to remember Alf Garnett[36]… He was kind of like that, but not funny… Basically my earliest thing in politics was me arguing with him at the dinner table, with the rest… sitting there, saying "oh God, here they go again"……..It was political in the sense that both him and my mother were interested in political issues… They weren't politically active in any sense of the word, but they knew what was going on and they talked about what was going on… So I didn't have any sort of role models in terms of… I didn't have that sort of model to follow…*

[35] 'Hunt Sabbing' refers to the act of sabotaging a hunt. Put simply it is any efforts to protect the lives and safety of animals (e.g. foxes, badgers, grouse) from human hunters. Hunt Sabbing can often be physically and emotionally draining and often dangerous, with very early morning starts, lots of outdoor physical activity, and the constant risk of conflict with the police or hunters, as well as the very real prospect of arrest and incarceration.

[36] Alf Garnett is a conservative and bigoted fictional comedy character from a British television series in the 1970s.

*I didn't meet my real father until I was 27 and it turns out he had been a shop steward in the T&G Union and actually agreed with me on most things so it raises very interesting things about whether things are hereditary or learned…'*

Reflecting on the casual racism of her stepfather, Julie feels this may have in fact pushed her further towards progressive and anti-racist politics.

*I think the key things with my stepfather were, one was sadly, you know, the sort of, the racism, I suppose, and the other things was… he worked in construction, demolition, he ran his own business, and was very much opposed to… 'Burdens on business', so he was against things like the minimum wage, health and safety legislation, he always thought that was like government interference with him doing his job, and it was like the little man struggling against the big authorities… Again, I didn't agree with that, and it was quite strange really, because I don't really know where I got any of my ideas from, but I sort of started arguing with him about all those things at quite an early age.*

One turning point moment in Julie's political development and journey towards activism occurred at a time of intensely polarised political parties in the UK. Mainstream politics in the nineteen eighties was characterised by a stridently Socialist Labour party opposition and a fiercely Neoliberal Conservative government. Labour Party leader Michael Foot's overwhelming defeat to Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party in 1983, has been described as being a consequence of the Labour leader's staunchly left wing agenda. Foot's manifesto for the 1983 election has been described as '*the longest suicide note in history*'; its unusually left leaning content called for Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament, withdrawal from European institutions, the abolition of the House of Lords, and sweeping renationalisation of Britain's industrial and infrastructural makeup (Morgan, 2007). It was within this context that Julie started to become more politically engaged.

*I saw Michael Foot speak when I was [eighteen], because I had a school friend by then whose dad was involved with the Labour Party… there was a sort of muddled period where I just didn't know enough about things but I probably didn't know about the political parties, I knew where I stood on specific issues, but I wouldn't know that Margaret Thatcher was all about the Free Market or whatever… There was a very clear distinction between the political parties. See then, in the seventies the debate was very much about things like the role of the Trade Unions, and I think also… it's probably still the same for people these days but um, your entry point is quite often single issue politics, like with me it would be the anti-racism thing….By the time we got to the '83 election… I was 18, I was politically, you know that was my first election and I voted Labour and I would never have voted for [Conservative MP] John Carlisle… he was known as… the*

*biggest apologist for Apartheid in the House of Commons… So I would've been becoming aware of that, I guess during the 79-83 elections… So that became even more polarised because as an MP he was so right wing.*

*I hung around a bit with the fringe groups, but I didn't join anything, I didn't join any political party at all, and it was just more, politics was more about…me having my own views on things, rather than Parliamentary politics, you know.*

The contrasting figures of Alf Garnett and Michael Foot are notable as two contrasting reference points from the UK during the 1970s and 80s. In a sense, they illustrate the polarised cultural context of Julie's political development. Having gotten involved in various 'single-issue' anti-racist political campaigns whilst studying at university, she later became involved in party politics after joining the Labour party. She saw this as a turning point.

*I joined the Labour party in 1992, so, that was when I started getting politically active.*

Julie's political expression has largely remained within the bounds of party politics and traditional campaigning. She feels her hometown limited her opportunities for political activism and hence her gravitation towards a more conventional model an away from street demonstrations, marches or direct action.

*Growing up [near London], [my hometown] is like the place where nothing very much ever happens, so there was almost like this fascination, like if I'd been growing up in London, or Liverpool or Manchester, it would have been much easier to have got involved in the marches or the demos or the protests, but it just wasn't really happening there.. so when I was at University there were things like the March for Jobs and the Miners' Strike, but I wasn't very sociable. So again, I went on one or two things. But since then… I've not really done anything beyond the sort of fairly mundane… marching sort of stuff.*

Julie has little experience of political activism outside of a party political context. In that sense her journey towards political engagement involved a direct interaction with formal mechanisms of governance, as opposed to grassroots political activism or direct action. Julie opted to pursue a political career within mainstream institutions of government, as opposed to attempting to influence institutions from the outside as an activist, or even a lobbyist.

Returning to the analytical thread of normalization, there is evidence of the concept at various moments in Julie's story. In the Chapter Five, we discussed Julie's

desire to keep her veganism secret in a professional context, as she feared being dismissed, ridiculed or pigeonholed. Here we have seen her familial background, and in particular her relationship with her stepfather, as central in her own journey towards political engagement. Within her family context, her incipient left wing views stood in opposition to those of her stepfather, whose traditionalism, casual racism, and belief in small government, represented a microcosm of mainstream values at the time and were the source of heated debate and conflict. In this sense, Julie's bourgeoning political identity was subject to processes of normalization, in relation to her leftism in a conservative familial context, and activism in an apathetic familial context. However, unlike the other vegans her activism eventually emerged in the form of involvement with Parliamentary party politics and electoral campaigning, rather than street demonstrations, or forms of direct action. In contrast, Bea's journey to political activism was influenced strongly by her interest in punk music.

**Punk**

Bea is a white woman in her mid-twenties, originally from rural USA. Her journey towards veganism and activism began in connection with her interest in punk music.

> *My vegetarianism, probably, it happened at the exact same time that I started listening to punk music. And so I think I got a lot of exposure to other kinds of activism through punk music.*

For Bea, becoming interested in punk music, especially the Canadian punk band Propagandhi, was a turning point that set her on a trajectory towards veganism and political activism.

> *Propagandhi was the first punk band I listened to and so that was a good one… to get me into it… I kind of knew, my parents' friends, some of them were vegetarian, but we didn't really talk about it, and I had an awareness that it was an ethical thing, in my group of friends I saw… so my friend Anthony, burned me a Propagandhi CD, and maybe a few months after that I went to a summer camp and I stopped eating meat, and I kind of came back and brought it to this little punk scene in my little town, and so I feel like I was kind of the first [laughs] ….to go vegetarian in my little area. [I was] fifteen. And I had friends who were like thirteen-seventeen-ish. After I did, maybe four or five other of my friends stopped eating meat.*

Propagandhi's pro-animal stance was something largely absent from the other cultural sources Bea had encountered before. This links back to Dianne's story in

Chapter 5; Dianne's engagement with straight edge subculture provided her a means of becoming sober and still maintaining a meaningful identity. I applied Smith and Sparkes' (2012) concept of a 'cultural menu' to Dianne's experience. The authors argue that a 'cultural menu' of narrative resources often impacts on the stories people tell about their lived experience; bands like Propagandhi add items to the menu, and thus offer new options for the way people understand their own experience. For Bea, discovering the music of Propagandhi and other animal advocate bands, presented an alternative narrative to the one she had previously experienced. Concepts like veganism and animal advocacy, had been presented in a way that she could relate to and see as relevant to her own life trajectory. As a young person with an interest in punk music, the discovery of punk bands gave impetus to her exploring alternative narratives of politics and ethics. This in turn led to her bringing animal advocacy to the small punk scene within her community, leading to four or five others deciding to go vegetarian or vegan.

The narratives of Bea and Julie highlight the importance of access to varied narratives, and the role this can play in allowing people to discover and engage with animal advocacy. In Bea's case, this came through the discovery of punk music, and in Julie's case, her political journey was tied to the polarised political context of the UK in the 1980s. Claire's story of political engagement contrasts with Bea's and Julie's, as her experience of veganism was mediated by embodied factors, such as health and mobility.

**Breaking Veganism**

Claire is a white woman in her late twenties, who describes herself as having an 'impairment'. Claire and I were acquaintances prior to the research, through us both being involved in political groups, as well as through our shared interest in punk music and culture. She has been concerned with environmental and animal advocacy issues from a young age. Claire is impaired due to a neurological movement disorder- this also affects her physical mobility, and as a result Claire uses a wheelchair.

Having initially gone vegetarian in her teens, Claire went vegan in her early twenties. Due to the nature of her condition, Claire has found that all of the available medicine that can limit the debilitating effects of her condition is non-vegan, that is, it either includes ingredients derived from animals, or has been tested on animals.

Claire recently made the difficult decision to 'break' her veganism in an effort to curtail the degenerative aspects of the condition, at first through using historically animal tested mediation[37], whilst still avoiding 'batch-tested' drugs.

> *[The Doctors] wanted to put me on a medicine that increases the amount of dopamine on your brain and all these medicines are animal tested, but these were really historically animal tested, they weren't new medicines on the market. At that point I made the decision, they told me, this medicine could stop me getting worse.*

Claire made this very tough decision under significant pressure from doctors to use 'batch-tested' medicines to treat her condition. For her, it was a choice between remaining vegan and experiencing a much lower quality of life, which would have been likely to get progressively worse, or accepting the batch-tested medication being offered to her.

> *I've gotten a lot better now, thanks to the horrible, animal tested medication… I'm now able to do stuff… When we got the diagnosis they referred me to a lot of medical input, one was a Dopamine replacement therapy, and I know I needed that… I gave myself the cut-off rule[38], um, if it was tested prior to the 70s, then I'd be not happy about it, but if I had to take it to preserve myself then I would. But not take it without serious discussion. So the professors involved in that treatment, I'd ask them exactly, where it came from, where it was tested and how it was tested.*

At various points Claire found herself in a lose-lose scenario, whereby she either took preventative animal-tested medication, or was forced to take animal-tested medication to alleviate the pain resulting from not having taken the preventative medication. She describes the point at which she could not stand the pain any longer, the 'breaking point', and this is when she decided she would take animal tested painkillers.

> *I always said, I would not have batch-tested animal testing, I would not have current animal testing (in terms of 1970s onwards), basically what they found*

[37] According to Claire, certain medication has been tested at some stage historically in the early stages of its use, but is no longer routinely tested on animals. For her these medications stand in contrast with 'batch-tested' ones, from which each new batch produced has to be tested on animals.
[38] The way in which a product is deemed to be free from animal testing varies, in some cases, a product may contain ingredients that were initially tested on animals, but have for the past few decades not been. In these cases, a 'cut-off' date is set for when these products are permissible as 'free from animal testing'. This mean that products tested on animals prior to the 1970s, might now be seen as acceptable.

*out was that my brain doesn't have enough Dopamine in it full stop, and I was gonna lose a lot of the use of my arms, and everything a lot quicker, and a lot of use of self-care and things that I was able to do up until I was 22. So they put me on this, medicine, it meant then, that I wouldn't need painkillers that I was taking that were animal tested, I had to take them when I was at breaking point, like I was passing out or being sick from pain, that's when I took the pain killers… I do have a high threshold because I've always had pain.*

Aspects of Claire's neurological condition meant that she routinely experienced severe discomfort and unpleasantness throughout her life.

*Part of my condition is that it feels like something is crawling over your body, and it's due to a lack of Dopamine, so it feels like there's lots of spiders crawling all over your body, um, but it's worse when you're tired or not moving, so always just assume, you know when people say they like to stretch, because stretching always made it feel better, I assumed everyone had that, it turns out no one really does, so when I took this Dopamine, it really alleviated it. I found I was able to concentrate more, I was able to sleep more than three hours a night, which was class, I was able to write and hold a pen, and my ankle stopped dislocating.*

Taking Dopamine was quick and effective, and restored some of the abilities that Claire had lost. But even at that point, she was still very reluctant to move onto regularly taking animal tested medication. However, having been shown a video of the results of these medications on other patients, Claire had a change of heart. Seeing people with the same condition at later stages on ventilators and unable to breath, eat or speak independently, and then seeing the almost-miraculous recovery through the medication, had a big effect on Claire's perspective. The knowledge that the medication was being produced on a large scale anyway, for a more common condition, also alleviated some of the strain of deciding to take them.

*The reason I decided to take this medicine that was animal tested, when I'd refused anything except that breaking point, was because, they'd said "some people take it" and they'd showed me videos of people at later stages of my condition where they are, on ventilators, unable to speak and chew, going from that to walking and running, with all regained use through Physio, and I dunno, that tipped it for me, and I had a big talk with the Doctor, and he said, "this medicine is getting made anyway, your small supplies aren't causing any more to be made, it's not going to stop being made, because it's a Parkinson's medicine, it's being made for people with Parkinson's…"*

Claire feels considerable anxiety over her decision to 'break veganism', and how it would be regarded were she to re-enter the world of animal advocacy to the extent that she had in her earlier life.

> *I dunno if I'd fit in with another group of activists anymore, because I've made decisions because of my medical treatment, and it kind of feels like I've cheapened everything that I did work towards, and things that people achieved…*

Claire also worries that were she to re-engage with animal advocacy, non-impaired vegans would too readily accept the choices she has made as a product of patronising, ableist pitying. It is hard for her to find a comfortable balance.

> *There's either too little opposition for my medical decisions where I felt like, why should it be different for me? Or there was too much, where I tried to explain 'I am a selfish human, I am self-preserving, and that's why I've made these decisions to self-preserve'*
>
> *And I understand that if I had a similar wheelchair user, or disabled person come up to me and say 'I've decided to take this route and forego a portion of my ethics' I've always been friendly, but I probably would've politely told them that I disagreed with that.*
>
> *I think everyone's entitled to their opinion, but sometimes I think it's unfair that I'm outcasted for things that are outside of my control, but are not particularly, but I don't know whether some of that is for self-imposed restrictions I've put on myself, to be honest if I told the majority of animal rights activists that I have neuro-block treatment, they wouldn't really know that that's batch tested, it's really sickening stuff, but in my head…[I feel] conflicted.*

Claire's story highlights the intersections between vegan identity and disability, and links to Foucault's (1997) concept of 'Biopower'. She experienced the sorts of normalizing processes discussed by other participants, functioning through things like 'vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011) and the discursive positioning of veganism as abnormal and undesirable. However, this normalization process was compounded by her health condition, presenting her with unique obstacles. Whereas most vegans can function without consuming animal products, the nature of Claire's condition means that, if she remained 100% vegan, her health and standard of living would rapidly deteriorate- potentially to the extent that she would need a ventilator to breathe. A Foucauldian analysis of veganism might see Biopower evidenced in the discursive normalization of a meat-based diet, and thus, the 'abnormality' of eschewing meat takes place within a power dynamic where our embodied actions are mediated by dominant norms (Foucault, 1997). For Claire, the embodied experience of consuming or eschewing animal products is arguably intensified due to her condition. Her decisions regarding the consumption of batch-tested drugs meant she

was no longer 'vegan', but her values remain consistent regarding the ethics of batch-testing. This poses questions around authenticity, and performances of veganism.

It is useful to apply Butler's (1990) concept of 'performativity' in relation to Claire's lapsed veganism and identity. Butler challenges gender essentialism, and the idea that particular performances are innately linked to particular genders. Applying these ideas to veganism poses a different set of questions. There can be no 'pre-existing vegan'. Veganism is entirely a performance; it is not tied to specific biological, essential traits. A vegan is simply someone who performs veganism. These performances can be intensified in the case of embodied impairment. For example, Claire once physically removed a 'non-vegan' morphine drip from her arm whilst in hospital, aged fifteen. It had been inserted without her being consulted. Removing it caused her massive amounts of pain and shows that even at a young age Claire has strict standards of 'veganism'. Foucault's concept of Biopower might see morphine drips as part of a complex process by which our bodies are mediated (Foucault, 1997) and the use of animal-tested morphine, without Claire's consent, highlights the normative context vegans frequently find themselves in. Claire's rejection of the unethical morphine may considered an act of Biopolitical resistance to dominant values and governance of her embodied experience, as well as being a performance of veganism.

One might argue that Claire's use of batch-tested drugs denies her the ability to achieve a performance of vegan identity. Claire argued that it is ableist to apply different standards to her than to a non-disabled person. Rigidly defined veganism requires one to subsist with a plant-based lifestyle, without consuming animal products. There are different reasons why one might do this. For example, some may understand it as a moral boycott, intended to wield consumer influence and change industry practices. Some may do it for health benefits and care little for the animal exploitation dimensions. Some may see it as a symbolic gesture of removing oneself, as much as one can, from a system of oppression. Looking at Claire's story, we might argue that the spirit of Claire's veganism is to remove oneself from exploitation and to promote and achieve the goals of animal liberation through one's lifestyle. If we separate veganism as a set of rules, from veganism as a set of ideas, Claire's performance of struggling with the decision to take batch-tested drugs, could be deemed a performance of 'veganism' in that it is rooted in the ideas underpinning

veganism. Crucially, Claire still believes in veganism, and given other options, would certainly go vegan once more. Her experience of veganism is embodied and fraught with conflicts that other vegans do not face, and her story highlights the intersecting issues of disability, animal advocacy and normalization. Claire's political and ethical expressions and performances are mediated in her embodied experience as someone who lives with an impairment.

Claire's experience as a vegan with an impairment also highlights the complexity of insider/outsider relationships in social research (Mercer, 2007). Claire and I shared experiences of veganism, and involvement in social and environmental justice causes, and in this regard ours might be seen as an insider relationship. On the other hand, I do not use a wheelchair, and I have a considerable amount of structural privilege based due to the fact that I do not have an impairment. Once again, we can see that I was moving along a continuum of 'insider/outsiderness' throughout this project, and Claire's story highlights this.

The next section explores narratives of political activism and direct action in the biographies of Jamie and Geoff.

## Activism and Direct Action

This section moves on from narratives of political engagement, to themes of political activism and direct action. In so doing it addresses research question 3: *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?* It focuses on the stories of Jamie and Geoff, who have each been involved in activism and direct action. This section explores some of the differing contexts of political engagement, through demonstrations, hunt sabbing, radical social centres and through punk subculture.

Jamie is a white man in his late twenties. Having been brought up eating meat, in a quiet, rural, conservative constituency in the south of England, Jamie became interested in social justice at a fairly young age. He became vegetarian aged eleven, prompted by his older sister's decision to do so. He continued to have an interest in animal rights, environmentalism and politics throughout school and on into university, where he decided to go vegan. This was a largely solitary decision, and Jamie did not have many vegan friends whilst he was at university, nor was he politically active outside of his animal advocacy. Upon graduating from university, he

found a job where he came into contact with more activists, and was able to pursue his own activism.

> *When I finished uni, I think I went back [home] for a few months, because I didn't have a job… I applied for a job in Leeds at UNCAGED, which is an animal rights organization, mostly an anti-vivisection organization but they also have some more general things like international Animal Rights day, they coordinate. I hadn't been involved with animal rights activism as such until that point, but I applied and had an interview, and got the job, and that was, I worked there for a year*

Moving to Leeds was a 'turning point' moment for Jamie, particularly, through his involvement with national and local animal rights groups.

> *When I moved to Leeds, I got involved with Leeds Animal Action (LAA), I just sent them an email, pretty soon after I got there I think, and the first thing I came to was a 'Vegan Fair' in Manchester so, I just met three people from LAA in Leeds and we drove to Manchester, and yeah, it was really nice, just uh, it was quite a good way to get a feel for the movement, and I went to, a talk by someone from Sea Shepherd, ate lots of vegan cake, and yeah from then on I got quite regularly involved.*

Jamie's experience at the International Animal Rights gathering can also be seen as a turning point, in allowing him to experience animal advocacy in a different geographical and cultural context.

> *LAA does things like information stalls, demonstrations at shops selling fur, social events, like brunches or meals out, as well as the monthly meeting which we still have, yeah, I think it was in that year that I, went to the International Animal Rights gathering in Sweden, which was really nice, and it was good to kind of meet activists from other, countries where the situation is different, like where they still have a fur farming industry to deal with or where the movement is just so small, that it's all new for them, um, I went to some demonstrations in Stockholm after that, so it was quite nice to… be part of these big demonstrations*

These experiences highlighted for Jamie, the differing contexts that animal advocacy takes place in, from large scale mass demonstrations, to small movements, with very low membership figures, and the differing obstacles faced in such contrasting situations.

**Hunt Sabbing**

Generally, Jamie has been involved in stalling and city centre outreach work, but he has also taken part in direct action. He has been involved in Hunt Sabbing activities with his local group. He feels that, whilst not necessarily the most effective form of direct action in terms of number of lives saved, versus hours, energy and resources spent, Hunt Sabbing is extremely important in being able to see the positive outcome of direct action, and the connection between the action and the lives saved.

> *I think that hunt sabbing is a good thing to do and it's great to directly save lives but in terms of the number of animals killed you might, you know you might save a couple of animals, and I think it is positive to be able to see that tangible effect but it's only a tiny proportion of animals involved in bloodsports so I kind of focus more on the city centre outreach and that kind of thing.*

His experience of Hunt Sabbing contrasts with his experience working for UNCAGED, who were typically adverse to forms of activism that might result in arrest.

> *When I was working for UNCAGED, I'm not sure if I ever asked. But I got the impression that they wouldn't have been happy if I'd been arrested and they'd wanted to kind of make a distinction between themselves and people getting arrested and …..the underground side of the, animal rights movement and were quite keen to be kind of a professional lobbying style organization. So, I didn't do it then.*

This is significant, especially in the wider context of the criminalization of Animal Advocacy. Arguably, it indicates that larger, national lobbying groups like UNCAGED are aware of 'vegaphobic' portrayals of animal advocacy activism as extremist, and consequently resist action that could be deemed radical enough to be met with enmity by the authorities (Cole and Morgan, 2011). This illustrates the normalization of some forms of activism as acceptable, legal, peaceful, and arguably ineffective, versus, the aberrant direct action, which is subject to stigma, and increasingly erroneously subsumed by terror discourse (Sorensen, 2009; Nocella, 2011).

Having been regularly involved in animal rights activism, during his time in Leeds, Jamie ventured outside of the UK, initially to study at postgraduate level. This allowed him to experience the continental animal rights movement more intimately.

> *I was in Leeds for a year but my job came to an end and I moved to the Netherlands to Utrecht at first to do a Masters course and that was in Urban Geography and there, there wasn't like a group in Utrecht itself, there was, there are a few national Groups like 'Respect voor Dieren' which is 'Respect for Animals'…*

He was able to compare activism in the Netherlands to his experience in Leeds.

> *There's quite a big crossover between Respect voor Dieren and other activist groups, a lot of people I met in Respect voor Dieren were squatting. And it seems that in the Netherlands, most activists seem to squat! Or are involved in like anti-fascist stuff, so I think I went along to an Antifa[39] demonstration with some people from Respect for Dieren, so …we carried on doing some information stalls and demonstrations, although in the Netherlands there's a lot of fur so, it was kind of hard to choose where to start, whereas in Leeds, there's no fur that we know of…*

Jamie's experience in the Netherlands can certainly be regarded as a 'turning point' moment, in that, like his experience at the International Animal Rights gathering in Sweden, it broadened his knowledge and understanding of how animal advocacy activism works in different contexts. He has carried this knowledge and experience with him through his continued involvement with LAA. The variety of different forms of activism Jamie became involved in, during his time in the Netherlands, is perhaps indicative of the increased importance of importance of intersectional thinking in Jamie's worldview, and a move beyond single-issue approaches to animal advocacy, towards an encompassing social justice approach. Having returned to Leeds after dropping out of his MA course, Jamie continues to be actively involved with LAA, and has done to this day. On returning he brought with him experience of animal advocacy in another context, as well as experience of other forms of political activism, and a more intersectional approach to justice campaigning.

Geoff has also been involved in different forms of activism and direct action, and provides another example of vegan expressions of political and ethical beliefs, thus addressing research question 3. Geoff's involvement with animal advocacy activism is tied closely to his involvement with a social centre in the North of England.

**The Trunchbull Centre**

Geoff is a white man in his later twenties. His involvement with an Anarchist social centre was a turning point in guiding him towards political activism. It gave him a social arena where he gained knowledge and awareness of the actions that were taking place in the city.

[39] The term 'Antifa' comes from the German word 'Antifascismus' meaning 'Anti-Fascist'. The term is typically used to refer to radical left-wing activism opposing fascism and racism.

*Being [at the Trunchbull centre], a couple of times a week or more… made me realize that okay, there are people that do stuff, and there are things we can do, to affect some change… so it had like a dual effect of… well it made me feel better, but I knew that 'alright we can make some changes'…*

This awareness of current action, and the new opportunities for his own involvement, was important in allowing Geoff to express his political and ethical beliefs.

*When things are better for other people, it's also better for me, because I won't feel so… like I'm part of the problem. I didn't want to be part of the problem anymore, to try and be as less a part of the problem as I can be…*
*To lessen the effect I had on other beings, on other people. And on the planet. So that was beneficial to me.*

The Trunchbull centre provided Geoff with new avenues to explore political activism, relating to a broad spectrum of issues, including anti-capitalism, environmentalism, anarchism and more. In turn, this eventually led to his decision to go vegan through his involvement with vegan outreach work, whilst he was still vegetarian.

*We had our first free vegan food fair, and I helped do a bit of stuff for that. But I felt hypocritical because I was still vegetarian, I hadn't, I was still occasionally eating cheese and stuff, so I had to make the change and that came, not long after…*

*Once it kind of clicked in my head that this is so unjust and I'd read some books that my brother and his girlfriend had, I thought about it for myself… I properly was considering, my actions and how easily they impact on other people and other things, it came together really quickly and it was like, oh this is, this really makes a lot of sense, this really is, what I can become passionate about and kind of knowing…*

This new impetus to help the world (through veganism and activism), and thus in the process help himself, led Geoff to become involved in a wide variety of different forms of activism.

*I knew that I was anti-capitalist at least, and then discovering more about Anarchism and stuff from being involved in the Trunchbull Centre… I was aware of it before, but I hadn't thought about things for myself as much. And I hadn't really met anyone else that would describe them, themselves in that context, so it would just be from the second hand things from bands kind of saying things in lyrics but, not really, um considering it that much, but I had obviously a lot of time where I was just thinking… 'okay, how can I be a better person', to make myself feel a bit better and so I could get out of the kind of trap I was in of feeling hopeless and lost and about the pointlessness of everything, so it helped me*

*personally to go 'okay, alright, there's things I can do to change my life, to make me a more positive person, and to make things better overall'.*

Activism has become a regular aspect of his daily life, and something that he feels defines his whole identity.

*For the last five years [activism was] pretty quickly became a big part of my life, doing things regularly, week in week out…...*

*I've done, numerous….stalls, on different issues surrounding veganism, and then how they can link to other issues that people might be concerned about, exploitation of the planet… doing collections for some of the kind of major groups like Animal Aid… I've done a lot of fur demos where you're leafleting outside [fur retailers], and doing the whole kind of shouting through megaphones and things, but also, being able to engage people in an intelligent way to make them think, in a conversational intelligent way, to … reconsider their actions and what impact they could have… I've done demos at circuses, greyhound racing tracks, um, shops selling foie gras… doing vegan outreach, helping with the kind of events where people could sample vegan food, giving away free vegan food on stalls… going on the kind of national marches and demos, and going to different places in the country, to do demonstrations. I've gone hunt sabbing, … I've… been abroad to the 'International Animal Rights Gathering' in a couple of places, and gone to the 'National Animal Rights Gatherings', still being involved to some degree in other Anarchist goings on, doing demos about some other things, for humans… but it's mostly animal rights stuff that is my focus.*

A key principle for Geoff in his journey towards activism and veganism, was the relationship between, and interconnectedness of, differing forms of oppression and exploitation.

*When I'm involved in wider events, like Anarchist Book Fair, …to bring in an animal rights perspective… to people that might not have thought in that way, even though we share a lot of the similar, kind of outlook, just to try and aid people in making connections between different struggles and that exploitation is exploitation. At the end of the day it doesn't matter if you are an animal or the planet and trying to do stuff, which is about how I live or trying to influence others on how to live a more sustainable and a better way of life, so we can all benefit. And just kind of the Anarchist Anti-Capitalist side, not being into the consumer culture…*

Geoff began with an anti-capitalist analysis and then from the basic values of equality and social justice, developed towards other areas of struggle such as animal rights, feminism and environmentalism.

> *To people that are already either lefty, or of the kind of anti-capitalist or anarchist mode and saying okay, there is a lot of stuff that you do that is really bad for animals. It also has an effect on humans… these things all interlink, having an effect on the planet we all have to share so, an environmental person doing environmental campaigns, try and join the dots for them and go look, they might not have… an anarchist outlook or whatever… the anarchist saying look we've got all these cross overs, you go on about we won't be sexist racist, or whatever else, and it's like 'okay, well what about speciesist?' Try to get people to think a bit more about where all these things intersect…*

Access to the Trunchbull centre, and the people involved, who shared stories of their own activism, provided Geoff with means of becoming more politically active.

It is useful to consider some ideas surrounding cultural narratives, in reviewing Geoff's experience. According to McAdams (2006: 16) *"Culture provides people with a menu of narrative forms and contents from which the person selectively draws in an effort to line up lived experience with the kinds of stories available to organize and express it."* Similarly, Phoenix and Sparkes (2006: 109) posit that "*life and story are… connected and are always interlinked with the lives and stories of others in a relational manner. These others may operate to construct, deny, confirm, or problematize stories of the future in relation to aging and embodiment. They do so by offering those who have less knowledge of what lies ahead a narrative map of the future*". For Geoff it was through discovering the activist community, that he realized that these were narratives open to him. Particularly the Trunchbull Centre presented a context in which Geoff could flourish, and allowed him to access new options on the 'cultural menu', from which he could base his own understandings of his role in society, for example, as a vegan, an activist, and a human being. Without the Trunchbull Centre, which opened the door to activism as a lifestyle and rendering activists as real people and not stereotypes in the news or fiction, it might be that the 'cultural menu', from which Geoff was able to construct narratives about his life, would be narrower and less radical.

Another key aspect of Geoff's story is his intersectional attitude towards animal liberation. Geoff embraces the idea that emancipatory struggles must '*connect the dots*' to successfully resist oppression. A key facet of intersectional philosophy is the idea that looking at oppression, in a separate compartmentalised way, produces a flawed analysis, as it fails to engage with the unique overlap between superficially disparate networks of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). An obvious connection, for

Geoff, is environmental destruction and the oppression of animals; but further to this, examining how capitalism contributes to these and other systems of domination. Geoff's involvement in events such as the Anarchist book fair showed his desire to engage people from different sections of radical leftist activism with animal advocacy. In his words, he wanted to "*aid people in making connections between different struggles… exploitation is exploitation*". In focussing on these connections, between critiques of Western capitalism, patriarchy, racism, speciesism etc. Geoff sees himself as being part of an intersectional movement towards progressive social change. Thus, the way he has expressed himself politically and ethically is imbued with his intersectional analysis of oppression and exploitation. Like Bea and Julie, Geoff's story highlights the importance of access to varied narratives in allowing people to discover and engage with animal advocacy. Geoff's involvement with the Trunchbull centre presented unique new opportunities for his own political expression. Geoff's story also coincides with Jamie's, in the centrality of an intersectional viewpoint. Jamie's experience of anti-fascist action with animal rights activists outside of the UK, can be understood as parallel to Geoff's desire to 'connect the dots' between speciesism and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

The next section continues to look at different narratives of political and ethical expression, this time focussing on those that have crossed lines of legality.

## Criminality

This section offers some examples of narratives of political and ethical expression that have crossed legal lines, continuing to address research question 3: *how have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?* It explores the stories of two participants, Eddie and Dolly, who have each come into direct contact with the criminal justice system as a result of their political expression. Staying with normalization as a primary analytical thread, these narratives of formal legal and institutional conflict are in contrast to the more fluid examples of normalization presented in the Chapter Five.

The two stories presented emerged from the interviews with Eddie, who has been involved in radical direct action in the USA, and spent a short time in prison, and Dolly, who has also been involved in radical direct action, and was once assaulted by the police during a protest.

**Direct Action**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Eddie is originally from the East coast of the USA. He has been involved in various animal advocacy and outreach campaigns and has expressed his animal advocacy in a variety of ways. He helped set up an Animal Rights group at his university, and had also been involved with other local and national groups, making contact with radical activists beyond the boundaries of animal rights. Over a decade ago, Eddie experienced arrest and a short period of imprisonment for animal rights related activism. This experience represented a 'turning point' in Eddie's journey, and signified his gradual move away from radical direct action[40] towards an increased focus on cultural modes of resistance. Eddie was kind enough to share the story of his arrest, which is recounted in his words below. Eddie went into the action, fully expecting to be arrested.

> *We had this thing that we were going to do… that we knew… it was basically a hundred per cent chance we were getting arrested, it was like summer, we were like "we're going to get arrested in two weeks" …..*
>
> *We were going to [the G7[41] protest in] DC, as allies and supporters, and to do what we can, but… we're not gonna be kicking people, throwing bricks, Molotovs, none of that stuff because, often I feel like it's wasted energy and it's…. more based on… the adrenaline, and sometimes it's based on that feeling… when I saw that [animal cruelty] video for the first time, you wanna go out and like smack the first person you see eating a hamburger, and you're forgetting maybe two weeks ago, you were eating a hamburger …You know it's like, but you get to that like, emotional point so, I understand why people get to that point but, so we went to that thing and I remember…*

Eddie remembers feeling conflicted in the build up to the action. Those involved had agreed to keep the planned action a secret, in order to ensure and preserve a degree of surprise.

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[40] Eddie commented during our follow-up interview that he felt my analysis had drawn too quick of a close on his activism following the MACY's fur vault action. He stressed that his activism continued after his imprisonment and release, and the winding down of his activism was more of a gradual process over a long period of time rather than a straightforward breaking point. This is now reflected in my write up of his story.

[41] G7 (or 'Group of Seven') is a group of finance ministers and senior bank officials from seven advanced economies nations, who meet to discuss economic issues.

> *We didn't talk to people about what we were gonna do in two weeks, because it was kind of a secret so when we were going to that thing in DC… I felt like I was being looked down on, because I wasn't gonna be involved with one of these big rallies, or one of these big lock ups, or one of these big things that people could get arrested at.*

However, Eddie and the others felt stigmatised by other activists heading to the G7 protests, who were planning to get involved in radical direct action, which would likely result in arrest. Eddie did not want to get arrested at G7 for fear of jeopardising their planned action, yet he was treated as though he was a coward. We see processes of normalization here, within this radical activist context, Eddie's desire not to be arrested was under scrutiny and stigma. He was being judged within a different value system, in which the 'norm' was direct action and possible arrest, and the 'deviant' was peacefully attending a protest. Regardless of Eddie's reasons for not wanting to get into the thick of the action at G7, he felt that his decision deserved respect. The irony that he was avoiding being arrested so as not to jeopardise another action, only underlined this in his mind. Eddie had always sought what he described as a 'balance' in his activism, with regards to what people were doing and why they were doing it.

> *We had a meeting to talk about the, everything that happened in DC. And that meeting came up after I got home from… Jail… And I remember my friend, who I felt a lot of being looked down on from, coming and like, hugging me, and giving me this thing like, and you know just being like, 'fuck you man, you're like, two weeks ago, you were making me feel like shit, me and a few of my friends feel like shit because we weren't like 'with you…' like, arm-in-arm when the like horse-cop's about to start stepping on people'.*

Here Eddie is describing the stigma of his peers prior to the protest as his punishment, versus the warm embrace Eddie received returning from jail as a reward, within this context of normalization. As a vegan, Eddie felt like an outsider in a mainstream context, and then, within his small activist community, processes of normalization were also occurring within different value systems.

Like Claire's story, Eddie's discussion of emotional and embodied aspects of radical activism, highlights the way that political and ethical expressions can be mediated or rooted in embodied experience. Responding to a video of animal abuse by 'smacking the first person you see eating a burger', represents a kind of chaotic embodied impulsive emotional response to the frustration of witnessing cruelty. Similarly, Eddie's reference to adrenaline and the potential thrill of being involved in

a demonstration is also important in understanding these expressions as embodied, within varying normalizing contexts.

**The Fur Vault**

Eddie's jail experience was the result of an action at a MACY's store that sold fur. His imprisonment and the events that preceded it were to become significant turning point moments in his life. Aware that activists on the West Coast had successfully stopped the sale of fur at MACY's stores through direct action, Eddie saw this particular action as being worthwhile, and valuable, within his desire to achieve balance. The ends justified the means. Eddie and a few other activists, locked themselves together in the fur vault of a MACY's, in protest at the sale of fur.

> *We went in [to the fur vault], and the four of us locked ourselves together and… the nice thing is that, while people were focused on us, [other] protestors were able to come in, with signs, and chanting, and marching, like throughout the store, cause it just like created this really nice like diversion. So that they'd just not be outside, they came right into the store. Technically I guess, could get arrested for that, but more likely they'd just be … "You've gotta get outta here" … but then obviously, eventually the cops came… we were like thinking at the most we'll get put in a jail cell the police station overnight… and then there will be like, 'ah get outta here, like, don't do that again'…*

Eddie was surprised by how pleasant and sympathetic the police officers were during and after their arrest. Given that the extent of their crime had been disrupting business in a large department store on a busy shopping day, they were not treated as dangerous criminals, and even had the doors to their cells left open at the police station.

> *…But um, we get taken to… the police station, and, the police were actually extremely kind to us… they just didn't see us as a threat, you know, they left the ah [laughs] the cage, the cell open, and we're just like sitting on the floor, and they just like processed us, and did all that stuff, making jokes with us, they were like, oh there's an Officer Fox, and an officer some animal, some other furred animal, over at this other place, we should get them over here or something, you know just making these silly jokes…*

From the police station, the arrestees were taken to the adjoining court, where they were due to go before a Judge. The action had managed to drum up a good amount of local news coverage, which was positive for Eddie. It appeared that they had been

successful, at least in terms of raising awareness of the issue of the sale of fur in MACY'S stores, via the press.

> *So, um, so we appear before the Judge, and there's like cameras there as well, because this was like, you know the news came out and covered the protest, and they saw that activists got arrested so they were like, 'oh we're gonna go cover this too', and because it was the first time anything like that happened in [the town]….I don't know if it was a special arrangement for the Judge to come over, or maybe because the cameras were there…but he decided to make it, like, $10,000 bail, for each of us… I didn't live in that area, I didn't tell my parents I was even coming so, so we already decided no matter what the bail was, we weren't gonna pay it… it was just one of those things like, "worst case scenario if something happens we, we won't pay the bail, or whatever"…*

Eddie felt that the inordinately large bail amount was an attempt by the Judge to make an example of the activists, and to discourage others from taking part in similar actions.

> *…but when we heard ten thousand dollars, that's our bail? For a couple of people that sat down in a fur vault?!*

The bail fee astonished the group, and from this point onwards, the initially sympathetic treatment that they had received quickly disappeared, as they moved into the custody of the prison guards and court police.

> *From then on, the kindness, and information all, kinda… stopped. It was all of a sudden… you know, handcuffed, and put in a car, no one explaining anything, the cops in the front seat saying, "oh I hope your parents have good lawyers", or something and like, and then, they don't say anything..*

The activists were taken to prison, where they experienced the dehumanizing process of being checked in. This involved being stripped, inspected, having possessions taken away and being forced to have vaccinations.

> *And all of a sudden we were at this, maximum security prison, being like, unloaded and …they take the cuffs off, put you in this one room and are like, "okay, take your clothes off"… So we had to strip in front of these guys and then like, put these like jumpers on, or whatever, and then …they take our clothes and belongings and stuff… Then we get put in a room, for, to talk to a nurse, and then we have to get these [injections], which we found out like, one of the shots we knew, like, from the get go, wasn't, it was for uh, a hepatitis check… it was not vegan at all… I remember us talking and being like 'we don't want the shot' or whatever, 'we don't need it' and we knew the court date was on Monday this was a Friday. So it was Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night. Monday is our*

> *court date, and they said it takes up to three to five days for them to get the results, so we were like "why are you giving us this test, if you're not even gonna get the results back by the time we're out of here?" You know, and then they just kinda like forced our hand on it, and made us do it…*

Not only was it jarring to be forced into a situation where you required to have apparently pointless vaccinations against your will, this was further complicated by the fact that these activists were effectively forced into breaking their veganism, through receiving medicine which included animal ingredients. This was completely against their expressed wishes.

> *…And then from there [we were] given some like, some bedding, and they just point down a hallway, and you're supposed to walk down this hallway, like just walking, and then put in, into ….the cell block that is for, it's like twenty three hours in your cell, one hour out, before they can put you into general population or whatever… Of course, we weren't gonna eat the food anyways, but there was nothing we could really eat, so we were basically fasting for those like three days, on purpose, because we were like, we're not gonna eat anything…*

Vaccinations are an example of what Foucault (1997) calls 'Biopolitics', that is, social control as maintained through the governance of individual bodies. In this instance, Eddie and his fellow activists are enmeshed in a complex biopower dynamic, where they are forced to have vaccinations on arbitrary, bureaucratic grounds, because they are imprisoned. Their bodies are literally policed into the vaccination, despite their ethical rejection of what they believe to be a non-vegan vaccine. Once again, this provides evidence of the way political and ethical expressions are mediated or rooted in embodied experience.

Eddie and the fellow activists were also effectively on hunger strike during the time they were in the prison, due to the lack of access to vegan food. Naturally, it was very distressing and unpleasant. Nevertheless, Eddie feels it was an important moment in his life, and was something he is glad that he experienced, as it gave his new insight into the nature of prisons, and piqued his interest in critiquing the prison-industrial complex.

> *I just remember being… thankful for the experience, because it also kind of pushed my interest and my like politics in the idea of anti-prisons, and… anti-bullshit arrests. At that time I wasn't single issue at all, I was, animal rights is my main issue, but it wasn't like I was a single issue activist… but, so it was really nice to feel… maybe I'm supposed to experience this… then tying it back to back to animal rights, and well this is like…. a pig …living its life out, in the factory*

*farm… it's all you can do is think, so you're sitting in this room with like, nothing…*

Eddie's imprisonment was part of a turning point moment in his life, and one in which his intersectional politics developed, in particular through drawing parallels between the prison system and the meat and dairy industry. The fear and isolation Eddie felt going into prison, only reinforced his empathy for caged animals.

*I definitely remember just, being very scared….it gave me a new reality, coming out, cause like the action wasn't so extreme… the punishment was a little extreme….sitting in this like piss reeked, with everyone that's brought in before they see the nurse. One guy had possession of a crack pipe, which was five thousand dollars bail, and another guy who had, possession of heroin or cocaine, the actual drug, not the thing to use, and it was like, still less than our bail was, and it just opened my eyes again, to like the politics.*

The fact that the MACY'S action received such an amount of coverage in the news vindicated Eddie's decision to take part in the action, knowing the potential consequences and likelihood of arrest. An important factor that activists have to balance is the potential consequences of an action, versus the potential benefits.

*The personal, kind of life experience I gained… because any other activist I know that got arrested, and any other time I dealt with police, with activism, it was take you into a car, or to a room, or just to the jail, like, not the prison, take you to the police station, and let you go… Kinda like a 'doesn't this scare you?'*

It is unusual for such a peaceful and small-scale direct action to result in time spent in a maximum-security prison, and it was more likely a consequence of the holiday period coupled with a deeply unsympathetic Judge.

*So when we actually did-" okay you're gonna go to a maximum security prison, with like actual murderers, and actual like quote unquote 'criminals'"… Whatever they did, or not, it was kind of a strange eye opening experience…*

Regardless, Eddie found that his perspective changed and developed having spent this short time in prison.

Eddie had found his identity as an authentic activist was questioned when he and his friends decided they were not willing to get arrested during a protest. Then, further down the line, Eddie was treated favourably because he had been arrested.

This was part of a normalizing process within his activist context in which 'activists who have been arrested' were deemed authentic and valuable, and in which others, regardless of their reasoning, were less authentic (Foucault, 1997). Eddie's identity as an activist is fluid, and his performance of an activist identity was variably successful based on the achievement criteria, of whether or not he had been arrested for the cause. Ultimately, this normalizing process mirrored the normalizing processes of wider society, which discourages direct action.

Performativity is evidenced in Eddie's concerns over direct action being perceived and even celebrated as a masculine performance. Eddie discussed his trepidation over getting involved in direct action, in terms of macho attitudes; "*this machismo thing kicking in of like, oh well "if you haven't been arrested you're not an activist, if you don't know what it's like to get pepper sprayed you're not an activist".* Direct action is a physical site in which gendered performances have significance, especially through 'concealment tactics' (Davis, 2004). Concealment is the act of covering one's face/identity during direct action, with the use of bandanas or balaclavas. Davis (2004: 206) argues that such performances reinforce a masculine perception of activism, whereby activists are "*stylized figures, in black masks, shot at a distance".* This dynamic is recognisable in Eddie's story, whereby the perception of the other activists was that Eddie's activism was more valid, once he had been through the ordeal of arrest and imprisonment. His identity was fluid, and this fluidity was negotiated via performances of activism.

The next section focuses on Dolly's story, in particular of her involvement in Peace camps, and on demonstrations. Dolly shares similar experiences of activism and direct action to Eddie, but Dolly has experience of dealing with the Police in both an activist and professional capacity. Her story presents another narrative with which to address research question 3.

**Iceland**

As discussed in Chapter 5, Dolly is a white woman in her late twenties. She has been involved in direct action and activism for a number of years, and her involvement in activism has impacted on her life and career trajectory. Dolly described her frustrations with the activist 'scene' and her move away from activism as a lifestyle. One major turning point in this process was an experience at an environmentalist

camp in Iceland[42]. Dolly left feeling furious at the actions and attitudes of fellow activists throughout the duration of the camp. Most of these protestors, including Dolly, were not native to Iceland, and many considered themselves 'full time activists' and as a result refused to engage respectfully with the perspectives of other people involved in the camp, viewing themselves as the 'experts'.

> *There was loads of really arrogant British people, who were largely from tree camps… they were just super arrogant and super patronising to everyone else, really rude, massive egos really. Really pushed me away from it. Definitely before that I was really stoked on the idea of seeing myself as an 'activist' like as an identity, but seeing these people just so fucking drunk on their own egos, not only were they wankers, but it was just really ineffective. The egos got in the way of any decent direct action happening.*

One example of the problems Dolly experienced at the camp was an instance where a huge row broke among activists out over who would construct the equipment that would be used for blockage action (which required activists to lock arms together with one another inside tubes).

> *We did a blockage, like a lock on, on the site, and me and my mate ended up making sandwiches, because everyone else wanted to make the arm tubes, and no one wanted to make the sandwiches and I was like, "right well I know what's more important to me!" And then, so these people who'd insisted on making the locking on gear, because they live on tree camps and blah-blah-blah, and [the locking on gear] was fucking shit. The cops pulled people and it came apart and broke, and it was like "you fucking arseholes. Not only have you ruined this action, but now the police think that if they pull people in arm tubes, they'll come apart", and I don't live on a tree camp, but I could've made a better arm tube than that in five minutes.*

Finally, Dolly left the camp feeling jaded about her experience and about the ineffectiveness of those sorts of actions.

> *Stupid fucking dreadlocked tree protestors with a much-exaggerated idea of their own importance, really alienating everyone. People were leaving the camp in droves. All the Icelanders went. Pretty much everyone that wasn't in that little clique went. Just seeing people fuck up on that level was really frustrating. And it just really made me not be into activism as an identity.*

[42] Dolly was part of an international protest camp that aims to protect the natural environment in Iceland from environmental destruction, through direct action.

It was a turning point in her exploring other avenues for having a positive impact on the world, outside of 'professional activism'.

> *It's like "well we've not really achieved anything at this camp, so what, you get to brag about how you've been on-site in Iceland but actually we've managed to achieve two actions in two weeks when we've got forty people with a load of energy". So yeah, that was a bit of a turning point. I still do… I did do a lot of political stuff afterwards, but I've been a lot more suspicious of 'professional activists' since then.*

In spite of her disillusionment with the 'activist' identity, Dolly continued to be involved in activism and direct action, and became involved in providing first aid on demonstrations and actions.

**First Aid**

In the run up to the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland, Dolly had trained as a protest street medic. This was something she enjoyed, particularly having a specific role in direct action contexts, and being able to use apply practical skills.

> *I went and just really enjoyed the training. I met people that I really got on with, so I'd kind of been doing that for a couple of years by then, and I'd also been running trainings, I'd kind of got quite involved with the action medics and was helping to teach and stuff.*

This represented a turning point, and her training and skills as a medic led her to travel to Israel-Palestine to take part in activism there.

> *I had a mate that we worked together on medic stuff and went to a lot of actions together, and she'd been to Palestine before so we kind of devised this plan to go over there for three months so… I went out to Israel-Palestine for three months to do medic work and things like that…[The experience] was good. It was fucked up in a lot of ways. But …I feel like we went out with a plan and managed to get a lot of stuff done… there was four of us that all did street medic stuff, so we ran a series of trainings in Israel. We went as a self-contained definitive group. We got in contact with the Anarchists Against the Wall[43], so we ran a series of trainings for that lot, and then we were in the West Bank doing ISM[44] stuff, mostly with the ISM but with a couple of other groups as well, and then we did a couple of other actions with Anarchists Against the Wall. There were ups and downs and it's a*

[43] Anarchists Against The Wall (AATW) is an Israeli direct action organization that supports the popular Palestinian resistance to the Israeli separation wall.
[44] The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) is a Palestinian led resistance movement against systemic oppression of Palestinians, through non-violent direct action.

*really awful situation obviously, but I felt like we worked really well as a group. We went out there with an aim, which I think a lot of people don't.*

Having first experienced working as a medic in an activist context, Dolly went on to train as a paramedic, something she now does full time working for the NHS. Prior to the relative stability of her current employment, Dolly has done a number of jobs, from working at a wholefood green grocer, to waitressing, cleaning work, office temp work and working as a healthcare assistant. These jobs tended to be casual, short term and balanced with her travelling activist lifestyle. She discussed her journey towards working as a medical professional and its connection to activism.

*I don't really remember ever deciding that I wanted to do it, but I think there was just a point where me and a few other people in the street medic crew were just like, "yeah we should be paramedics" and it just became something that I wanted to do…*

*I thought it would take a few goes to get on the paramedic course, cause it was quite competitive, but I got an interview and then got through that, so I got offered a place [after] I'd been working as a healthcare assistant for a few months. It's something I'd wanted to do for a long time, but I needed that experience to get on the course… My training was a couple of months at uni and then you go out on placement, and for the rest of the course you're mixing placement with study days. Being out of placement meant being the third person in the ambulance, so you're just like shadowing the crew. I didn't do any driving, I just shadowed them, but then over the two years, I started treating patients more and more, until by the end, you're kind of working as a paramedic, but with your mentor looking over your shoulder.*

Initially, paramedic work came as quite a shock to the system for Dolly. Whilst she had experience of working with sick and injured people through her time as a street medic, and her work at an A&E, the conservative culture of the ambulance service presented her with some difficulties.

*It was a really big culture shock… It is weird being a kind of squatter punk and then suddenly you put a uniform on and you've got this job where people think you can do shit and just treat you really differently as well… like it's really, quite old school culture, lot of racism, lot of homophobia. Not so much homophobia actually, but a lot of sexism. Racism is the worst, or at least the most overt. And there's just all these ways of doing things, there's a lot of slang. Like, it's really different [from A&E] even though on the surface the jobs are quite similar. It's very much working class. Lot of ex-army…*

*So yeah there's a really different culture, like I'd never really worked with old blokes before. They have a lot of ideas about what a twenty something woman is capable of… And my placement was at a really big station, and, as I know now, is a notoriously unfriendly one. I didn't realize that at first, I thought it was just me, so my training was quite difficult. I thought I didn't fit in, but I think it's because it was a shit station.*

Another significant point of conflict in Dolly's life working as a paramedic has been working alongside the Police. She tends to be opposed to the Police politically and ethically and having been involved in activism and direct action for many years, Dolly has experienced first-hand some of the negative aspects of the Police force. Some of these experiences have been manifest in embodied ways, for example through injuries sustained on demonstrations.

**Police Cooperation**

Prior to becoming a paramedic, Dolly has had unpleasant experiences with the Police on a number of occasions, and was once assaulted during a protest, which left her with a broken wrist.

*I suppose there's been a shift in the last few years of really living in the subculture and being really anti-authoritarian, to the job I'm doing now. Like I'm an authority figure when I'm at work, and I can boss people about, and I also work with the Police, and that's been a really big shift. Um, like I've been arrested a fair few times for political stuff and I've been assaulted by the police a lot and one of the last times I was arrested the police broke my wrist and then were just total cunts about it as well, they wouldn't take me to the hospital for a long time stuff like that.*

This was a significant turning point moment in her life.

*I was at an Antifa[45] demo against the BNP[46], they were having some fucking festival weekend thing, and it all just went totally nuts, we surprised the Police, so there weren't very many of them, but they had dogs and just went totally apeshit and were beating everyone and chasing us and just hacking away at anyone at the back, and there was just this epic like run through fields and stuff.*

*I'd like waited behind because there was a big ditch and I was worried people were gonna fall in it, and so I ended up at the back and I think, in fairness to them, they were trying to hit me on my thighs or my arse with this baton, but I just had my arm behind me so they just cracked it on the side and broke it, so then I got arrested and they were just dicks, like, I was in a police van, I told them*

[45] Antifa is a catch-all term of Anti-fascist direct action organizations.
[46] The British National Party (BNP) is a British Far-Right political party.

*straight away it was broken so they didn't put me in handcuffs but that was about the last decent thing they did for me, they left me in the van for ages they were processing everyone and they weren't prioritizing me at all, and just being like clever dicks about it all. I waited hours for a nurse, who said, you need an x-ray, which I knew already, then I had to wait for transport. So they broke it at about 11[am], and I didn't get to A&E till about 8 at night. And it was just really painful and I knew that it was broken, it was just really fucked up; total lack of giving a shit.*

After the ordeal, Dolly was charged with 'violent disorder' and released from Police custody on bail. This incident has significance in relation to Foucault's concept of 'Biopower', and the coercive policing of bodies by the state (Foucault, 1997). Dolly first experienced an assault, and was then erroneously charged with the crime of 'violent conduct', despite being the victim of violence herself. There was no foundation for the police claims, and charges were soon dropped.

*So they bailed me for 'violent disorder', which, if I'd been convicted of, it's an imprisonable offense but also it would've meant that I couldn't do what I'm doing now, so that was all up in the air for a while, quickly they dropped all the charges,*

Dolly was able to pursue legal action against the Police in relation to the incident.

*I did sue them and then just before I started this job, I got £4,500 off them. So that was pretty sweet. …That was just before I started working in health care, so it's always been in the back of my mind when dealing with the Police, or people injured by the Police. You can be around the Police being difficult, I've seen them being dicks, but I think it's like a different thing, like also; I've been hospitalized by them. It's not like there was a difference of opinion in whether they were being dicks or not. I've started suing the cops a few times. I've got no convictions. I've been on trial and been acquitted, and I've got a caution but I've never had any convictions. So I started suing them a few times cause of really shitty violent arrests when we were doing 'owt. But I always dropped it cause it was too stressful. And I was travelling around a lot and stuff so this is the first one I've seen through and it's been really good thing to get a load of money off them. Even though they said "we'll give you this money, but we're not accepting any liability" and I'm like "oh, so you just had four and a half grand lying around did you?"..*

Once again, we might look to Foucualt's (1997) concept of Biopower, and its role in normalizing processes. The physical violence, Dolly suffered, can be seen an act of explicit social control by the state to curtail resistance and protest. Dolly's experience once again illustrates the embodied nature of activism, direct action and political expression, and how the bodies of activists are policed through state violence. Going

from this extremely antagonistic relationship to a professional partnership in such a relatively short period of time has been a significant point of conflict in Dolly's life.

> *So I guess the big conflict in my life at the moment is that I kind of have this history, which definitely isn't all in the past, I'm not getting arrested anymore cause I'd lose my job.. I still have the same politics that I did then, and the same motivations but then, yeah, I also have this day job where I put on this uniform and chat with cops. I used to really stonewall Police at work but you just can't do this job without interacting with them on some level, which I find hard to explain to some friends. But I've been doing this job for three years now so there has to be an element of compromise. I do think they can be total cunts, and I think the concept of the Police is fucked up, and a lot of things that they are useful to us for, ideally, wouldn't be done by the Police, like people in mental health crisis should have someone else to ensure their safety that's not the cops. At the moment, that's all we've got.*

That Dolly has experienced being treated badly by the Police, yet she relies on them for help and assistance now is troubling, especially given that she has experienced radically different treatment based on whether she is performing the role of activist or paramedic.

> *So yeah, that's something that I find really difficult, just being forced into a slightly more nuanced view of the Police is difficult. It's easier to sit in a squat and do ACAB[47] tattoos. And I definitely feel like that's yeah, I try and be pretty open at work, but something I can't really talk about is being arrested and being hospitalized by the Police and stuff… I do have to remind myself of the bad things that they do, cause, when I'd first started it was such a head-fuck, cause I'd only ever engaged with them on this level where they are screaming at you and hitting you, and then suddenly they're like "hiya, you alright?" and start chatting. And like ambulances and cop cars when they pass in the street will wave at one another, which I didn't do for years, but now it's just easier. But like the difference in how they deal with you, I guess especially because I don't really go to many demos now, it's been a while since I've seen them in full on riot cop being bastards mode. I get used to them being these friendly guys who help us out and stop us from getting beaten up or whatever.*

Dolly finds herself having to remind herself of her past experience of the Police, and her philosophical beliefs regarding Policing in general, due to the close working relationship. She does not want to dehumanize Police officers and remove their own agency in problematic behaviour and actions. She feels that her co-workers would have difficulty in understanding her feelings towards the Police, because they tend not to share a history of activism and direct action, once again highlighting a

[47] ACAB is an acronym for 'All Coppers Are Bastards'

normalizing context, and a necessary fluidity of her identity (see discussion of Dolly's 'Strategic Self' in Chapter 5). Dolly's identity has been necessarily malleable.

Processes of normalization have been a consistent factor in the participants' stories in this project, and these have framed the narratives of political and ethical expression presented here. In this chapter, we have seen various examples of political expression. Eddie's involvement in criminal direct action meant his reputation improved within sections of the activist community, because of an alternative, normalizing context in which 'arrest' was positioned as superior. Eddie's reputation improved through his arrest and brief imprisonment. For Eddie this was a source of frustration. He was the same person he had been before the arrest, and his outlook and actions had not significantly changed, but his association with radical movements was now deemed to be more authentic, his identity valid. Similarly, Dolly's experiences at an environmentalist camp in Iceland highlighted the fluidity of her identity. Having experienced conflict with self-proclaimed full-time activists, Dolly's identification with an activist identity diminished. She continued to be involved in activism and direct action, even travelling to Palestine as an activist, but her self-perception was not that of a typical 'activist'. In addition, we have seen that narratives of political and ethical expression are often rooted in an embodied context. For example, Eddie's discussion of the adrenaline of a demonstration, and him being forced to have non-vegan vaccinations in prison, frame our understanding of his expressions. Dolly's experience of assault and hospitalization as a result of Police brutality supports Foucualt's (1997) notion of Biopower as a way the bodies of activists are policed and controlled.

Dolly and Eddie's stories highlight how political and ethical expressions and performances of veganism are often embodied experiences. Eddie's enforced vaccination and Dolly's injury at the hands of the Police demonstrate the biopolitical context of resistance, and can be tied to Claire's experience, where her expressions of veganism were mediated by health concerns and lack of ethical treatment options. They also serve to underline the complexity and contested nature of 'insider' research. Although I share the experience of veganism with Eddie and Dolly, I have not experienced imprisonment or police brutality, and this highlights the ways that I have moved along a complex continuum between insider and outsider through the

research project (Mercer, 2007). The next section summaries themes and concludes the chapter.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter explored a variety of narratives of vegan political and ethical expression and activism in order to address research question 1: *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*; and research question 3: *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?*

Turning point moments in the lives of vegans, have been discussed, which relate to experiences of and involvement with political engagement. It drew on Julie's description of her early experiences of political engagement that led her to political activism and Bea's account of her involvement in punk subculture and how this acted as a catalyst in her journey towards political engagement and activism. It discussed Claire's account of her experience as a vegan, with health and mobility impairment, and how this has impacted on her ability to perform veganism. Jamie's description of his experiences of activism (such as 'stalling' and 'hunt sabbing') across regional and national contexts was discussed, as was Geoff's involvement with an Anarchist social centre and how this contributed to him acknowledging connections between struggles and becoming more politically active. Eddie's story of his arrest and brief imprisonment included the way that this experience altered the trajectory of his political engagement. Similarly, Dolly recalls her experience at a peace camp in Iceland, and her experience of Police brutality and how these have framed her experience as a paramedic, were explored.

Building upon Chapter Five, these examples provide more evidence that, rather than being fixed and rigidly ascribed, vegan identity is fluid, and that it is performed in various ways and achieved by myriad means across differing contexts. This is shown in Eddie's experience of disapproval from fellow activists, after expressing that he did not wanting to be arrested. Similarly, Claire's performance of veganism was mediated by normalizing contexts, in particular those of the medical profession, who gave her non-vegan drugs without her consent. Dolly's professional career has required her to be strategic about her identity, due to the politically charged context of working with Police, whilst simultaneously having a personal history of experiencing Police brutality.

The narratives presented here also provided evidence that vegans' political and ethical expressions are often mediated by or rooted in embodied experience. Claire's experience of a neurological disorder, and her decision to use batch-tested drugs, illustrated that her expressions of veganism were mediated by the embodied context of her health condition. Eddie's imprisonment and coerced vaccination, also illustrated the Biopower at work, whereby his body was forced to experience vaccination, and break veganism. Dolly's experience of having her wrist broken by police on a demonstration can also be regarded within the realms of Biopower, whereby social control and order is maintained through the policing of individual bodies (Foucault, 1997).

The experience of vegans adds another layer of interest, due to the embodied nature of eating (or not eating) meat, in particular the way that bodies and lives have become objects of political power relations (Lemke, 2011). Expressions and performances of veganism are often embodied, for example, in Claire's experience of a neurological disorder and the ethical dilemmas of non-vegan but quality of life improving medication, and in Dolly and Eddie's experiences of state violence and suppression of resistance. Normalizing processes impact on how vegan identity is performed and achieved, but also, inevitably, impact on the experience of being vegan. In simple terms, it makes veganism more difficult. Beyond the act of cutting out certain foods and products, is the social stigma and policing that adds to the task of achieving a vegan identity. As shown in Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism, vegans in this study navigated this through being careful about who they open up to regarding their veganism. In the realms of embodied political action we see the significance of biopower and the way in which vegan and resistant bodies are policed.

Further, the importance of having access to varied narrative resources, in allowing people to engage with animal advocacy, is highlighted in these accounts. This is recognisable in the context of normalizing discourses, where vegans are portrayed in certain stereotypical ways (Cole and Morgan, 2011). Having access to alternative narratives about animal advocacy, activism or indeed politics in general, can be instrumental in enabling someone become more involved in animal advocacy (as evidenced in Bea's story of punk music, Julie's story of the political context of the 1980s, and Geoff's experiences with the Trunchbull centre). The importance of intersectionality has been evident in some of the narratives presented, in particular

those of Geoff and Jamie, and this can also be viewed as resistance to normalizing processes, and the portrayal of veganism as a single-issue cause (Steele, 2013).

The next chapter addresses research question 1. *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?* and research question 4: *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*. It does so through presenting and examining the comics created by research participants, as well as my own autoethnographic comic.

# Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism

## Introduction

In this chapter, I primarily seek to address Research Question 1 (*Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?)* and Research Question 4 (*Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?).* To do this, I present each of the comics created by participants for the project, offering a separate thematic visual analysis for each. I then discuss the overarching themes that can be used to tie the participant comics together conceptually. I argue that the themes of intersectionality, interspecies companionship, political engagement and normalization are particularly evident in the comics produced by the participants. I also argue that the ambiguity of meaning within the comics make them a useful research tool, especially in relation to attempts within queer theory to embrace fluidity vis-à-vis methodological approaches and modes of representation. In this chapter, I also present a brief introduction to my own autoethnographic comic [see Insert].

The chapter begins with a short recap of some key methodological issues relating to the collection and analysis of the comic data discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology, including a recap of what comics are, why this chapter is structured differently to the non-visual chapters, and my approach to visual analysis. I then look at the seven comics submitted to the project by participants, discussing each one separately. I begin by examining Raymond's comic, and discuss the ways that it evidences the theme of intersectionality, through his approach to ethics. I then look at Leanne's comic, as another example of the same theme of intersectionality- this time focussing on hypocrisy. I consider Erin's comic, identifying intersectionality and normalization as key themes. Following on from this, I look at Nelly's comic, and then CJ's comic, each representing the theme of interspecies companionship (the former, through her relationship with her companion rats, and the latter through his relationship with his dog). Finally, I consider Ian and Becca's comics, which I argue show evidence of the theme of political engagement. Ian's does this through a more abstract analytical approach, and Becca's does this through an autobiographical narrative. I then explore the themes of the comics, in connection with the overarching themes of the project, in particular, normalization and intersectionality. Here, in

addressing research question 4, I argue that the participant-created comics represent an interesting and unusual form of data, which allow participants to communicate in meaningful and thought-provoking ways. I maintain that the juxtaposition of words and images in the comics presented, allows for complexity and ambiguity of meaning, which lends itself well to the tenets of queer theory, as discussed by Jones and Adams (2010). Therefore, the comic medium represents a useful means of realizing some of the key aims of queer methodology and embracing fluidity and instability. Finally, I provide a brief introduction to and explanation of my own autoethnographic comic, which can be read immediately following this chapter [see Insert].

**Comics and Academia**

As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology, participants were asked to produce comics about their lives for the research project. A comic is a document that uses words and images to tell a story or communicate ideas (Magnussen and Christiansen, 2000). Eisner (1985: 1) defines comics more broadly; using the term "*sequential art*", that is visual art, designed so as to be viewed consecutively. The term 'comic' can therefore describe a very wide range of media accessed by diverse audiences. For example, McCloud (1993) suggests that cave paintings and hieroglyphics can be viewed as progenitors of the medium. Likewise, disparate media like illustrated diagrams, children's books and movie posters could theoretically also be defined as forms of the comic medium. However, the comic form should be regarded as a distinct medium in its own right, with its own specific history, trajectory and tropes. Comics tend to derive focus and meaning from the specific juxtaposition of panels, text, images and speech presented in sequence (Duncan and Smith, 2009). Other common features, which tend to be specific to the comic medium, are the use of speech bubbles and thought balloons, the use of panel size and placement to control narrative pacing and the prevalence of cartooning in imagery. Comics have not been widely used in an academic context; this is perhaps due to the lingering reputation of comics as childish and vulgar (Duncan and Smith, 2009). Nevertheless, comics do have potential academic applications. The comic form can be used within a research context in a number of ways, for example, research on comic audiences, comics as a source of 'data', the use of the comic form to present field notes and comics as a means of presenting findings.

Academic disciplines such as cultural studies, cultural geography and queer studies have increasingly turned to visual methods in recent history, in order to develop discipline-specific methodological approaches that draw from the longstanding established traditions of visual anthropology and sociology (Pink, 2003). Holliday (2001) has discussed the potential value of visual methodologies to the reflexive project of queer studies. According to Pink (2014), the development of postmodernism in the 1980s saw new challenges being posed to received understandings of objectivity and subjectivity within visual research and visual anthropology. This problematized the assumed objectivity of written texts, lending validity to visual approaches that had previously been assumed to be too subjective. Pink (2014) identifies three recent developments in the debate surrounding contemporary visual research; the first focussing on the increased enthusiasm for Interdisciplinarity, and connecting academia with arts practice [see discussion of Visual Methods in Chapter 4]; second, increasing emphasis being placed on training and ethics, partly influenced by downward pressure from institutions and research councils, which has improved practice and ethical self-awareness (and reflexivity); and the third development has been the success of visual ethnography outside of academic contexts, and its ascension as an applied, as well as academic, practice. Further to this, those using visual approaches can benefit from the potential of technological advances, in embracing digital media, and the Internet as valuable tools for doing and sharing research (Pink, 2012). It is within this methodological context that this research took place.

There are some notable examples of comics being used in an academic context, as described earlier[48]. Han (2008) produced a comic called '*Missionary*' in order to experiment with new forms of academic presentation. Comics, Han argues, are an 'accessible media for readers inside and outside of academia' and can produce a "provocative blend of intimate self-reflexivity and incisive social criticism" (Han, 2008: 58). Charts, maps and even illustrations are important and accepted aspects of representation in the author's field of Geography. However, she wanted her comic not to simply "*illustrate the writing*" but to "*play with successive images and their productive coexistence with words"* (Han, 2008: 58). Comics have also been used as a

[48] See discussion of comics in academia in Chapter 4

means of literally and symbolically emphasising the 'messy' parts of a research process, which are usually deliberately hidden. Jones and Evans (2011) produced a comic about a research project they had taken part in; it explored their own roles within the project with the aim of producing a 'reflexive' account of the project. These examples underline a precedent for the use of comics in research.

**Visual Analysis**

In this project, every participant was given an information sheet about the process of comic creation. This included simple instructions on producing a comic, based on principles such as, combining images and words, and using panels. I also discussed this process with participants verbally, offering support, guidance and answering questions. I placed significant emphasis on the fact that the 'quality' of the illustrations was not the focus, but the comic story itself, regardless of the 'realism' or 'artistic ability' apparent in the illustrations. Participants were free to interpret the instructions, and indeed 'comics' in general, in a way meaningful to them. This allowed participants to express themselves outside of the interview context, and via an atypical medium. I explained that participants could expand on ideas discussed in the interview if they so wished, but that they did not have to. In total, I received seven comics, all of which are displayed below. Some potential explanations for the relatively low number of submissions are discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology.

Once participants had submitted their comics, I analysed them using a form of thematic analysis. This entailed identifying key themes from the comics, informed by Rose's (2012: 15-16) critical approach to analysing visual data. There are three stages of analysis in this approach: 1. Taking images seriously: looking very carefully at visual images. 2. Thinking about the social conditions and effects of visual objects: especially as visual representations both depend on and produce social exclusions and inclusions. We must consider social, cultural, geographical, temporal, contextual aspects of images. 3. Thinking about one's own way of looking at images. This requires an engagement with reflexivity and the situatedness of the researcher. This involved reading/rereading the comics, and identifying prominent themes. These themes were narrowed or expanded upon based on re-reading the comics, with greater focus on social and political context and having reflected on my own way of reading the images. This method was less systematic than some other approaches

(for example, semiotic analysis), and this means the process was quite fluid, unpredictable, and very dependent on my subjective reading of the comics. I feel this allowed me to approach the comics in a flexible manner, and with awareness that "*visual imagery is never innocent*" (Rose, 2012: 17). When reading a comic, the text and the images could arguably each be read separately as distinct narratives. However, the narrative of primary interest to the comic reader is the one emerging from the complex relationships and interplay between the images and the text. It is important to note that the complexity of the relation between image and text is probably under-recognised in sociological uses of 'the visual' (Roberts, 2011). I attend to this relationship in my analysis of the comics.

I have deliberately separated interview data and visual data in both analysis and presentation in the thesis. I have done this for two main reasons. First, some participants wished to remain anonymous in their interview, but be named in relation to their comic. This created concerns over jeapordising anonymity of participants through connecting visual and interview data. Given that seven participants submitting comics, the potential pool of anonymity was sufficiently small as to make me rethink presenting comics and data together, where I might jeapordise participants anonymity. Separating visual and interview data was a simple way that anonymity could be preserved more easily, and reflects my duty of care to participants. Second, in focussing my analysis on the separate comics in this chapter, rather than the specific unifying themes, I was able to present a substantive chapter to the analysis and discussion of comics together, including a written accompaniment to my own comic. I feel that had I integrated comics throughout, I would have been forced to isolate and fragment the comics visually and practically, and that this would have done them a disservice. Instead, they are each presented in full, and analysed as standalone comics, before the overall themes are drawn together.

Below, I present the seven comics submitted to the project, alongside my analysis of each.

**Raymond**

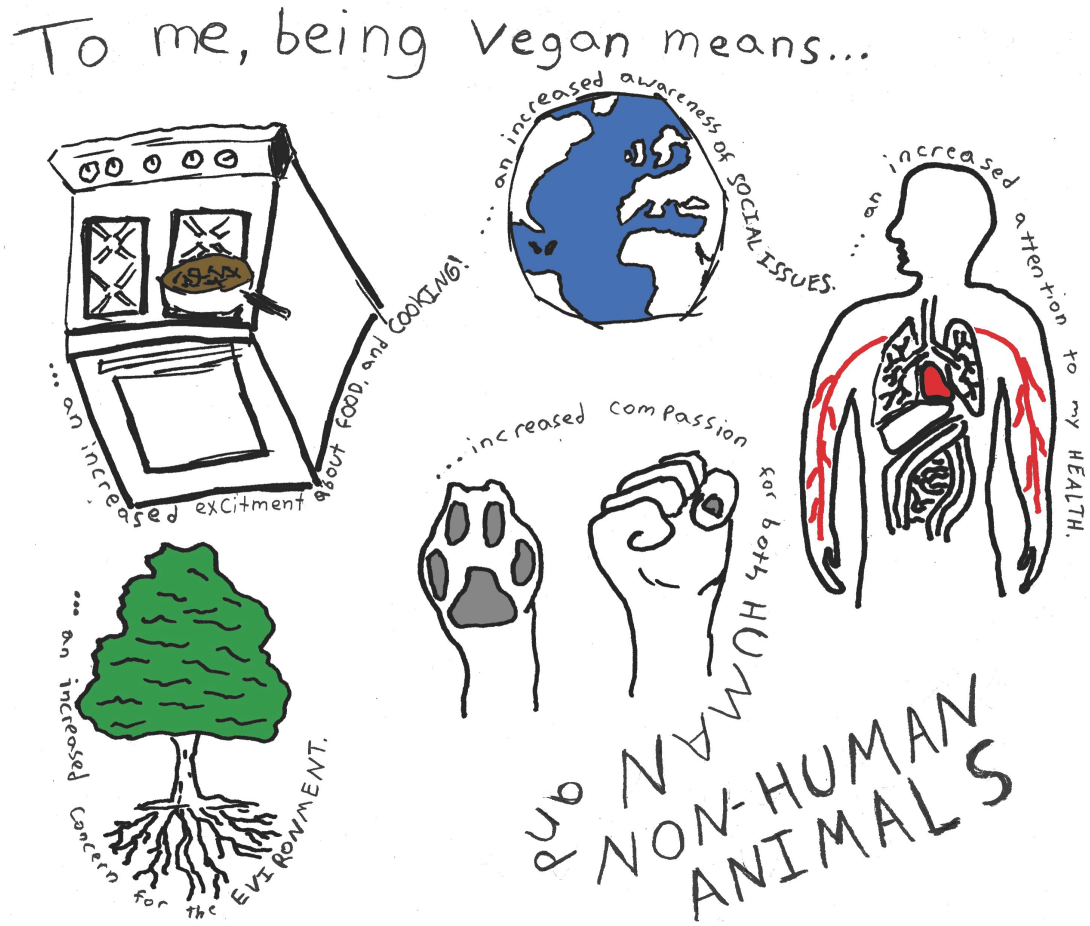


**Figure 6- Raymond's Comic**

Raymond contributed this comic to the research project. In it he describes what being a vegan means to him. It is very positive in tone, and the text visually 'snakes' around the canvas, connecting the images together. These underline the two the central themes of the image; 'normalization' and 'intersectionality'. The comic aims to challenge perceptions of veganism and in doing so can be understood in connection with the overarching conceptual thread of normalization within this project, as well as with embodiment and specifically the Foucauldian concept of 'biopower' (1997). Normalizing processes have resulted in veganism being positioned discursively in a negative or pejorative light. Raymond's comic is presented as though in conversation with these negative perceptions, and as a form of resistance to normalizing processes. The separate sections of the comic are connected through the repetition of style, and through the visually snaking words- as such a sense of relation between all of the

parts is achieved. As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of intersectionality (having emerged from feminism) provides a means of addressing the interconnectedness of differing forms of oppression, and the unique syntheses occurring through such connections (Crenshaw, 1989). In relation to this, Raymond's comic looks at the connection between the exploitation of animals and other forms of oppression.

The comic responds to typical assumptions and accusations levelled at veganism and animal advocacy. Raymond's first claim, symbolised by a frying pan on an oven hob, is that being vegan means, "*increased excitement about food and cooking*". This challenges the perception that vegans have a boring and/or restrictive diet. Likewise, the second section, symbolised by a blue and white image of earth, that being vegan means "*increased awareness of social issues*" challenges the oft-presented belief that vegans are single-issue activists, that care 'more about animals than about people'. Here, Raymond asserts his approach to veganism as reflecting a range of concerns, beyond those typically associated with it. The image of the human body in black and red, coupled with the words "*increased attention to my health*" illustrates Raymond's desire to shatter the erroneous but oft-promoted idea that veganism is unhealthy. For Raymond, being vegan means thinking more carefully about what you eat, and the impact it has on your health for the better. This also ties into the embodied aspects of veganism and political expression outlined in

Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism, as well as eating/consumption more generally. The image shows the human anatomy coupled with a message about health, which is relevant to the idea of Biopower, and perhaps a resistance to dominant power relations. It might be argued that fatty, unhealthy diets are part of a process of biopower (Foucault, 1997), whereby social control may be maintained through the governance of bodies. Harper (2010) discusses the prevalence of heart disease among black men in the USA, demonstrating the intersections of racism and veganism. She argues that the affordability and accessibility of unhealthy food contributes to the same system of domination by which racism (and classism) occurs. Raymond's statement about health and taking care over being healthy resists dominant ideas about eating and convenience, in favour of a critical approach that connects veganism, health, and animal cruelty in its analysis. The image of the tree and the tree roots in black and green alongside the words "*increased concern for the environment*" illustrates his 'intersectional' approach once more. Veganism is not just about the ethics of animal exploitation, it is also about acknowledging the calamitous effect that industrialised animal exploitation is having on the environment. Finally, the image of the clenched human fist, alongside the mammal paw, is one used frequently in animal rights literature, as a symbol of solidarity with other species. Raymond highlights his "*increased concern for both human and non-human animals*", once again illustrating his intersectional approach. Being vegan, he is arguing, does not mean choosing animals over humans. It means embracing an ethics in which compassion and kindness are not limited by boundaries of race, gender, class or species.

As a standalone image, this comic is clear and informative. Were someone to read it, out of the context of this research, it would still make sense, due to the simplicity and clarity of the message and the way the imagery supplements that message. It is not inconceivable to imagine someone reading this, and it challenging their normative perceptions of vegans, for example, as a single-issue movement. Similarly, should someone who did not know what veganism was read this, they might reasonably be able to make a guess at the core tenets of the concept, through engaging with this comic. I return to Raymond's comic later in the chapter, in the general discussion. The next section considers Leanne's comic.

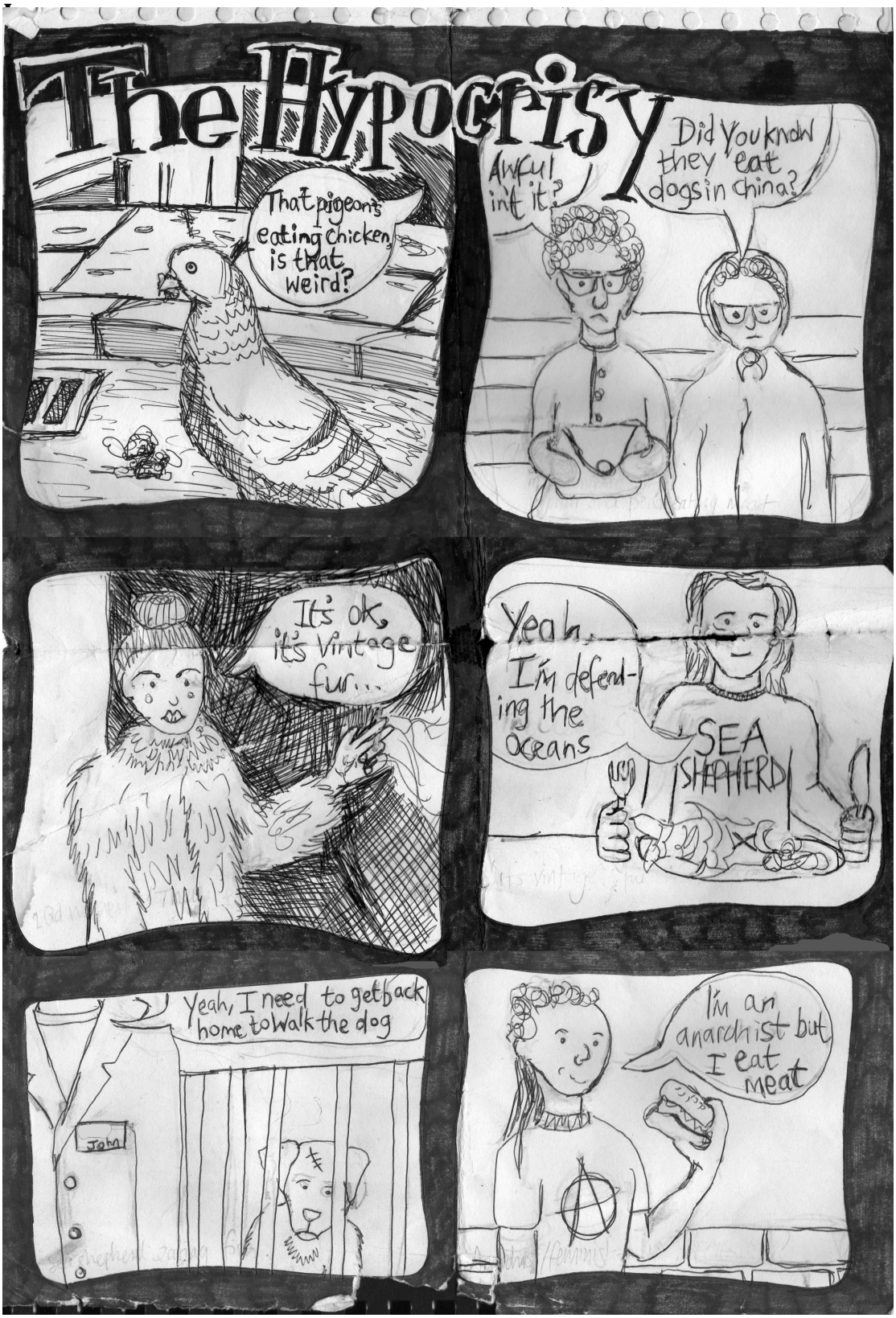


**Figure 7- Leanne's Comic**

Leanne has been involved in a variety of animal advocacy campaigns since she was a teenager and several years ago co-founded an animal rights group, which is now one

of the largest in her city. She produced this comic reflecting her perceptions of the inconsistent way people treat animals within and outside of progressive and activist communities. 'Intersectionality' is a major theme of the comic, evidenced in the focus on '*hypocrisy*', whereby the 'speech bubbles' and text are juxtaposed with the visuals. In each panel, there is an image coupled with speech, illustrating hypocritical views and attitudes. In several, the image itself shows something happening, against which the words act as a counterpoint, highlighting hypocrisy. This juxtaposition is a distinctive feature of comics as a medium (as discussed in Chapter 4). Intersectional focus on connecting different structures of oppression conceptually, can be linked directly to the hypocrisy visualised in this comic, particularly from the 'radical' characters. The hypocrisy on display is a product of individuals who have not embraced an intersectional viewpoint regarding animal exploitation. They have accepted the necessity for compassion in some contexts, or the importance of struggle and resistance against oppression and exploitation, but they have not 'joined the dots' to acknowledge the aspects of their own lives that contribute to exploitation and oppression.

Panel one shows a pigeon eating some discarded chicken meat. From the right of the panel comes the comment from an unseen observer "*That pigeon's eating chicken, is that weird?*" Leanne sees it as hypocritical that the person speaking sees the widespread consumption of other species by humans as 'normal', but the sight of a pigeon eating food wasted by humans as 'weird'. This is followed by a panel in which, two elderly woman are sitting on a bench, bemoaning the consumption of dogs in China as "*awful*", whilst implicitly accepting the consumption of various species in the Western world. The third panel shows a smartly dressed, women wearing make-up, who is wearing a fur coat and saying: "*it's okay, it's vintage fur*". Here the hypocrisy lies in the character's willingness to accept that wearing fur is wrong, but who regards 'vintage' fur as ethically permissible, because they are not the first buyer, and are not contributing directly to the fur market. The fourth panel shows an animal advocate, wearing a 'Sea Shepherd' t-shirt, who is saying: "*I am defending the oceans*", whilst apparently dining on fish. Once again, this is a juxtaposition in text-image interplay, where the image suggests one thing, but the words another. This character supports the actions of 'Sea Shepherd' activism, but still eats fish killed in an industry that 'Sea Shepherd' actively works against. The fifth panel shows

someone in a white laboratory coat, in front of a dog with a stitched head. The scientist is saying that they "*need to get home to walk the dog*". Here, the hypocrisy lies in the individual's willingness to hurt and kill dogs for a living, and yet keep a dog as a pet. The dog in the cage is not given the 'walks' and other basic care that this scientist implicitly accepts a dog needs and deserves. The next panel shows an 'Anarchist', indicated by the circle-A shirt, who is eating a burger, and saying "*I'm an anarchist, but I eat meat*". Here, Leanne is exploring her frustrations with people who she shares views with in some areas, particular the anti-oppressive politics of Anarchism, but who do not regard animal slaughter as connected with or relevant to this wider Anarchist politics.

The illustration is clear and striking, and the images convey complex information, without words (for example, the fact that the person in the final panel is eating fish). I could foresee this comic could provoke markedly different responses from different audiences. For example, I think that some might take issue with the tone of the comic, as it is very uncompromising in its message. Whilst this might be more likely to be non-vegans, I could also conceive of vegans disagreeing with the relatively 'hard-line' stance taken. However, I also think that this comic could be well received by those who agree with its message and who appreciate its uncompromising and unforgiving tone. It might also encourage others to reflect on their own views and practices, for example, the highlighting of differential treatment of dogs in various cultures as a form of hypocrisy. I return to this comic in the general discussion, later in the chapter. The next section considers Erin's comic.

## Erin

**Figure 8- Erin's Comic**

Erin presents a single page, sixteen-panel comic that focuses on her experiences of meeting and discussing the issues surrounding veganism with non-vegans. The comic

employs humour and uses simple anthropomorphic sketches and text to convey its message, which is centred on two main themes. These are 'Normalization', in relation to the hostility and antipathy faced by vegans in day-to-day scenarios; and 'Intersectionality', in relation to the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression and how this critical analysis informs Erin's lifestyle and ethics.

The comic begins with the smiling faces of a cat and a dog. They each have their eyes closed and are smiling, and seemingly content. They are labelled to indicate that the cat is Erin ('*me*') and the dog is '*someone I don't really know*'. The decision to use cats and dogs might be deliberately symbolic of things like antagonism and difference, similar way to the use of Mice and Cats in Art Spiegelman's (1991) Maus. This is a common trope in comics and allows pre-existing societal understandings about animals and their relationships to subtly contextualize a narrative. A speech bubble coming from the dog's mouth reads "*Oh, vegan? That's like, sort of like, vegetarian, right?*" This is the first hint at conflict, the tone is, on the surface, friendly and inquisitive, but it could also be taken as passive aggressive, especially given the symbolism of the use of animals, the dog (typically the aggressor) is asking the cat (typically the one being chased) questions about their life with insistence, despite not really knowing them.

In the next panel, the cat responds thusly: "*Yeah! Sort of; I don't eat any animal products, so… No meat, no dairy, or eggs* ☺". The smiley face sign indicates Erin's friendliness and willingness to engage. The descriptive text reads '*It always sounds so negative like this!*' further contextualizing Erin's desire to remain light in tone. The dog responds with "*Oh, okay… Cool! Wow. But you eat fish right?*" This is humorous, because it shows the dog's failure to understand what the cat has just said. The dog has never considered the idea of not eating meat, to the extent that 'fish' is seen as something that does not come from an animal. The descriptive text reads *'questions seldom vary'*, which alludes to how tiresome answering questions of this nature can become. This is further underlined in the next panel *"since when was fish not an animal?"* These panels are representative of theme of 'Normalization. Though this exchange is friendly, it represents a fundamental lack of understanding, which is frustrating and dispiriting and, arguably, a level of passive aggression underpin it, which is difficult to deal with. Normalizing processes mean that vegans are regarded as 'abnormal' in everyday interaction, and are subject to questions of this nature,

whereby they are routinely forced to justify their decision and choices in a way that non-vegans are not.

The next panel explains that "*to me, and lots of other vegans, it's not just about your "diet"- it's more of a "lifestyle choice". I try to live a "good life*". Conversations with strangers tend to immediately boil veganism down to the very basic, micro-technicalities of what being vegan entails, rather than engage with the broader, philosophical and ethical ideas that inform it. Here Erin is showing that whilst her diet is one of the most noticeable aspects of her veganism, it is not the most important aspect of it. The next panel humorously refers to the use of the term "*good life*", juxtaposing the ethical desire for positive living, with the consumerist notion of wealth and possessions ("*4 poster bed, enough money to never worry, very smart phone/stuff*"). Erin clarifies "*I mean I want to be a decent living organism! Make decisions, which have the least negative impact. That is my motivation for going and staying vegan"*. Then, the next panel shows Erin's cat avatar once again, smiling and waving. The text reads "*so, most of my interactions in the world tend to begin with: Hello! Can I help you with anything?*" Erin has set out very clearly why she is vegan, and her reasons for doing so, and these are rooted in a desire to have the least possible negative impact, and to be a '*decent living organism*'.

In the second half of the comic the theme of 'Intersectionality' and the interconnectedness of oppression continues to emerge. Erin's cat states: "*We live in a world dominated by oppression. I don't want to perpetuate that! Life is complicated, it is also all inherently linked*". She goes into quite a lot of academically informed analytical detail about why she thinks the idea of 'human civilization' is problematic and speciesist. "*To me… being anti-animal oppression is similar to being anti-sexism and anti-racism. I call it 'logical'. My family calls it 'fundamentalist'!"* Here we are back to 'normalization', and the conflict Erin has with her family over her veganism. This is expanded on in the next few panels "*However… things can be difficult sometimes; especially when you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings*". We see an image of Erin as a cat, looking forlorn, and arrow pointing to it explains "*me, at my granddad's 90th birthday, when there were no veggie options*". To me this conveys the theme of normalization. Erin does not want to upset her granddad or make his special day about her, so she is put in a tricky spot. "*Sometimes, one option is just less shitty than the alternative… My mantra is: Do the best you can, and get on with it. Respect life. Go*

*vegan. Be Nice*." This is a concise ending, which shows Erin's awareness of ethical complexity. She seems averse to the idea of an ethical 'high ground' position. She is saying that inevitably, sometimes, no matter how hard we try not to do damage, we will. Her philosophy is therefore simply to try her best, and not to get bogged down in the kind of technicalities her canine interlocutor was questioning her about.

Interestingly, the second half of the comic begins with a disclaimer, "*Caution: lots of text ahead*". This shows Erin's awareness of the medium, where images generally take up more space than text. In spite of this, I feel that her use of panels and speech bubbles, affords it the unique characteristics of the comics medium, in particular, juxtaposition of images, and differing types of text (where text in speech bubbles is distinct from text in panels). The use of panels also allows for the pacing of a comic, and a different reading experience. To summarize, Erin's is a concise and focussed exploration of some of the typical experiences of vegans and, implicitly, the assumptions made about them, and the hostility faced by them in normalizing contexts. But it is also a simple intersectional manifesto for living without getting too caught up in minor details.

The next section considers Nelly's comic.

**Nelly**

**Figure 9- Nelly's Comic**

Nelly's six-panel comic has elements of narrative, but displays a single 'vignette-style' scenario in which the author is happily dancing and singing along to music with her

pet rats. I argue that the dominant theme of the comic is an embodied 'interspecies companionship'.

The comic begins with Nelly pictured dancing next to some kind of music player (seemingly an old fashioned cassette player), from which musical notes are emanating, indicating that music is playing. Nelly is dancing, and her pet rat is pictured on the floor, looking up at her, on its hind legs sniffing the air (indicating its interest in what Nelly is doing). The second panel shows the rat beginning to run up Nelly's leg. The music is still playing, and we can hear some of the lyrics to the song "*So listen, Mr DJ*…" followed by the lyrics in the next panel *"…keep those records playing*". In this panel, a second rat has appeared. The next panel shows more dancing, and the lyrics "*'cause I'm having such a good time…"* followed by *"…dancing with ma babies"* in the next panel. This is indicates that what we are hearing is Nelly's singing her own lyrics. These reflect the fact that she views her two pet rats affectionately as her 'babies'. Finally we see the first rat, once again on its hind legs looking at Nelly's smiling face as the instrumental music plays on.

Nelly's comic conveys the personality of the rats in the story, purely through their body language and the way they react to her. It also shows the love between the owner and her rats, and the way this companionship is reciprocated between species in an embodied way, the fun being had by the human and the rats as they dance to the music together. It might also be argued that the comic challenges negative perceptions of rats. Rats tend to be portrayed as vermin, and as scary, harmful creatures, as opposed to traditional 'pets'. Nelly's comic shows a playful, positive, happy, fun moment of interspecies companionship featuring rats. This companionship is embodied. Beyond language and verbal communication, Nelly is interacting with her rats through sharing space with them, dancing with them, and allowing them to crawl and play on her body. These are signs of mutual affection that highlight the embodied nature of their companionship. This supports the idea that veganism and animal advocacy are embodied expressions, as discussed in

Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism. Thinking about the comic in this wider context is important, especially when considering the relationship between the theme of interspecies companionship, and the broader overarching themes of the project. This comic challenges the tendency for vegans to be represented as killjoys or extremists in normalizing contexts, as identified by Cole and Morgan (2011), through its playful and pleasant tone. Whether intentional or not, this contributes to resistance to normalizing processes. The companionship displayed between Nelly and her rats also provides some evidence of her resistance to speciesism, also evidenced in Nelly's veganism. I see this comic as having a very broad appeal. It does not explicitly have any connection to veganism or animal advocacy, and as such, when viewed out of context, can be enjoyed without awareness of the political/ethical dimension being at the forefront of one's understanding. It is a short, simple comic, showing a pleasant vignette of vegan experience. The relative lack of text and clarity of the images means that it could potentially be read and understood by a younger audience. The next section considers CJ's comic.

**CJ**

**Figure 10- CJ's Comic (page 1)**

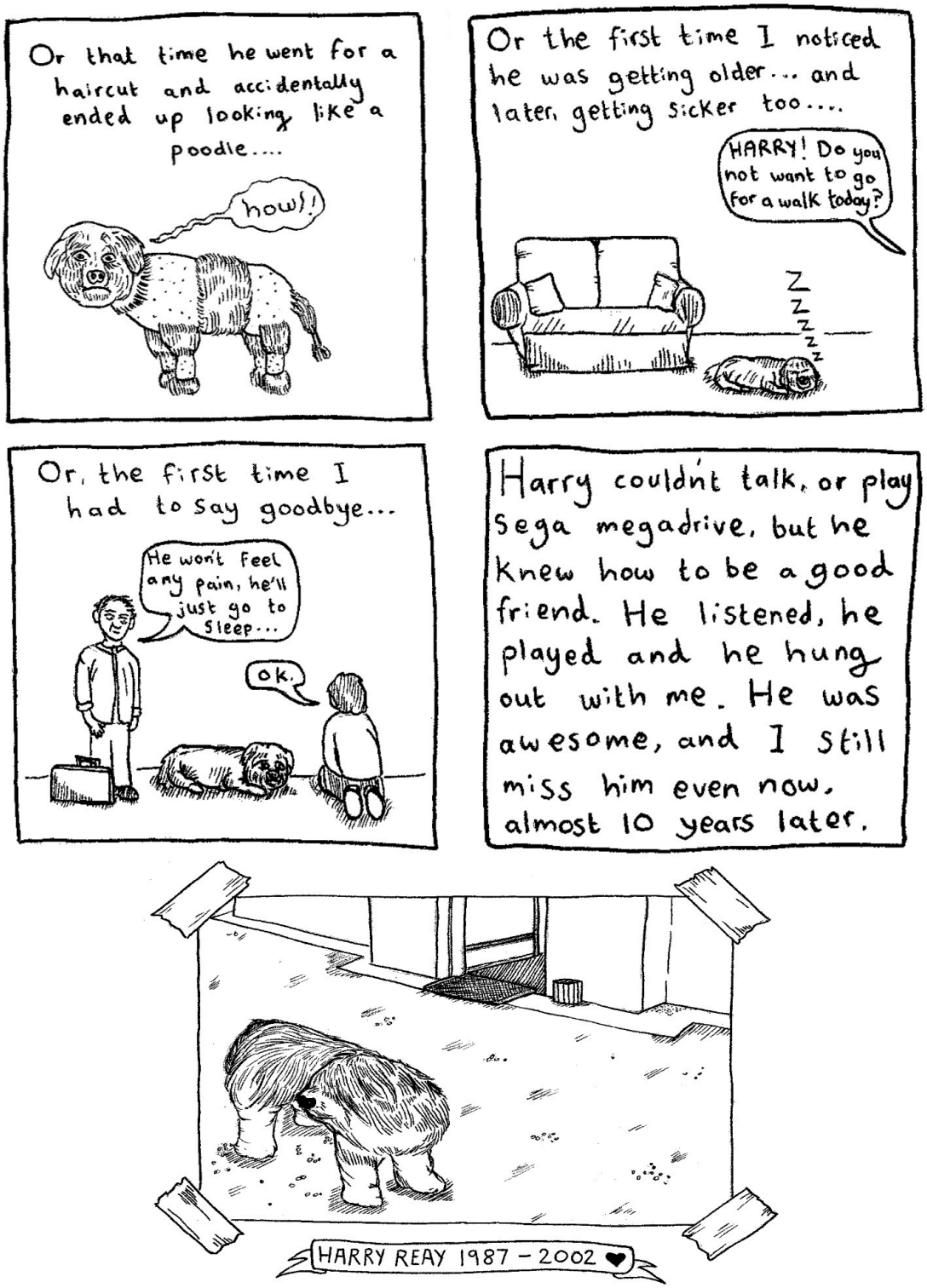


**Figure 11- CJ's Comic (page 2)**

CJ[49] produced a humorous and touching narrative, biographical comic, which tells the bittersweet story of his relationship with his first ever pet, a dog called Harry. It covers a number of issues, and is explicitly rooted in the biography of the

[49] Comic © CJ Reay 2012 (participant specified on their consent form that they wanted to be credited)

author/artist. The key theme[50] I have identified is 'Interspecies Companionship'. This companionship is embodied in various ways, in particular through Harry's mortality.

The comic starts by placing CJ's childhood friendship with Harry in the context of its unusualness. CJ sets the tone by stating that his "*when I was younger my best friend wasn't a boy. My best friend wasn't a girl either...*" and then in the next panel, he explains "*my best friend was a big hairy dog called Harry*". Here we see the first image of Harry, portrayed as an affable, friendly dog. Here we see the theme of 'Interspecies Companionship'; Harry and CJ are best friends, but this is unusual in comparison to others, who may have animal friends, but not animal 'best friends'. This is also indicates lack of hierarchy in CJ's understanding of his friendship with Harry. They exist on the same level, in spite of the fact they are from different species. Having introduced Harry, the comic then tells the reader that CJ and his friend *'Shared Lots of Experiences'*, once again, the word *'shared'* indicates a level of parity in their story. It is not a case of CJ experiencing things, and Harry being a subordinated figure. They both have agency in the narrative.

CJ then goes onto describe a number of 'first time' experiences he and Harry shared, some of which are humorous in nature. These are where the theme of the comic, interspecies companionship is most clearly evidenced. The first of these single-panel anecdotes describes a day of sledging where Harry urinated on some other children, whilst they were playing in the snow. The image shows the offending incident with the children running away screaming. The next panel describes a 'Fun-Run' where Harry ran six miles in the wrong direction. The image shows several people running after him shouting his name in an attempt to stop him running off. The next panel shows a disastrous haircut in which Harry ended up looking "*like a poodle*". Until this point the tone of the comic, both in imagery and text, has been very light hearted, comical and joyful. From this point onwards the tone shifts.

The final few panels of the comic illustrate CJ's sadness at the death of his friend. The next panel shows an image of a far more sombre scene, where a less vibrant looking Harry is sleeping next to an empty chair, with a young CJ wondering aloud why Harry doesn't seem to want to go for a walk. The text explains that this is

[50] In my initial analysis of this comic, I had included a theme of bereavement. After our follow-up interview, CJ and I decided in conversation that this theme might be less appropriate as the comic is intended as a tribute to Harry and is as much about fun and friendship, as it is about loss and bereavement. The final write up reflects this change.

"*the first time I noticed he was getting older... and later, getting sicker too*". The tone here is foreboding, through the text, both descriptive and sad, and the image which conveys the feeling that Harry is no longer his silly, youthful, active self, but is now older, his mortality more apparent. The words explain that Harry is aging, but the image gives a sense of the impact of aging on Harry's body. The panel shows a sleeping dog and the naively asked question "*do you not want to go for a walk today*?" Harry's body is aging, and CJ is witnessing the inevitability of the aging process, through the experience of his companion; in this sense their companionship is embodied. Then the next panel shows CJ's experience of saying goodbye, where he is shown with an ill looking Harry, and an adult, explaining, "*he won't feel any pain*". Here Harry is going to be euthanized, due to ill health. Harry's agency is gone, and CJ is forced to deal with losing his friend. Once again, Harry's deteriorating health highlights the embodied aspect of their relationship. The dog CJ once ran around outside with, and took on walks, is now unable to live on without considerable discomfort. The assurances that Harry won't feel pain in being 'put down', also highlight Harry's embodied experience of pain, and CJ's awareness of it. The comic ends with CJ explaining that although Harry couldn't "*talk or play Sega Mega drive"* he was still a good friend. This shows that species does not have to be a barrier to friendship, and in a wider socio-political context, shows how CJ feels animals should be included within the realms of 'the social'. The comic ends with a traditional 'tribute' style image of Harry Reay, complete with a scroll showing his year of birth and death. The fact that Harry is given a surname, and the kind of tribute normally reserved for humans, once again shows that Harry was a loved and respected friend and equal.

This comic can be seen as a bittersweet companion to Nelly's comic, illustrating both the happy and sad aspects of an embodied form of Interspecies Companionship. The standard of illustration and composition is very good, and would not look out of place in a published comic. As with Nelly's comic, it does not explicitly touch on veganism or ethics of animal exploitation, focussing on the author's meaningful relationship with his friend. Personally, I found this comic very moving and could see it being received as such by a wider audience.

Ian's comic is presented next.

**Ian**

**Figure 12- Ian's Comic (page 1)**

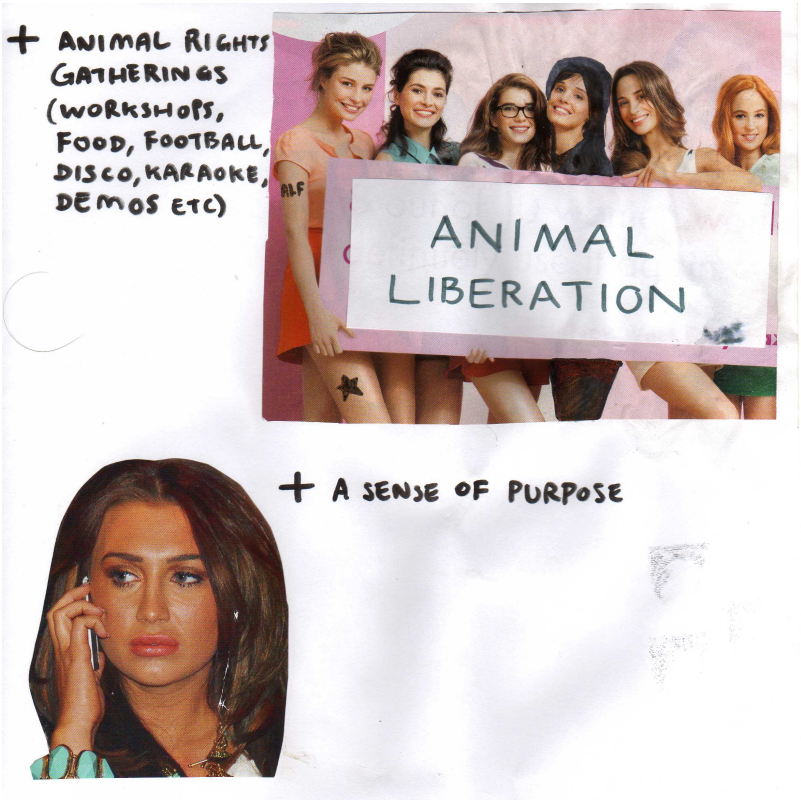


**Figure 13- Ian's Comic (page 2)**

**Figure 14- Ian's Comic (page 3)**

**Figure 15- Ian's Comic (page 4)**

Ian offers a light-hearted, humorous and analytical comic, using a collage of images cut from magazines and newspapers, with some of the author's additions, in order to illustrate some of the "*social and psychological reasons why people stay with or leave the animal rights movement*". An explanation is not given about where the images come from, or what their intended meaning was in their original context, enabling the reader to regard them largely at face value. In the comic Ian provides a system of value next to each reason described, that is, whether the reason was 'positive', 'negative' or 'neutral/other' (indicated by using plus and minus signs). The comic offers explanations of why people engage or disengage with animal advocacy activism and the dominant theme of the comic is 'political engagement'.

The comic begins with a photograph of four people, in Wild West USA period dress, walking purposefully through a field, towards the camera. A horse can be seen in the background. There are three men and one woman. There is a diversity of ethnicities pictures. Below it is the text "*camaraderie and making friends*". This fits into the theme of 'Positive' reasons (indicated by the + sign), that is, camaraderie and making friends can very easily be seen to be something that draws people into AR. The image is effective as it shows people from a broad range of backgrounds, who have come together, and through the symbolism of them walking in the same direction, seem to have a common purpose despite differences of gender, class or ethnicity. We also have an image of an adult woman. She has a young child on her lap, whose face has been cropped out of the image. She is smiling and facing the camera, and she is wearing earrings and a necklace, and a black blouse, with white circles on it. The accompanying text reads "*Acceptance of Diversity of Gender, Sexuality, and Other Personal Attributes*". In contrast, next to this is an image of someone of

indeterminate age, gender, et cetera, with their hood up, obscuring their face. A speech bubble emanating from their mouth reads "*So he was all like "Show me your I.D." and I was a like "make me". Uh-huh*". Although implied, to me this is a description of a conversation between the person pictured and a Police officer, security guard or other authority figure. The text indicates an implicit awareness of one's legal rights, and of the significance of being identifiable, for example on demonstrations. The descriptive text reads "*conflict and adrenaline*". This point highlights an embodied aspect of activism, which is something that Ian is suggesting that some people are drawn to. The adrenaline rush of being on a demonstration and coming into conflict with police or counter protestors is an embodied experience. The idea of getting a 'buzz' from demonstrating, as well as direct action (such as hunt sabbing) is therefore an important aspect of what motivates people to become activists. These images offer explanations for why people would be become engaged in animal advocacy. However, they each represent an attractive force when present, but also potentially a repellent force when not present. For example, a lack of acceptance of diversity could drive people out of animal advocacy movements.

Page two shows an image of six glamorous looking young women holding a sign. Ian has altered the sign to read 'Animal Liberation', and added tattoos to one of the women in the image. The text reads "*animal rights gatherings (workshops, food, football, disco, karaoke, demos, etc.)*". This describes a component of global animal advocacy; 'gatherings'. Events attended by large numbers of people, where the activities described might take place. Below this is an image of a woman talking on a telephone. Her expression is fairly neutral, and she is wearing jewellery. The text reads "*a sense of purpose*". Each of these '+' images describe aspects of animal advocacy that would attract people into the movement. Gatherings provide a very valuable means of socializing, learning and having fun. A '*sense of purpose'* is something that can be crucial to one's sense of self. The animal advocacy cause has clear aims and objectives, and so a desire for purpose can propel people into getting involved in activism.

Page three begins with an image of a smartly dressed woman crying. She is holding her hand to her face to wipe a tear. The text reads "*emotional burnout- being constantly reminded of animal suffering can get you down*". This is signified be a minus sign (-). For Ian, this is clearly something that he sees as a catalyst for people moving

away from activism, as it is something very emotionally draining. This is also indicative of embodied aspects of being involved in activism. Emotional burnout has a toll on the body and on one's experience of the world, one's happiness and energy- these are important embodied aspects of activism to consider. The second image shows two smartly dressed people looking uncomfortable, one is partially standing; the other is sitting down. A speech bubble comes from one of them, which says "*A petition? Seriously?*" The explanatory text reads '*Tactical Differences*' (also signified as a minus). The exasperated tone of the speech bubble links to activist debates over tactics (touched upon in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy). Ian feels that these differences can cause people to leave the movement. The final image on the page shows a woman, a child and a man together in an embrace. We might assume they are a family, as they appear to not be wearing any clothes. The accompanying text reads '*Lifestyle Changes*', and comes with a Minus sign. Starting a family and settling down can be something that causes people to be less involved in activism. The final image of the comic shows a rugby scrum, with several people piled on top of one another. A speech bubble reads "*Where was my invite to the ice cream party?!?",* and the explanatory text reads '*cliquiness*' (as a Minus cause). This certainly could be seen as something that would drive people away from animal rights, as it precludes their access to some of the aforementioned reasons for engagement.

In summary, Ian offers a light hearted, yet literal, analytically focussed assessment of why he feels people fall into or out of the animal advocacy movements. Though it is not linked directly with his personal biography, it is informed by his experiences within the movement for many years, and through his observations of people moving in and out, as well as the forces which he feels have drawn him towards, and pushed him away from activism. A non-vegan, or non-animal advocacy audience, might find this comic confusing and might not understand the use of acronyms like 'AR'. Similarly, the specificity of the topic might preclude some from understanding what it is about. I return to some of the themes from this comic later in the chapter.

The next section considers Becca's comic.

## Becca

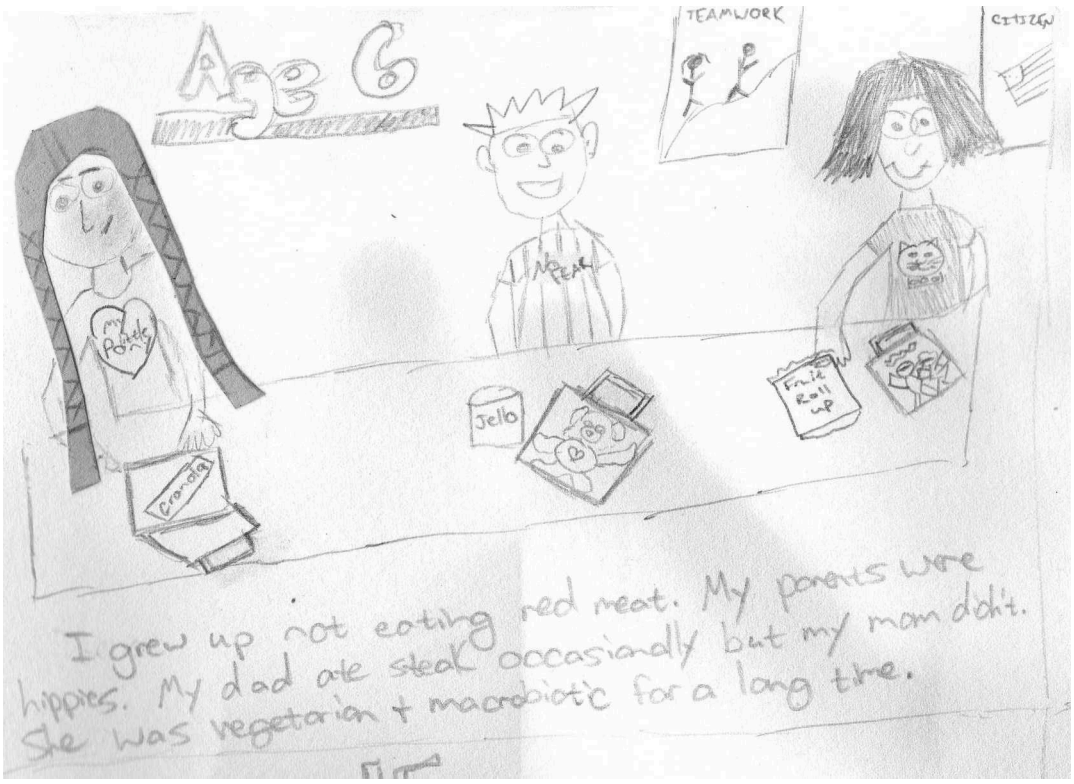


**Figure 16- Becca Age 6**

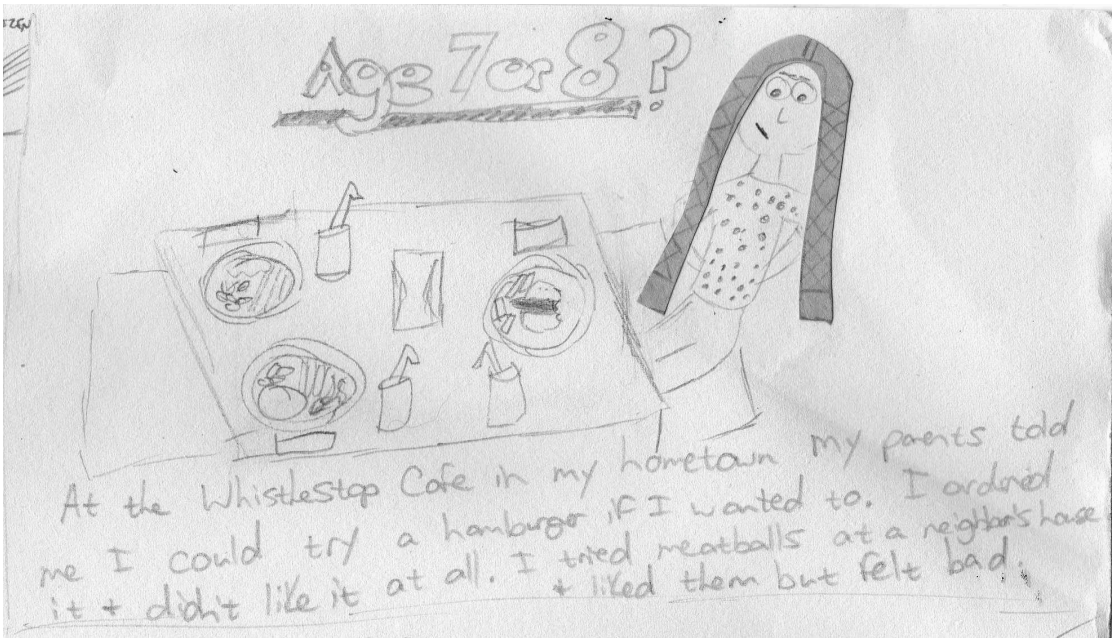


**Figure 17- Becca Age 7 or 8?**

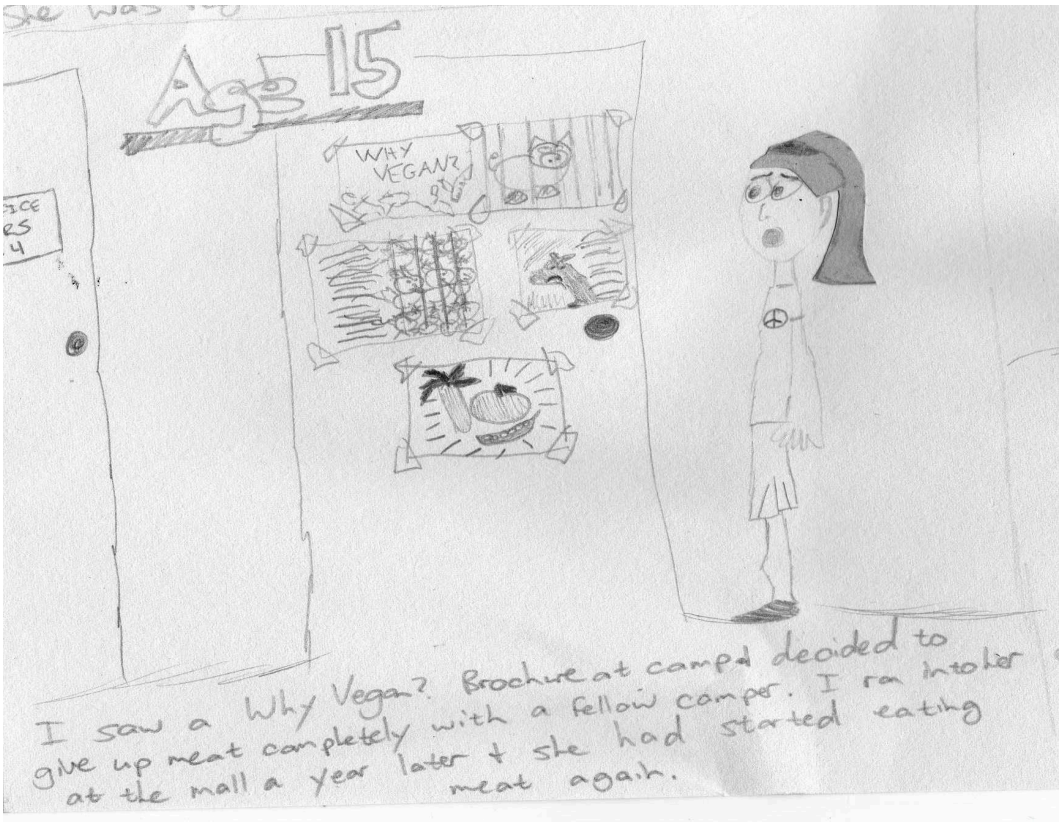


**Figure 18- Becca Age 15**

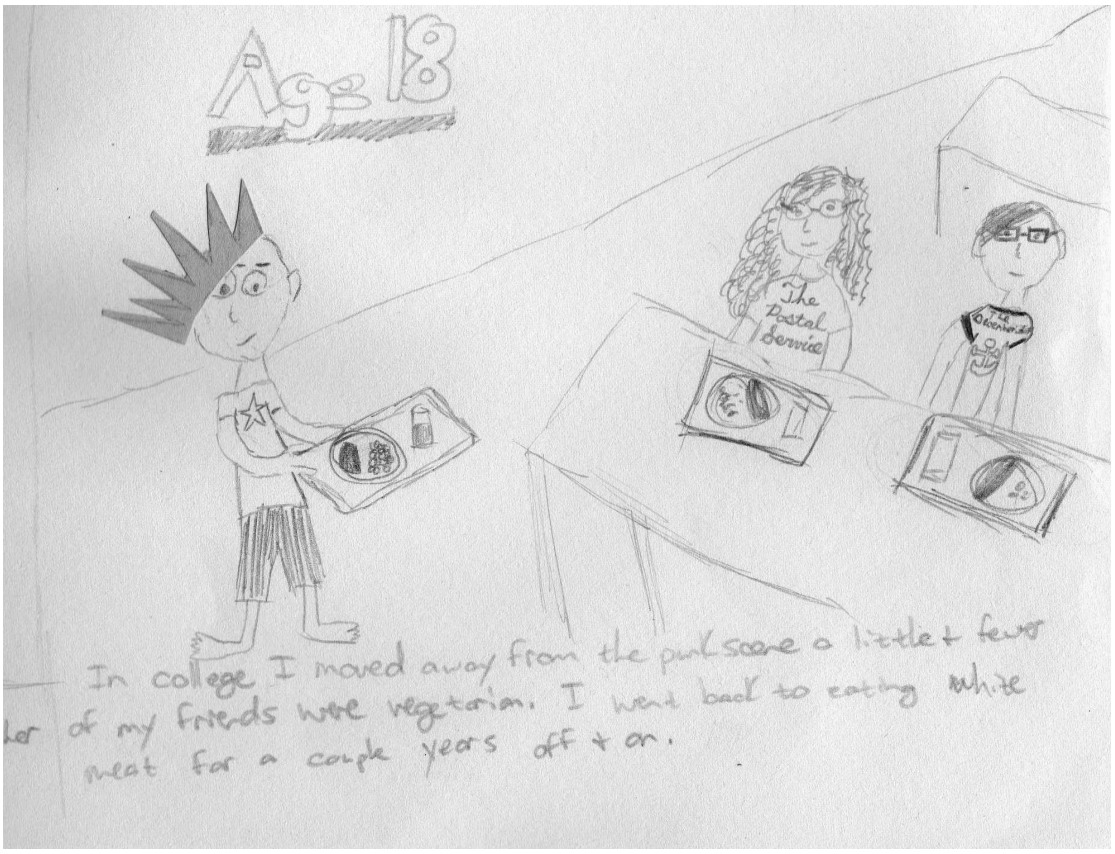


**Figure 19- Becca Age 18**

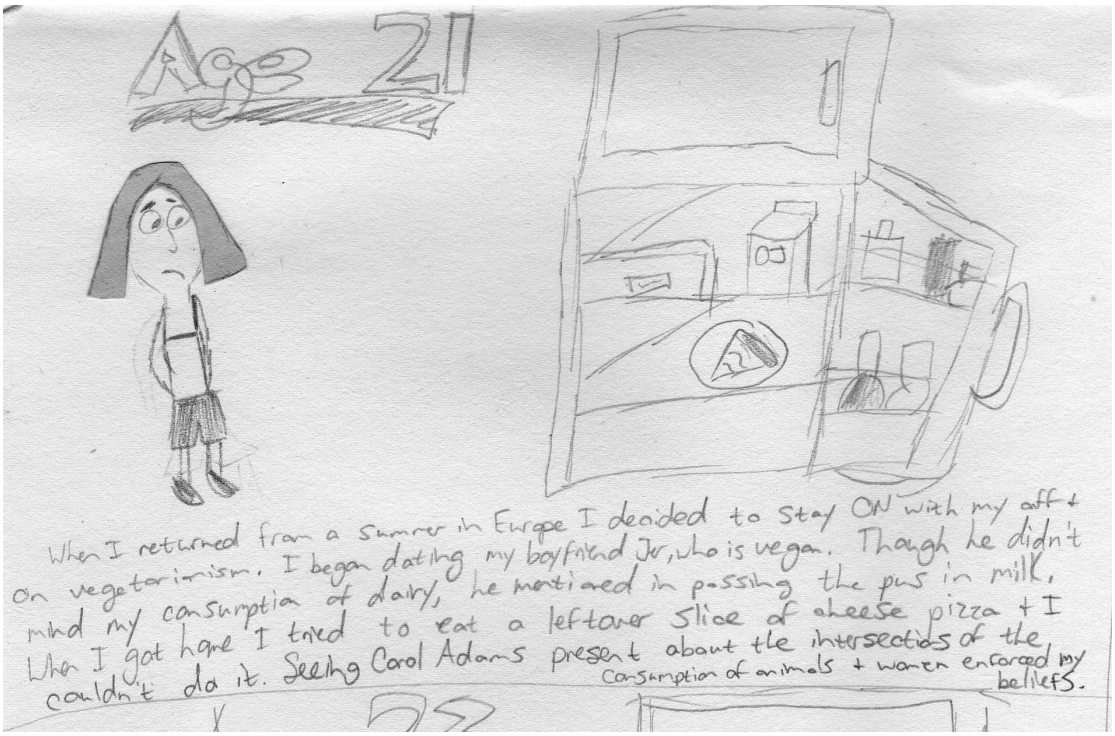


**Figure 20- Becca Age 21**

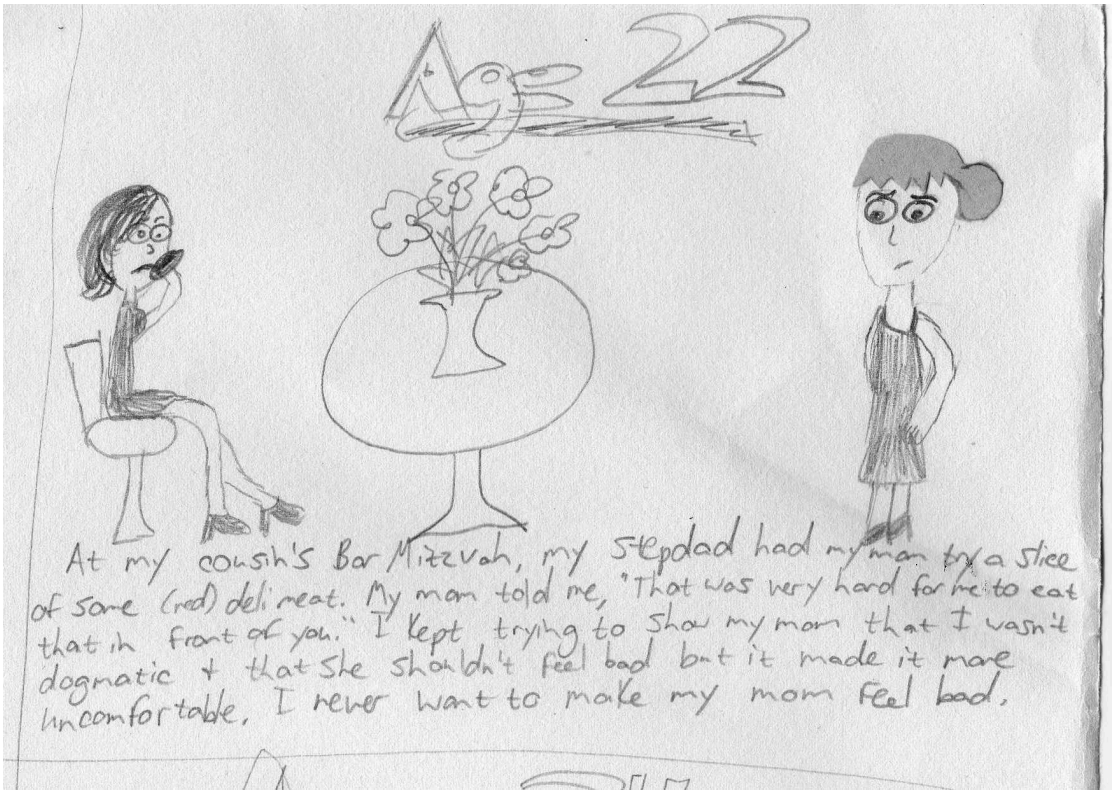


**Figure 21- Becca Age 22**

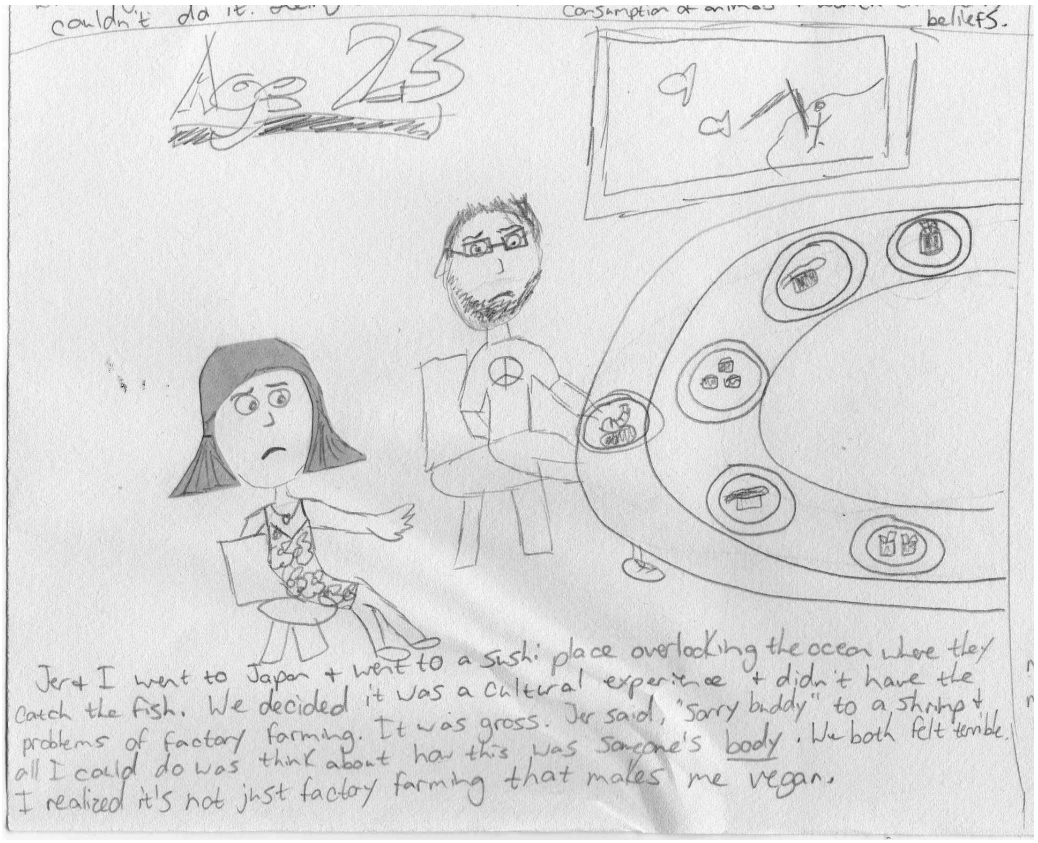


**Figure 22- Becca Age 23**

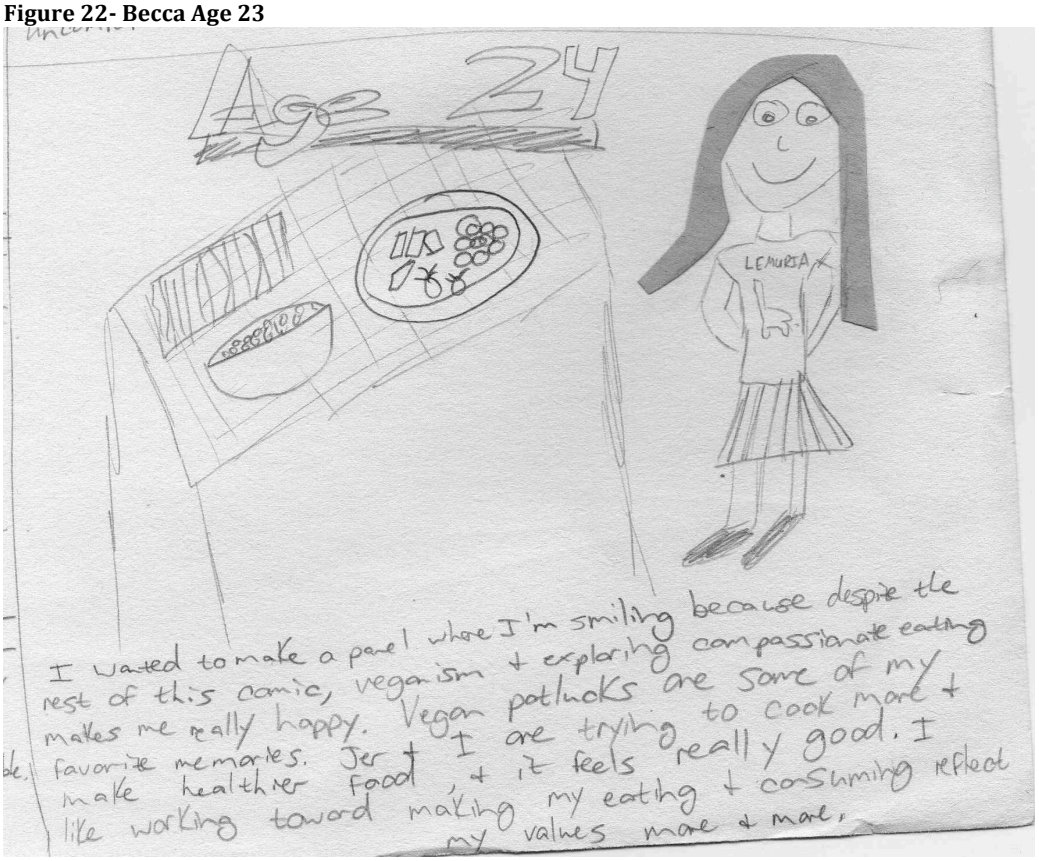


**Figure 23- Becca Age 24**

Becca's[51] comics present a brief narrative biography of the author in relation to veganism and personal ethics. It is situated in a familial, social and cultural context, and gives us single panel vignettes of the author's life at different ages. It focuses on key moments or information relating to the development of her ethical perspective. The central themes I have identified in this comic is 'Political Engagement', as told through Becca's decision making at various points in her life, regarding her interest in veganism, and animal advocacy.

The first panel shows us Becca aged six years old. Here we learn that Becca was raised not eating red meat, due to her parents being 'hippies'. Her father occasionally ate steak but her mother did not. The image shows Becca with long blonde hair and a 'My Little Pony' t-shirt, sitting alongside her fellow classmates eating lunch. Unlike her classmates who have conventional looking meals in front of them, Becca is eating granola. In the second panel we see her aged seven or eight, deciding to try red meat for the first time, at a local cafe, after her parents tell her it's okay if she wants to try a hamburger. She did not enjoy it at all. Soon after she tried meatballs at a friend's house enjoyed them, but this made her feel bad. At this point, politics is not a big part of her thinking, Becca is simply trying new things, and her rejection of meat-balls and hamburgers is based mainly on the taste and unfamiliarity.

The third panel shows us Becca aged fifteen at a summer camp. The image shows her standing in front of her friend's door looking visibly shocked (wearing a shirt with a CND logo on it). The door is adorned with various animal posters, alongside a pamphlet. This is central in the theme of political engagement, as the comic informs us that exposure to such literature was a key catalyst in Becca's interest in animal advocacy and veganism. The text informs us that it was at this age she decided to give up meat entirely. The fourth panel shows Becca aged eighteen, complete with a spikey, punk-looking haircut. She is politically engaged and interested in punk and activism. We then learn that later, in college, she moved away from the punk scene, and knew fewer vegetarians. She went back to eating white meat, on and off, for a couple of years.

[51] Comic © Becca Spence 2011 (Participant specified on their consent form that they wanted to be credited)

Panel five shows us Becca aged twenty one standing in front of an open fridge containing a slice of pizza, looking forlorn. Here we learn that upon returning home after university, she decided to stop eating meat once again. This was also around that time that she started dating her current partner, who is vegan. He did not object to her consuming dairy products, but told her about his own reasons for not consuming it. This, coupled with seeing ecofeminist Carol Adams speak about the interconnectedness of speciesism and sexism, influenced her decision to go vegan. Having been less interested whilst at college, this point represents Becca's reengagement with animal advocacy politics, and the beginnings of her veganism, particularly through her partner's influence. Panel six shows us Becca dressed up smart at her cousins Bar Mitzvah at a dining table along with her mother. The text explains that Becca's step-dad made her mother try a slice of red meat, and Becca's mother explained that she had felt uncomfortable eating it in front of Becca. This made Becca feel bad, because she did not want her mother to feel judged over her choices. The text reads *"I kept trying to tell her that I wasn't dogmatic, and that she shouldn't feel bad but it made it more uncomfortable"*. This highlights a tension in Becca's politics, between doing what she feels is right, but not wanting to make others feel guilty for making different choices.

Panel seven shows Becca and her partner on holiday in Japan, at a conveyor-belt style Sushi restaurant looking slightly uncomfortable. The text explains that, in order to respect local culture and because the restaurant was not using factory-farmed fish, they decided to try Sushi. However, they immediately regretted it. "*It was gross... I kept thinking about how this was someone's body... It made me realize that factory farming is not the only reason I am vegan*". This is evidence of a process of political engagement. Their willingness to eat the sushi, and 'break veganism' is not borne out of losing their belief in the ideas behind it, but in challenging their own politics. The eighth and final panel, shows Becca smiling and happy, next to a counter with food displayed on it. The text explains "*I wanted to make a panel where I'm smiling because despite the rest of this comic, veganism and exploring compassionate eating makes me really happy... I like working towards making my eating and consuming reflect my values more and more*". This once again highlights Becca's political engagement, and her desire to live positively, through veganism. The comic

ends on a deliberately positive note, and offers an interesting and engaging explanation of Becca's biographical journey towards veganism.

The next section explores some of the unifying themes of the comics, in particular 'normalization', 'intersectionality' and 'political engagement'.

## Comic Discussion

The comics presented here provide valuable evidence of the important connection between the visual and the biographical. As O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) have argued, the visual is an important methodological aspect of the field of, taking us outside of text and conversation and into new senses. It allows us a means of representing the "*unsayable*". This is arguably reflected in many of the comics presented above, but particularly CJ's comic about his relationship with his first pet, says more through the complex interplay of words and images than words alone might, and similarly Nelly's comic about dancing with her pet rats captures a vignette moment of experience that expressed visually holds more power than it might in conversation. O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) argue that biographical work, represented visually as well as textually, can help to illuminate the experience of individuals, and "*bring us into contact with reality in ways we cannot forget*" (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006: 49-50). I feel that the comics presented above achieve this, and in doing so provide a counter narrative to the hegemonic understandings of vegan experience, discussed earlier in the thesis, evident in phenomena such as 'Carnism' (Joy, 2010), and 'Vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011). These comics transgress dominant understandings of veganism and animal advocacy, and potentially human-animal relations more broadly.

Having reflected on the comics above, I consider that comics do in fact "*represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or mode of representation"* especially within a queer research paradigm. Jones and Adams (2010) argue that 'queer' methods are characterised by a deliberate focus on fluidity, intersubjectivity and 'the particular', and the necessity of challenging normative discourses. These comics provide evidence of this challenge to normativity. Several of the comics presented above explicitly or implicitly challenge normalization through their narrative or message. For example, Raymond produced a strong defence of veganism as a positive and intersectional outlook, in reaction to negative stereotypes of

veganism in normalizing contexts. Given the unifying theme of 'normalization', which emerged from the biographical interviews and from the comics, the participants are offering a form of resistance to fixed notions of what it means to be vegan, and at times, explicitly engage with negative perceptions of veganism (for example, Erin's assertion that veganism is about living a 'good life'). Richards (2008) argues that normalization of 'abnormal lives' occurs through the way they are written about and represented externally. Cole and Morgan (2011) have described the way this functions in media representations of veganism, as 'vegaphobia'. In asking participants to produce comics, the project offered them an opportunity to respond to these external representations, and offer their own perspectives and experiences. Arguably, the interviews were also an arena in which this resistance could occur, however, my presence, and the institutional acceptance of the interview form, arguably diminish their capacity for to be an arena for resistance.

Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) have argued that visual methods are valuable in enabling people to communicate in a meaningful way about their identities and experiences, without being limited to talking or writing about their lives. In the context of queer theory, which seeks to challenge fixity of meaning, and essentialist ideas about identity, producing these comics provides a means of allowing participants to express themselves and their identities, without being subject to the typical reception of text and interview data. The comics 'trouble' the typical experience of reading an academic text, and provide a means for participants to express themselves in interesting dynamic ways. As evidenced above, the participants responded to the task with a diverse set of comics, which, viewed as unique documents, give us a picture of veganism that we otherwise might not have had access to.

The comic medium offers unique opportunities for representing complex, and fluid ideas, and in utilizing comics this contributes to the queer project of exploring novel forms and embracing fluidity. For example, the juxtaposition of words and images in the comics presented allows for complexity and ambiguity of meaning, that lends itself well to the tenets of queer theory, for example in Leanne's comic about 'Hypocrisy' which juxtaposes images and text to highlight inconsistent attitudes and behaviour. The comics presented above are evidence that the medium could especially be useful in relation to recent efforts to develop a queer methodology

(Browne and Nash, 2010). Indeed, radical queer texts have already employed the comic form, for example a chapter within the edited volume 'Queering Anarchism' (Daring et al, 2012). The comics themselves shared some unifying themes.

**Overarching Themes**

The dominant unifying themes of the comics that I identified were 'intersectionality', 'normalization', and 'political engagement', as well as 'interspecies companionship'. 'Intersectionality' occurred in a number of the comics, in particular in Raymond, Leanne and Erin's comics. For example, Raymond explicitly talks about interconnections between oppression. Leanne also highlights the inconsistency in the way humans treat animals. Erin's compares veganism to being anti-racist and anti-sexist, which identifies her veganism as being intersectional.

'Normalization' was a dominant theme Erin's comic, evidenced through the reactions of others to her veganism, highlighting the way in which veganism is regarded as something questionable, that needs to be justified, unlike eating meat, which is relatively unproblematised in society. 'Normalization' is also present in other comics, for example, Leanne's discussion of hypocrisy, Ian's analysis of 'cliquiness' within animal advocacy movements, and Raymond's desire to challenge negative assumptions about veganism. This normalization was also reflected in embodied ways in the comics, for example, in Raymond's anatomic drawing and reflections on veganism as a healthy alternative to what might be seen as dominant Bio-political norms surrounding meat. Political engagement, were dominant themes in Ian and Becca's comics, Ian's from a more analytical perspective, and Becca's from an autobiographical perspective. Finally, 'interspecies companionship' was a theme identified in Nelly and CJ's comics, through their portrayal of embodied relationships and experiences shared between humans and non-humans.

In analysing the examples presented above, some can be understood as focusing on political themes, for example, Raymond and Leanne's comics explore the political significance of animal exploitation in one way or another (Raymond through his rejection of it, and Leanne through the ambivalence and hypocrisy of others towards animals). Ian and Becca's comics both focus explicitly on issues of political engagement. Ian's does so in an analytical way looking at the animal rights movement

as a whole, whereas Becca's does so through an autobiographical tale of her own journey towards veganism. Nelly and CJ's comics, however, focus on personal narratives, in particular through interspecies companionship (in Nelly's relationship with her rats, and CJ's relationship with his dog). Several comics are overtly optimistic in outlook (for example, the comics of Raymond, Nelly and Erin). Raymond discusses all the ways that veganism improves his life and the world around him, Nelly simply shares a positive experience from her life, and Erin talks about her own positive outlook. Leanne's comic is more negative in tone, focussing on the cruelty of humans towards animals. Stylistically, Nelly, Erin, Leanne, CJ and Becca's comics share a more typically comic structure, using panels and cartoon images. Raymond's comic could be said to take elements from the comic genre, but could also be seen as an info-graphic of some kind. Ian's comic is the only one not to use illustration of some kind, instead using found photographic images from magazines as proxy characters. However, through the use of speech and thought bubbles, Ian's comic shows an awareness of the typical tropes of the comic medium.

There were a number of instances where issues surrounding embodiment and embodied experience came to the fore in the comics. For example, Raymond's discussion of veganism and health might be viewed within a Foucauldian Biopower context, as resistance to dominant normalizing ideas around diet and health. Similarly, there were two instances of comics around interspecies companionship that portrayed embodied relationships between humans and nonhumans. Nelly's vignette about dancing with her rats showed how she and her animal companions share a moment together through embodied relationship. Similarly, CJ's comic about his dog Harry showed how Harry's deteriorating health and mortality were experienced through CJ's awareness of his friend's weakened body. Finally, Ian's comic highlighted some of the embodied experiences of vegan activists, pointing to the adrenaline of a protest, and to the damage of emotional burnout as embodied phenomena that impact on one's engagement with animal advocacy.

The comics provide an interesting, dynamic and engaging source of information, about the lives and experiences of vegans, which might otherwise not have been accessed. They provide a platform for challenging normative assumptions, and through the comic form present unique opportunities for expressing complex, fluid ideas. They also trouble the traditional experience of reading an academic text

and force the reader to engage with the text in different ways. Sparkes (2009) argues that academics can benefit from embracing an art of appreciation (or '*connoisseurship*') in relation to data, in order to assist their judgement of novel forms of representation. This means approaching unusual modes of representation with an open mind and an adaptability, which allows you to judge a piece of work on its own terms. The use of comics in this project encourages adaptability (or '*connoisseurship'*) on the part of the academic audience, forcing them to engage with a novel medium, troubling the conventional experience of reading an academic text. This is also true of the autoethnographic comic presented alongside the research (see Insert).

The next section discusses my autoethnographic comic, explaining why it presented how it is, and providing an introduction and brief explanation.

## My Autoethnographic Comic

As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology this thesis is partly made up of an autoethnographic comic [See Insert]. Visual and autoethnographic methods have been used as part of a broader biographical approach to the project, and as compatible with the interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology of the research. I created this autoethnographic comic, based on my own biography and experiences conducting the research. As discussed above, part of the reason I have used this visual autoethnography is to 'trouble' formal modes of representation within academia, and to assess the potential of comics as a mode of academic representation. For this reason, it is important that I do not simply describe the content of the comic in prose here, despite that being a tempting and possibly safer thing to do. The comic is in fact self-explanatory, it stands on its own and conveys its own message, and to describe it in prose here in too much detail would certainly detract from the purpose of producing it. I feel that it is very important that it conveys its own message, in order to support the argument that comics convey ideas as well as prose, if not better in some instances, and have a place in academia.

Nevertheless, the following section attempts to tie the key themes of the comic to the themes of the visual data presented in this chapter and discussed above, as a means of providing continuity between my own comic and the data. As discussed in Chapter 4, autoethnography represents a significant aspect of the methodology of this project. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011: 273) define autoethnography as "*an*

*approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (graphy) personal experience (ethno)*". It entails the use of autobiographical and ethnographic techniques, and should thus be regarded as both a process and a product of research (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography strives to challenge the conventions of social research, placing the human being behind the research at its centre. In doing so, it provides an accessible way of representing research, which is "*grounded in everyday life*" (Plummer, 2003: 522). Autoethnography entails a focus on specificity and subjectivity, and represents a bourgeoning methodological apparatus in social research (Sparkes, 2002; Holman Jones, 2005). The process of creating an autoethnographic comic gave me an opportunity for self-critique and to reflect on the often messy research process. Like biographical research, autoethnography provides opportunities for accessing marginal voices, particularly where authors belong to groups who have been subject to marginalization or ridicule (Muncey, 2010). This resulted in me producing a comic about my own biography as a vegan, and about my experiences of doing the research. It allowed me to reflect on my experience, and my role as a researcher within a field that is personally significant to me. For example, I had various difficult and emotional experiences conducting the research (as I am certain most PhD students have) that might not otherwise have made it into the project. Instead, I was able to reflect on these in my comic autoethnography (in particular in comic Chapter 5: 'Acutely'). These were messy experiences that I feel were relevant to the research, and in acknowledging them, I strengthen the value of the work as a whole.

With an awareness of Delamont's (2009) criticisms of autoethnography (discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology), I opted to utilize reflexive autoethnography as part of a mixed methods approach, alongside biographical interviews, and visual methods through the collection of comics from participants (presented in Chapters 5 to 7). I also sought to ensure that I was able to look at my own role, motivations, and influence on the research and I felt that, as a vegan conducting biographical research into vegan animal advocacy, my own biographical insights were actually valuable.

However, a project focused solely on my own subjectivity was not something that I think would have been very useful or beneficial to the field. It made sense to engage with ideas surrounding autoethnography as a methodological approach, but

for this to supplement the main focus of the project- the biographies of the participants presented. In a project focusing primarily on the experience of its participants, a reflexive autoethnography shows evidence of my heightened desire to reflect on my role and the impact my biography has on the research.

Whilst the autoethnographic comic would ideally be read immediately following this chapter [see Insert], it is deliberately written and presented in a way that it can be read separate to the thesis, and still make sense. This is because I think comics can be a valuable and accessible means of communicating with diverse audiences (Han, 2008) and I hope that people who are interested in my research, but who might not ordinarily have the desire to sit and read a PhD thesis, would read and enjoy the comic. This also reflects Rose's (2012) critical approach to the visual, and the need to acknowledge the specificity of an images viewing to diverse audiences. The comic is separated into six chapters.

Chapter 1 is entitled 'Early'. This discusses my life growing up, and my upbringing as a vegetarian, including some moments from my early biography that I feel were significant in relation to my veganism. Chapter 2, entitled 'Recently' discusses my decision to go vegan as an undergraduate, and some important aspects of my life as a vegan since. Chapter 3, 'Daily', focuses on my day-to-day experience as a vegan post-graduate and would-be 'academic'. Chapter 4, 'Messily' focuses on the research process, in particular looking at some of things that did not go as smoothly as might have been planned. Chapter 5, 'Acutely' discusses some health issues I had during the project, and how they might have impacted on the project in some way. Chapter 6, 'Slowly' offers a very brief and simple overview of what I see as the key findings and contributions of the project to the field, by way of drawing the comic to a close.

A number of themes that emerged in participants' comics can also be seen evidenced in my own autoethnographic comic [see Insert]. The dominant theme of normalization can be seen at various points throughout the comic, for example, in 'Chapter 3: Daily' of the comic, where I am asked the classic question "*but where do you get your protein*". The theme of political engagement can be seen pretty consistently throughout, from the discussion of my early interest in political campaigning in 'Chapter 1: Early', through me meeting likeminded people whilst on tour in Germany in 'Chapter 2: Recently'; to my experience conducting research near

the houses of parliament in London in 'Chapter 4: Messily'. The theme of intersectionality is also evidenced often in the comic, most notably in 'Chapter 1: Early' where I discuss the interconnectedness of political resistance. Interspecies companionship can also be seen evidenced in 'Chapter 1: Early', where I discuss taking my pet dog for walks growing up, and my grief over her death. The theme of embodiment is particularly evident, especially in 'Chapter 5: Acutely', where I talk in some detail about my experiences of depression and anxiety when conducting the research.

The autoethnographic comic functions to emphasise my subjective standpoint within the research, explaining my embodied experience as a vegan conducting the research, and underlines the centrality of reflexivity within the project. The next section summarises this chapter.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed Research Questions 1 and 4 '*Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*' and '*Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*' To that end, I presented the seven comics produced for the project by participants, offering a thematic analysis of each, guided by Rose's (2012) critical approach to visual analysis. The comics illustrated several themes; these were, intersectionality and the interconnectedness between veganism and other critical emancipatory struggles; normalization, through participant's responses to the way in which veganism is negatively perceived and responded to in social interaction; political engagement, through the narratives of involvement in animal advocacy and veganism; and interspecies companionship, in the meaningful relationships between participants and non-human animal companions. The comics also evidenced themes of embodiment, for example through health awareness, embodied friendships with pets, and through the embodied experience of activists (e.g. 'adrenaline' and 'emotional burnout').

Lending further weight to the claim that vegan political expression is frequently embodied (discussed in Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism). I discussed the overarching themes of the comics, and argued that comics present a useful methodological tool and mode of representation, particularly in relation to queer

research paradigms. The use of comics provides an important link between visual and biographical research, as well as providing a means of communicating the "*unsayable*" (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006). I also argued that comics provide a platform from which to challenge normativity, such as 'Vegaphobia' (Cole and Morgan, 2011), and the participants expressed rejection of normalizing processes through their comics. In drawing together these themes, I argue that comics represent a valuable methodological tool for collecting data, especially in connection to a queer theoretical framework, in which fluidity and uncertainty are valued. This can work to 'trouble' the typical experience of engaging with academic work. Following on from this, I presented an introduction to and brief explanation of my own autoethnographic comic [See Insert], which should ideally be read following this chapter. Here, I recapped the underlying motivations for the use of visual autoethnography and presented a brief synopsis of the comic itself, highlighting some themes that overlap with those of the participants' comics.

The next chapter offers a conclusion to the thesis. It presents a brief recap of the research questions that the project asked, explaining how these have been answered, and the significance this project has for the field as a whole. I discuss the themes and arguments that have emerged, in particular those relating to 'normalization', 'performativity' and 'intersectionality'. I then discuss the methodological contribution of the project, discussing comics as an accessible, novel academic form, with strong links to queer theory and biographical methods. I consider some obstacles that need to be overcome if work in a similar vein is to be conducted, and also place down some markers for future research in the area of biography and veganism.

Before reading Chapter 8: Conclusions please now turn to the Insert and read my autoethnographic comic.

# Chapter 8: Conclusions

## Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the research project. I summarise the main points in reference to the research questions, and establish the contribution of this project to existing knowledge. First, I offer an outline of the project as a whole, detailing 'where I started' in the terms of existing literature and context, 'what I did' in terms of the biographical and visual methodological approach, and 'what I found' in relation to the research questions. I discuss the findings, in relation to the research questions. Revisiting the theoretical underpinnings of the project, and the core concepts of normalization and reflexivity, I summarise the way that the project has answered the research questions. This involves discussing vegan identity as being necessarily fluid, and how vegan biographies have been shown to be subject to processes of normalization through the findings. Further to this, I return to the idea that vegans negotiate normalization through various performances, achieving and managing identities through these performances. I reassert that vegans have expressed themselves politically and ethically in diverse ways, and that these expressions and performances are mediated by normalizing processes as well, as embodied experience. I then restate the argument that comics have a place in academia, and that the use of comics in this project has provided a rich source of data, and that comics lend themselves particularly well to the tenets of queer theory. Table 6 provides a summary of the findings of the research in relation to the research questions.

I then consider the significance that this research has for the literature as it stands, that is, I outline my contribution to knowledge. I argue that this biographical project has contributed to the generation of theory surrounding animal advocacy and veganism, in particular, through developing ideas around queering vegan identity, normalization, performativity, intersectionality and political engagement. I then argue that the project has a clear methodological contribution; through its use of comics, and autoethnography. Finally, I consider some potential areas for future exploration in this area.

**Table 5- Findings Overview**

| RQ | Research Question | Findings |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans? | See Chapters 5 to 8 for specific biographical accounts of vegan experience and accounts of turning points. |
| 2 | To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid? | Vegans in this study have taken great care over who they open up to about their veganism, and as such vegan identity can be seen to be fluid. This process can be understood as a form of 'coming out', especially within a normalizing context. |
| 3 | How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs? | The vegans in this study have expressed themselves in a variety of ways. These have often been mediated by normalizing forces, which have ranged from social and peer stigma to police brutality and imprisonment. The political and ethical expressions are often mediated by and rooted in embodied experience. |
| 4 | Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation? | Comics provided fascinating, rich, complex, fluid and diverse accounts of biographical experience and perspectives; thus comics are particularly well suited to queer methodological approaches.<br>However, the project also had issues with attrition, and not all participants produced comics. Nevertheless, there is scope for further exploration of comics as a biographical method. |

## Where I started

As discussed in Chapter 2: Animal Advocacy, there is evidence to suggest that humans have shown concern for the wellbeing of animals throughout history. Certainly, there are examples of vegetarianism and practices of non-violence towards animals in Ancient societies, such as Ancient Greece (Ryder, 2000). Today, animal advocacy represents a broad, international movement, with a strong connection to the United Kingdom- widely regarded as the birthplace of the contemporary animal rights movement (Molland, 2004). Couple this with increasing popularity and significance of 'ethical consumerism', and veganism emerges as an important topic of study. In recent years, there have been several high profile cases of animal advocacy activists being imprisoned for their part in criminal activism, and more discussion of the

erroneous conflation of non-violent animal rights activism with 'terrorism' in popular discourse (Nocella, 2011; Sorensen, 2009; Lovitz, 2010; Best and Nocella, 2004). For these reasons, animal advocacy and veganism represent an interesting and topical group to study in an academic context.

Existing research into animal advocacy has been diverse, but there are gaps in the literature, particularly from a methodological perspective. Many studies of animal advocacy have been conducted from a distant, outsider position, adopting positivist and empiricist techniques of inquiry, such as large-scale surveys and questionnaires. These have produced useful knowledge about animal advocacy, and helped shape our understanding of the movement, but have largely failed to provide an in-depth account of the complexity of life as an animal advocate. There have been studies that have been conducted including more qualitative approaches, however, many of these have also adopted outsider, and neutral positions in relation to the movement. A third tradition, emerging predominantly from the interdisciplinary field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) has challenged objectivist approaches, and adopted insider and autoethnographic approaches to the study of animal advocacy. It is this tradition that this project has sought to sit within and develop further.

**What I did**

This project has been a biographical, visual and autoethnographic study of veganism and animal advocacy, conducted from my own situated standpoint as a vegan. Having been raised vegetarian, and having gone vegan almost seven years ago, I have a longstanding interest in and connection with animal advocacy causes. Coupled with my academic interest in biographical research methods and CAS, I was well placed to conduct a study of this nature. Furthermore, my connections with animal advocacy groups, and my credentials as a vegan, meant I had an opportunity to access a group that might not otherwise have been accessible to social researchers. I gained access to animal advocates through my connections with local animal advocacy groups, and through the use of a gatekeeper, who introduced me to potential participants from their home city. Building upon the interpretive epistemology and constructionist ontology underpinning the research (discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework), I sought to develop an approach that would allow for focus

upon specificity and subjectivity, and would provide a means of producing reflexive research. This led me to explore biographical research as a field suited to these aims.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4: Methodology, there were three primary aspects to the methodological approach: biographical interviews, comics created by participants and an autoethnographic comic. In drawing from the diverse interdisciplinary field of biographical research, I supplemented the use of biographical interviews with visual and autoethnographic methods, in the form of comics. I looked at the trajectory of visual methods within biographical research and sought to contribute to this tradition through asking participants to produce comics about their lives. This allowed participants an opportunity to express themselves outside of the interview context. It also presented them with a chance to communicate using what might be an unfamiliar medium, and to say what might not be as easily said with words alone (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006). I also drew from the field of autoethnography, in the hope of producing reflexive, visual, biographical data myself. This biographical autoethnographic comic is presented in full as part of the thesis (see Insert).

The project includes data from twelve (12) participants. Further interviews were conducted, data from which I intend to write up for publication. I regarded ethics as a process spanning the entire project. Partly as a result of this approach, I decided to separate visual and interview data in writing up the thesis, to avoid compromising the anonymity of animal advocates in a relatively small and interconnected community. I also intended to conduct follow up interviews with all participants, but practical constraints meant that this was not achieved. The aim of these follow ups was to ensure participants had a say on how I interpreted and analysed the interviews and comics. There were a limited number of instances where participants disagreed with my analysis, and in these cases I decided to go with their own analysis. These instances are indicated in the text with a footnote (See footnotes 40/p172 and 49/p**Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Seven (7) participants completed comics (presented in Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism); and five (5) completed follow up interviews.

This combination of interviews, visual and autoethnographic methods as sources helped me to produce a reflexive biographical study of veganism and animal advocacy.

**What I found**

In employing these methods, I sought to address the following research questions:

1. *Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans?*
2. *To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid?*
3. *How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs?*
4. *Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation?*

Chapter 5 primarily addressed Research Questions 1 and 2, doing so through examining narratives of normalization. I found that vegan identity is fluid, and that this fluidity occurs within a context of normalization and the continuing significance of binary understandings and value dualisms. The chapter looked at stories told by participants that focussed on 'Coming Out' narratives, narratives of 'Vegansexuality', and stories of 'Faith and Veganism'. By examining the stories told by participants, through the conceptual prism of normalization, I was able to better understand the significance of vegan identity as something fluid and flexible. This is in tension with the apparent fixity of veganism as a rigid set of rules. These rules do not take into account values, beliefs, context or identity; they are simple and apply across the spectrum. Through the stories told by participants, I found that vegans move through identity in fluid ways. They 'come out' as vegan, depending on context, and on hostility or how they feel veganism might be perceived. This coming out is not insignificant, and intersects with other normalizing processes. For example, Julie felt it might jeopardise her professional career if she were to 'come out' as vegan too early in her career- she would be dismissed due to the negative associations people have of veganism and vegans; this was further compounded by issues of gender. Another example was Kaya who felt like a hassle when going out with colleagues because she wanted to go to a restaurant that would accommodate her diet. I argued that Kaya's experience, as a vegan member of a 'racialized' faith, should be viewed within an intersectional framework of normalization, whereby differing forms of oppression intersect with cumulative and unique effects (Taylor et al, 2011).

In chapter 6, I continued to follow this conceptual thread, looking at normalization within narratives of political expression, activism and criminality. The chapter primarily sought to address Research Questions 1 and 3. I found that the

vegans have expressed and performed their political and ethical beliefs in a variety of ways, and demonstrated this by looking at the varied forms of political expression discussed by participants. Participants discussed a diverse selection of ways that they have expressed themselves politically and ethically, including, involvement in mainstream party politics, street demonstrations, stalling, hunt sabbing, direct action, as well as criminality. I found that political expressions and performances were mediated by normalizing processes. For example, Geoff and Jamie both discussed a desire to challenge notions of veganism as being 'single issue' through their intersectional politics. Similarly, Julie, Bea and Geoff all discussed cultural entry points to animal advocacy, such as the polarised political context of the 1980s, the punk scene and an anarchist social centre. I highlighted how these entry points can be understood to provide new narratives through which participants could access animal advocacy and veganism. This is particularly important in a normalizing context, where dominant narratives surrounding veganism tended to be negative. I drew on ideas around the 'cultural menu' (Smith and Sparkes, 2012), arguing that the stories participants told provide evidence that having diverse narrative resources can impact on the stories people tell about their lived experience, opening up new areas of possibility and potential. I also found that expressions and performances of veganism are frequently embodied, and heavily mediated. Claire's experience with a medical condition, posed significant challenges to her ability to adhere to veganism, whilst also maintaining a relatively decent quality of life . Her story as someone with a neurological impairment that impacts her mobility, illustrated the embodied ways that political expression is mediated. It also linked to Foucualdian Biopower, in particular her experience with medicine where her vegan values were not taken seriously. Similarly, this biopower was evidenced in Eddie and Dolly's stories of imprisonment and police brutality, as examples of state control over the bodies of outspoken vegans. Once again, the stories gave a picture of vegan identity as something necessarily fluid and mediated by normalizing processes. These were myriad and complex and occurred within a mainstream context, but also within the micro-politics of protest movements. One such example came from Eddie's story of taking part in direct action in a shop selling fur. Eddie was berated for not wishing to take part in front line activism in the weeks running up to the fur shop protest. His reasons were not that he rejected direct action, but because he wanted to avoid

imprisonment so that he would be free to carry out the action. He found himself being criticized for not being radical enough, where, paradoxically, his reasons for doing so, were to preserve the impact of radical action in the near future. Having been to jail for his part in the action, Eddie suddenly found himself treated with respect. He had 'achieved' a valid identity by virtue of his arrest. His motivations and actions remained fairly constant but his identity was fluid within various conflicting value systems, as he moved from vegan to activist to criminal. Once again, participants resisted and negotiated these normalizing processes in various ways.

In Chapter 7, I addressed Research Questions 1 and 4. This chapter presented the visual material that resulted from the project, in the form of the comics produced by participants. Normalization was evident in the comic narratives, as well as other conceptual themes such as political engagement and intersectionality. Intersectionality was a theme that emerged in a few of the comics, for example, in Leanne's comic entitled 'Hypocrisy'. In the comic, Leanne highlighted some of the perceived double standards people have over the treatment of animals, for example, highlighting Western disgust at the prospect of eating dogs, without reflecting on our own commonly held belief in the necessity of killing and eating similarly sentient beings. Alongside this, I found that the comics were a useful methodological tool, in terms of allowing participants to express themselves outside of the interview context and in an artistic and creative way that was not burdened with the expectations of typically accepted methods, such as the interview. I argued that the comics presented provide evidence of the potential methodological value of the medium. The data presented is rich, diverse and eye catching, and works well with the queer theoretical framework of the project, in which fluidity and uncertainty are valuable. Juxtaposition is a core component of the comic medium, and this lends itself to queer goals of challenging fixity. Using comics as a mode of representation in research can work to 'trouble' the typical experience of engaging with academic work. I also used this chapter to introduce my own autoethnographic comic about the research process, explaining why I did it, and why I thought it was useful [see Insert]. This autoethnographic comic tells the story of the research in terms of my own biography, from a reflexive situated vegan perspective.

Overall, based on the findings of the research, I have argued that vegans have necessarily fluid identities. This fluidity occurs within normalizing contexts, and is

enacted through embodied performances. Vegans achieve and manage their identities, within an unsympathetic, 'vegaphobic' discursive context in which veganism is subordinate to meat eating (Cole and Morgan, 2011). I have also found that the processes by which veganism is maligned often intersect with other normalizing processes, for example, ones relating to gender, social class, ability and sexuality. Veganism can, therefore, be understood in terms of queer conceptions of identity as fluid and unstable. We have seen that vegans in this study have taken great care over who they open up to about their veganism. In certain instances, this process can be understood as a form of 'coming out', especially within a normalizing context. Furthermore, vegans in this study have expressed their politics and ethics in a wide variety of ways; for example, mainstream party politics, punk music, street demonstrations, stalling, hunt sabbing, locking-on, conversations with strangers and through embodied choices over life improving medication. These expressions are often mediated by normalizing contexts, such as social and peer stigma, ridicule and excessive questioning. Often, political and ethical expressions have also been embodied, particularly in the cases of imprisonment, police brutality and with the experience of Claire as a vegan living with a neurological condition.

Looking at participants' comics revealed evidence of the themes of political engagement, normalization, interspecies companionship and intersectionality. These comics provided fascinatingly rich, complex, fluid and diverse accounts of biographical experience and perspectives. These are eye catching and dynamic, and open up the thesis as a document. By virtue of the medium, comics challenge the typical experience of reading an academic text, troubling ideas around fixity of meaning, and as such I would suggest that comics are particularly well suited to queer methodological approaches. However, the project also had issues with attrition; not all participants produced comics. If similar methods are to be used in future, more needs to be done to ensure that all participants are supported enough to produce a comic. I feel that there is certainly scope for further exploration and experimentation with comics as a biographical method.

In the following section I discuss what significance these findings have for the existing field, and in doing so, give consideration to the unique contribution to knowledge of this project.

## Contribution to Knowledge: Theory

### Queering Veganism

This research has contributed to the fields of biographical research and CAS by producing a biographical and visual study of animal advocacy from a situated vegan perspective. Building upon the interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology underpinning the research, I applied concepts and ideas emerging from queer theory to the study of veganism, in order to 'queer' the vegan subject[52]. In doing so I have provided a novel analysis of vegan experience as being subject to normalizing processes, which builds upon the existing research discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Grubbs (2012) questions the potential 'queerness' of all attempts to problematize "*normative tropes of hierarchy that naturalize speciesism*". This project further develops ideas surrounding 'queerness' and 'veganism'.

In Chapter 3 I examined some important concepts, illustrating the queer conceptual assumptions guiding the project. We saw that Halperin (1995: 62) has argued that *"'queer' is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer'… demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative".* By this principle, queer is always fluid and always contingent. We have seen a number of examples of queer identity on the fringes, and in opposition to perceived normalcy, through stories of hidden identity, sexuality, faith, activism and protest. In chapter 3, we saw that Warner (2000) challenges the idea of 'normalcy' by highlighting that statistical likelihood is not a measure of value. Simply because fewer people are non-heterosexual or non-cisgender, does not make heterosexual or cisgender identity better or more valuable than others. In the same sense, just because participants in this study are drawn from the relatively small pool of vegans, relative to non-vegans, this is no reflection on the value of vegan identity,

[52] As discussed earlier, the arguments presented here are intended to draw parallels between processes of normalization in narratives of vegans to other normalizing contexts, for example, LGBTQ experience and heteronormativity. However, in doing so, I am not attempting position vegans as an 'oppressed group', or to equate vegan experience with that of the LGBTQ community. The work takes place in a context where hostility towards, ridicule of or dismissal of veganism is relatively unproblematised. The narratives presented suggest that there were real consequences to these processes in the biographies of participants, and I do not wish to dismiss them as harmless or lacking significance. Having sought an intersectional analysis, it is important to acknowledge that several participants in this study were themselves LGBTQ, and as such this analysis seeks to draw parallels as a means of understanding vegan experience.

or an indicator that vegans should change their lifestyle to fit in with mainstream norms. This project has contributed to the 'queering' of debates surrounding veganism and animal advocacy by calling into question the perceived 'normality' of eating meat, and highlighting the negative effects of dominant meat eating value system on the lives and daily experiences of vegans. In doing so it also provides biographical evidence of the phenomena of vegan experience that strengthens other empirical studies.

The project provides biographical accounts of the discursive positioning of veganism earlier evidenced empirically by Cole (2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, Cole (2008) patterns of language and repetitive phraseology used by authors writing about vegetarianism/veganism, in which words such as 'restrictive', 'avoidance', 'strict' are used repeatedly; this contributes to the hierarchizing of diets, and limits the ability for vegetarianism/veganism to fulfill its promise as a potentially beneficial lifestyle for the environment and the wellbeing of human and non-human animals. What this project offers is biographical and visual data in support of the significance of this process. Cole's systematic study gives evidence of the way in which vegetarianism and veganism are variously belittled, mocked, dismissed or otherwise berated, and this project produces biographical accounts that support the argument that these processes have a meaningful and negative biographical impact on individuals. Cole's study provides an empirical basis for the biographical and visual claims made in this project. In eliciting these biographical accounts, which can sit alongside the larger scale empirical data of Cole, this project develops and strengthens the argument that vegans experience normalizing processes, and that this contributes to the discursive denigration of veganism. Thus building a broad, multi-method base of evidence, from which CAS scholars may resist and challenge dominant knowledge axis. Throughout the study we have seen examples of the phenomena Cole and Morgan (2011) describe as 'vegaphobia' (initially discussed in Chapter 2). For example, Kaya's experience of colleagues seeing her diet as a 'hassle', and Julie's desire not to 'come out' as vegan at work. 'Vegaphobia' ultimately supports and reinforces dominant hegemonic understandings of human-animal relations, as well as ethics and political expression more broadly, in the same way that racism or homophobia do around issues of ethnicity and sexuality respectively. Cole and Morgan (2011) see this as part of a damaging process, by which veganism is divorced

from its ethical and political context, and rendered an obscure curiosity, or a dangerous obsession, thus protecting mainstream understandings of our relationships with animals from critical analysis. Again, this quantitative, empirical research on the prevalence of 'vegaphobia' in the media is bolstered by the biographical accounts of it presented here, which demonstrate the real and often embodied impact of these normalizing processes on people's lives.

Looking back to the narratives in Chapter 5, which focussed on normalizing processes, we might consider veganism with regards to queer categorizations. Veganism challenging essentialist ideas about what humans should eat, and thus adherents often find themselves positioned uncomfortably 'outside' of normative discourse (for example, Luna's claim to 'alternative' identity, and thoughts on 'vegansexuality' and the practical benefit of a romantic partner who is sympathetic to veganism, discussed in chapter 5). This can also be seen in the 'coming out' narratives, and conversations surrounding strategic identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, queer theory sees identity as something in perpetual flux. The fluidity of vegan identity in these social interaction contexts demonstrates its 'queerness' of veganism in normalizing contexts. This project has therefore contributed to the project of 'queering' vegan identity, and strengthens existing work such as that of Parry (2010), Stanescu (2012), which have applied a queer analysis to the subject of veganism and animal advocacy.

**Intersectionality**

This study has also contributed to theories of intersectionality and animal advocacy, strengthening existing work, which has sought to identify the interconnected nature of differing forms of oppression and domination. The narratives presented in this project have shown that, far from being a politically benign 'diet' or 'lifestyle' choice, vegans routinely become the subject of normalizing processes. These function to make it harder to be vegan, creating conflict in areas of daily experience that are otherwise unproblematised. These micro-conflicts are often embedded in other power structures, such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, cissexism, ablism and other hegemonic power structures, which delegitimize experience and perpetuate oppressions. As we saw in Chapter 3, this frequently

occurs through the construction of binary understandings of social phenomena as critiqued by queer, feminist, other critical theories.

Veganism poses a meaningful challenge to the human/animal binary, challenging assumptions about the way we do and should view the world. It demands a deconstruction, or re-examination of binary thinking around animals (human and non-human alike). An intersectional analysis of the experience of vegans takes into account the significance of other dominant power structures, and the symbolic challenges veganism poses to industrial capitalism (and the 'animal industrial complex')- regardless of the specific motivations of individual vegans. Intersectionality provides a prism through which to view veganism and animal advocacy in political context. In Chapter 6, we heard Dolly and Eddie's stories of direct action, imprisonment and police brutality. These provide biographical data to support claims made about the impact of the 'animal industrial complex' (Noske, 1989) on the lives (and bodies) of activists in a capitalist context. Gilmore's (2013) work on the policing of protest draws these processes into a legal context. Gilmore has illustrated how laws have been introduced, intended to deal with certain crimes or issues, and then repurposed for political ends, for example the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (2013: 137). This originally purported to address community disputes and minor criminal offenses, but has more recently been used to prosecute activists. Indeed, this extends beyond the machinations of the legal system into the language used by politicians, for example, the claims by a Home Office minister that animal rights 'extremism' should be referred to as 'terrorism' (Gilmore, 2013: 189). Legitimate activism is thus subject to normalizing processes, which see it recast as illegal and pernicious. This is arguably evidenced in the $10,000 bail fee Eddie was subject to, having conducted a non-violent sit-in protest at a fur dealer store. The punishment did not seem to fit the crime, but the political context, and terror discourse framed the political activism, and so Eddie spent time in a high security prison as a result of what otherwise might have gotten him a minor rebuke.

The project has demonstrated that the normalizing contexts vegans face, frequently intersect with other hierarchical power dynamics and structures, such as heteronormativity and patriarchy. Julie's experience in the workplace demonstrated the sexist stereotyping she faces, and her desire to avoid being dismissed due to involvement with the feminised performance of caring about animals. This provides

biographical evidence to strengthen arguments around meat eating and speciesism. Adams (1990) argues that hegemonic understandings of masculinity position it positively in a contrasting dualism with femininity. Meat is therefore positive, and the absence of meat is unnatural. Julie experienced this in her professional career, making the decision to keep her veganism secret to avoid being categorized within a vegaphobic stereotype. Similarly, Dolly, a queer woman, likened 'coming out' as a vegan to her being in the closet regarding her sexuality. Dolly described telling her parents about her veganism, speaking about her fear of their reaction; "*there was a couple of times when I went home and I didn't tell my parents, cause I was too scared".* Dolly self-defines as LGBTQ and vegan, but her performances are fluid across contexts, and she achieves the identities variously depending on performance. Meat eating inhabits a hegemonic position, and vegans navigate experience and identity through this dominant hegemony. Ultimately, the experience shows the significance of managing and performing one's identity in social contexts. Similar stories emerged from Dianne, in relation to class, Kaya in relation to race and ethnicity, and Claire in relation to disability. All of which support the necessity of an intersectional analysis when looking at the experience of vegans.

In approaching the study of veganism and animal advocacy with a sensitivity to intersectionality, this project also contributes to the growing body of work from within CAS that attempts to highlight links between the exploitation of animals and other forms of exploitation and domination. The stories of Geoff and Jamie in Chapter 6 demonstrated that activists themselves are aware of the perception that vegans are 'single-issue' activists, and were keen to demonstrate that this was not the case, and that their veganism was part of a broader worldview. For example, Geoff's involvement in an Anarchist social centre and his desire to help others in the radical activist community to 'join the dots' and embrace animal advocacy causes. Similarly, Jamie's discussion of his time spent in other countries, and how this developed his worldview, in particular working on anti-fascist activism with other vegans, and demonstrating the interconnectedness of forms of oppression. In Chapter 7, we also saw comic reflections on intersectionality, with Raymond producing a comic about his veganism that highlighted that it stemmed from a concern for human and non-human animals, again disavowing the assumption that he has a single-issue worldview. As the academic branch of the animal advocacy movement, CAS strives to

produce an intersectional analysis of the world. In looking at veganism and animal advocacy in the way I have, this project contributes to that end, and provides biographical and visual data to support demonstrating the complexity and heterogeneity of vegan experience.

This project has highlighted some of these intersections in terms of the biographical experience of participants. Dianne's story of changing schools (see Chapter 5: Normalizing Veganism) and the subsequent issues of class that rose to prominence as she moved from a working class school to a more affluent, middle class school, had real significance in her narrative surrounding veganism. As someone from a working class background, Dianne had often felt alienated among her peers, often by virtue of her interest in alternative culture, as well as her bourgeoning ethical beliefs and activism. This was more markedly pronounced as she changed schools, as found that her peers were more sympathetic to her decision to eschew meat in her diet. Similarly, Claire's experience of impairment highlighted intersections in her experience as a vegan, and as someone with health and mobility issues. She faced tough choices in deciding whether or not to pursue potentially life-changing treatment, at the expense of having to 'break' her veganism. Most vegans make choices everyday about what does and does not fit in with their perceptions of the philosophy, but few do so in the knowledge that these decisions could contribute to the rapid deterioration of, or improvement in their health. Veganism is not the sole preserve of the healthy, nor is it only something middle class people are interested in. These claims are not new, but the biographical flavour of the narratives throws a spanner in the works of discursive dismissal or simplification of veganism.

Many of the participants in this project indicated the significance of intersectionality, not just on a theoretical-analytical-academic level, but in terms of their own experience and motivations. As we have seen, this emerged, directly and in-directly, in several of the narratives. For example, Eddie's reflections on imprisonment and the experience of animals (Chapter 5); Julie's awareness of the assumptions surrounding veganism and femininity (Chapter 5); Geoff's insistence on the need to '*connect the dots*' between anarchism, anti-capitalism and veganism (Chapter 6); Claire's experience of impairment and illness as a vegan (Chapter 6); Jamie's Anti-Fascist, Anti-Capitalist, Squatter vegans in the Netherlands (Chapter 6); Leanne's comic on '*hypocrisy*' of leftist activists who do not embrace veganism

(Chapter 7) and Raymond's comic on the complexity of veganism as a rejection of animal exploitation, but also environmental devastation (Chapter 7). This poses a challenge to perceptions of veganism and animal advocacy as being only about animals (Steele, 2013), and provides further evidence of the complexity of vegan experience, and the significance of intersectionality within the lives of grassroots activists and vegans.

**Fluid Identity and Embodiment**

This project also contributes to ideas surrounding veganism as a fluid identity. At its core, veganism means eschewing all animal products (Vegan Society, 2014). We may have debates over what constitutes an 'animal product', and there are admittedly grey areas, but the definition of veganism remains rigid. If it comes from an animal, it is not vegan. Vegan identity however, I have found, is more fluid. As we have discussed this is often the result of normalizing processes. People with 'abnormal' identities feel the need to hide, or manage their identity, so as to avoid conflict, hostility or just questions. Vegans perform a 'straight' identity, in order to fit in, whilst maintaining a rigid approach to veganism (as discussed in Chapter 5). Butler's (1990) development of the concept of performativity can be applied to many of the stories, for example, Dolly's performance of her queer vegan identity in different contexts (discussed in Chapter 5), and her differing identity performances as an activist in conflict with the police, and as a professional paramedic working alongside the police (discussed in chapter 6). Through the stories she told, Dolly could be seen to perform various different roles. In her role as a paramedic, she wears a uniform and behaves within the boundaries of the expectations of her profession, whilst also maintaining her veganism. Dolly also performs the identity of a vegan activist; this has its own de facto 'uniform', and parameters of accepted behaviours. To be recognized as a paramedic or as an activist is to achieve recognition of a subjective identity (Jones and Adams, 2010; Apitzch and Siouti, 2007). These identities are not mutually exclusive, but the friendly, amicable relationship with the Police in one, and the adversarial, hostile relationship in the other, suggest that both identities carry a weight of assumptions. Similarly, these are not 'essential' traits. Dolly can move between identities through her varied performances, but the way these performances are mediated differs. Dolly can equally achieve the identity of 'anarchist squatter

punk vegan activist' and 'qualified medical professional'. Whilst 'veganism' remains rigid at its core, the process through which vegan identity is achieved is fluid and contextual.

This project also contributes to understandings of veganism, animal advocacy, political activism and expression as embodied performances. As discussed in Chapter 6, Claire's experience of veganism differs from other participants, as a result of a neurological condition. This means that Claire is physically impaired in some respects (she uses a wheelchair), and it also poses questions for her choices surrounding diet and medical care. Claire faces a severe deterioration in her mobility and cognitive capacities if she stops taking a specific set of prescribed non-vegan drugs. Claire faces a tough decision regarding the use of the drugs, between having almost no quality of life, but maintaining 'veganism', or being 'vegan' and her condition deteriorating rapidly and painfully. This decision is arguably occurring at an intersectional nexus of disability, speciesism, gender and more. It highlights the fluidity of veganism as an identity, as well as the significance of embodied performance in constructing identity.

**Summary**

To summarise, this chapter has demonstrated the following primary theoretical contributions of the project. Firstly, the project contributes to queer conceptions of vegan identity, producing a queer-informed analysis of veganism and animal advocacy. In positioning veganism vis-à-vis 'normalacy' the project contributes to CAS work that has problematized normative understandings of human-animal relations (Parry, 2012; Stanescu, 2012). Furthermore, this forms part of the broader intersectional project of CAS, as an anti-oppressive and anti-speciesist field. In particular, the biographical narratives illustrate the 'coming out' narratives of vegans, vegansexuality, and the normalizing processes faced by vegans, such as vegaphobia (Cole and Morgan 2011). Secondly, the project contributes valuable biographical data to support empirical evidence of the vegaphobic normalizing contexts vegans frequently find themselves in. It has demonstrated that, whilst veganism is a relatively rigid set of rules, vegan identity is something fluid and flexible. Vegans achieve their identity in different contexts and take care over how they present their vegan identity. Thirdly, the project contributes to CAS research by providing an intersectional analysis of human-animal relations. It provides biographical evidence

of the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression, as seen through narratives of sexism, homophobia etc. It has also shown that vegans are often keen to resist normative understandings of the movement as single-issue- and thus assert their own intersectional perspective. Fourthly, the project contributes to understandings of political expression and animal advocacy as embodied performances. In particular this was seen through the experience of Claire as an impaired vegan.

Having established its theoretical contribution, the next section discusses the projects' contribution to knowledge with a specific focus on its methodological contribution.

## Contribution to Knowledge: Methodology

Having conducted an extensive literature and database review, this project is, to my knowledge, one of the first of its kind to utilize autoethnography alongside comics, as a mode of representation in a biographical sociology research project. The practice of using arts based methods is well established (O'Neill, 2010; Rose, 2012; Pink, 2014), however, the use of comics by the researcher is more rare (Han, 2008; Jones and Evans, 2011; Daring et al, 2012; Plowman and Stephen, 2008), and as such there is a uniqueness to the methodological character of this project that should be acknowledged. As discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework, the idea of 'Mess' in social research, was significantly influential in shaping the project, and a desire to reflect the mess of the research process, whilst also contributing something coherent and meaningful. Likewise, Delamont (2009) and others' concerns about autoethnography, in particular the idea that focussing on privileged academics does a disservice to participants, was a concern of mine when designing the methodology. I did not want to produce a self-indulgent, solipsistic look at veganism. I attempted to balance this through the use of a separate comic autoethnography, which can be read as a standalone piece [See Insert]. I do this to acknowledge subjectivity and 'mess', but the comic is a self-contained work.

The main focus of this research is a visual biographical study of veganism, focussing on participants' lives and experiences through the biographical interviews and through examining their comics (as directed by research questions 1, 2 and 3).

My own comic is separate from the main body of the project, as the focus here is necessarily on the participants. However, my comic contributes to the findings of the research, through my own biographical story and my reflections on the difficulties of conducting the research. The comic also serves to challenge critiques of autoethnography, through presenting a novel and dynamic piece of work, which is academic in nature, but potentially accessible beyond the typical boundaries of academia. In so-doing, this project provides evidence for the potential application of visual and narrative methods within the context of studying animal advocacy and more broadly.

**Comics and Accessibility**

This project has contributed to the project of making research more accessible and dynamic through its use of comics. Recent academic focus on issues of 'research impact' and 'public engagement' mean that the use of non-traditional, eye-catching modes of representation, such as comics, have a heightened potential in promoting the ideas and issues that they espouse (Stephens Griffin, 2014a). The use of comics, therefore, represents a particular point of opportunity for CAS and academia more generally. In embracing and exploring the value of comics, CAS research could contribute to emerging and distinctive modes of representation and communication within academia, as well as expanding the reach and profile of CAS issues in the process. It may also represent and opportunity within 'audit culture' to promote the aims of CAS through visual methods (Sparkes, 2007). We should be working to make our research dynamic and accessible (Jones, 2006), and this project has shown that comics provide a means of achieving that. Once this project is complete, I intend to share my own comic with participants and anyone else who might be interested. This is something I have found has been well received in the past, for instance, during conference presentations, I have tended to produce a short supplementary comic hand-out. Part of the appeal is that comics are distinctive, and we do not expect to see them in academic contexts, but their application within a biographical research context is justified.

**Biographical Research and Comics**

Another methodological contribution of this project has been demonstrating how the field of biographical research might benefit from further exploring the use of comics. Comics can provide biographical research with a means of achieving greater accessibility and thus accountability. I also believe that comics can produce a context in which new forms of knowledge may emerge.

In its use of comics as a mode of representation and as a research method to study veganism and animal advocacy, it is one of the only studies of its kind. In successfully utilizing comics in its methodology, the project opens the door to more use of comics in academic contexts. The comics produced by participants represent rich, fascinating insights into their lives and biographies. Having utilized a thematic analysis, informed by Rose's (2012) critical approach to analysing visual data, the project produced some striking comics, giving us access to new ways of looking at and thinking about veganism and animal advocacy. This approach shares some of the advantages of photo-elicitation methods, particularly in allowing participants to engage in a project visually as well as through interviews. Harper (2002: 23) argues that "photo-elicitation mines deeper shafts into deeper mines of human consciousness… than word-alone interviews"- the same can arguably be said for this approach. However, where photographs capture moments of reality, comics have the capacity for potentially limitless imagination, and in this regard, this approach sits happily alongside photo-elicitation as a valuable visual method.

The material produced by participants in this study is unique, interesting and thought provoking. From reading the comics they have created, we gain an insight into the subjective creative, political and social viewpoint of the participant, in this case, vegan animal advocates- a relatively unstudied and unusual social group. When viewed in connection with biographical interviews, we are able to gain a broader understanding of the lived experience of participants. Jones' (2006: 67) seeks methodologies that "embrace the humanness of social science pursuits" arguing that there is a need for innovation in the way we share our research. Law and Urry (2004: 403) have argued that traditional academic practices struggle to negotiate "the sensory, the emotional, and the kinaesthetic". It might be the case that in some contexts and for some audiences, comics do a better job of representing ideas and feelings than typical academic modes of representation.

A second level at which this project can be seen to be successful, is with regards to 'accessibility'. In using comics, the project makes a point about the validity and usefulness of alternative modes of representation, both as a source of interesting research material, but also as something accessible to different and possibly wider audiences. The use of visual modes of representation in research and, in particular, the attributes of the comics medium, may allow us to produce accessible depictions of social phenomena that are also truer to the experience of stakeholders. Halford and Knowles (2005: 1 cited in Jones, 2006) argue that "*working visually involves a significant shift away from the often oddly lifeless and mechanical accounts of everyday life in textual representation, towards sociological engagements that are contextual, kinaesthetic and sensual: that live*". This is arguably evident in Nelly's comic [see Figure 9], which represents a simple but evocative moment of poignant interspecies interaction that a quotation from an interview transcript might not convey as effectively. The hope is that, in engaging with the use of comics, biographical methods may be able to access new sources of knowledge and find new ways of communicating biographical experiences in meaningful ways.

**Comics and the Queer Project**

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, queer theory embraces fluidity, and seeks methodological approaches that enable this fluidity to be manifest in research. Comics provide an appropriate means of achieving this representational fluidity. The use of comics in this project has contributed to queer theory's methodological commitment to novel and challenging academic forms, to efforts to make research accessible to diverse and non-academic audiences. Giving participants a reason to produce a comic, and bestowing on them that responsibility, was a means of establishing that their role in the project was active rather than passive. In this sense, the participants had agency and a degree of autonomy within the project. This is consistent with the idea of 'performance narratives' in research; which mute the voice of the narrator and facilitate the space for the participant's voice to be amplified (Chase, 2005: 665). The use of comics also fitted neatly with the methodological and theoretical foundations of the research, as discussed in Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. The importance of queer discourse in unsettling the reader is discussed by Giffney (2009a). Comics can be seen to contribute to that end,

with regards to breaking out of the typical formal constraints of academic representation. The comic medium juxtaposes words and images in complex and dynamic ways, and offers something different. In doing so, it may work to challenge the assumed fixity of meaning in prose, through the uncertainty and ambiguity of the comic medium. Comics work to 'trouble' the conventional process of reading a piece of research. This project has demonstrated that in two ways. Firstly, through the unique comics produced by participants [see Chapter 7: Visualizing Veganism], that provided a novel perspective on their lives and presented us with ideas about vegan experience in an unusual and thought provoking way; and secondly, through my own autoethnographic comic [see Insert]. In presenting this autoethnographic account in the form of a comic, I am including my own story in the research, and I am doing so through an unusual narrative means that forces the reader to engage with a new and possibly unfamiliar medium.

This poses questions as to how work of such a nature might be received in a broader academic context. Sparkes (2009) has written on his concern for how novel representations are received in academic contexts, especially in relation to ethnographic data. According to Sparkes, there are two schools of thought on how novel representations are viewed, the criteriological approach, which believes universal criteria can be established by which we may judge novel representations, and a relativist approach- which is more focussed on specific context and processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. Sparkes posits that ethnographers might benefit from embracing an art of appreciation (or '*connoisseurship*') in relation to data, in order to assist their judgement of novel forms of representation. This entails approaching data represented in a form you are not familiar with or sceptical of, with an open mind. "*Connoisseurship, therefore, is about risking one's prejudices when encountering something new or unfamiliar*" (Sparkes, 2009: 315). It requires skilfulness, to be able to actively and reflexively change the criteria we are using to judge a piece of work. Embracing connoisseurship allows work to be of benefit in contexts it might otherwise be excluded from, by virtue of its form. Taking this into account, it might be argued that the visual aspects of this project encourage connoisseurship in the reader, or at the very least, challenge readers to engage with modes of representation they might not ordinarily encounter in certain contexts. It may be that academic readers are not used to reading comics. They may not fully

appreciate the specific grammar or the flow of comics, the finer details within a comic that a connoisseur might appreciate. Comics within academic contexts may perhaps encourage academics to develop or hone aspects of their critical approach to differing modes of representation. Just as one can read a statistical survey alongside a biographical interview and recognize the relative pros and cons of each approach, we might also develop our ability to engage with visual comic data, and explore the possibility that our criteria for judging the value of comic data might have to be malleable.

The criteriological approach to connoisseurship discussed above, could create space for diverse forms of academic representation; for example, the use of comics. It follows then that if we want readers to engage with unusual, diverse modes of representation, we need to provide them with a framework through which to engage with them. We should therefore specify the criteria by which comics such as the one found in this thesis may be judged. This is especially important where a reader may be unfamiliar with a particular medium. I would therefore suggest the follow criteria by which a reader may judge this autoethnographic comic. These are partly based on similar criteria developed by Burbank (2011) in order to assess the quality of comics.

- Was it eye-catching?
- Was it aesthetically pleasing?
- Could you tell what images were meant to represent?
- Did it make sense?
- Was the narrative engaging?
- Was it informative/interesting/funny/entertaining?
- Did it resonate with you?
- Did you care about the story or the characters?
- Did the images complement the text (and vice versa)?
- Do you think someone from a non-academic audience could read it and get something from it?
- Do you think someone who has not read the main body of the thesis could read it and get something from it?
- Did it supplement (or complement) the main body of the thesis?

- Did you get something from it you might not have gotten from prose-based piece of work?
- Would you recommend it to someone else?

These criteria are not exhaustive, and certainly there are other ways to judge the value of the medium, but I would ask that when reading the comic you use these criteria to inform your judgement of it. Different readers will have different answers to the questions above. The criteria above at least offer a structure by which it can be judged and by which it's usefulness can be assessed.

***Obstacles to Overcome***

The project was not without its difficulties. Many of the key weaknesses of the project were rooted in practical constraints, which were compounded in some ways by the visual elements. Any research project will have limitations with regards to funding, time, and resources; the challenge is to plan within a reasonable framework for achieving research aims. I looked to examples of similar methodologies, such as the photo elicitation method (Harper, 2002), for guidance on planning the project, but there were still obstacles to overcome. There were also issues with access, due to the nature of the research. Many of the participants had been involved in direct action or illegal activity. There is understandable suspicion and caution within activist groups surrounding police infiltration, in particular in the wake of high profile cases such as Mark Kennedy, an undercover police officer who spent years living within environmentalists (Lewis and Evans, 2011). My credentials as an activist and vegan helped in this regard, but many people remained suspicious. This is something I was able to reflect on through my use of reflexive autoethnography.

The project also suffered from a level of attrition. Some participants took part in interviews, but did not contribute a comic. I feel that this was probably due to a lack of confidence about drawing, and confusion over what was expected. With more face-to-face time with me, I am confident that this level of attrition would have been lower, but as many of the participants were based in different cities, it was very difficult to arrange meetings. That being said, more than half did contribute comics to the project. Another potential critique of methods such as these is the idea that their success is very dependent on participants' abilities and skills in executing their

experiences in comic form. Some participants do not feel that they have the ability to produce a comic, and as a result either do not produce a comic, or produce a comic, which they feel has little meaning to them and their experiences. This is an important critique, but is not one that is limited to arts-focussed methods. Some people struggle articulating themselves well in interviews, and excel more in a creative, visual context. People are different, and research design and researchers should account for this fact.

To implement the use of comic based methods in future research projects, time and consideration must be given to training needs. For example, whilst I am by no means a professional illustrator or artist, I have a basic knowledge of the grammar of the comic medium. This enabled me to advise participants in this department (see Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet). Since beginning the project I have led workshops on the use of comics in social research, and have received positive feedback. I have also been able to assist other projects exploring the use of comic based methods. One example was a project working with the families of domestic abuse perpetrators, where I adapted research questions into a colourful visual research tool that children could engage with. In the same way that we should not let the relative lack of visual methods stop us from wanting to use them, I think we should be more adventurous in our own abilities. Many avoid visuals because they feel they do not have a command over visual modes of representation, to the extent that years of writing in an academic context has given them the confidence to write. I would like to see more visual research groups, bringing people together in and outside of their institutions, across disciplines, across media and exploring and sharing knowledge and skills. In my view, biographical research should be dynamic and innovative visually, but this requires people stepping outside of their comfort zone, more so than I have in this project, and this has been an obstacle. In particular, I consider that the study could have gone further in providing analysis of vegan experience from a queer perspective, for example, through expressly focussing on the narratives of LGBTQ participants[53]. It could be argued that this study presents a hetero-centric picture of veganism, especially as one purporting to explore veganism from a queer perspective. My decision to not actively seek out queer participants in the early stages of the research, along with my concern over preserving anonymity in

[53] This is something I intend to examine further at post-doctoral level.

what can be quite a small interconnected community, meant that the study lacks the experience of a trans vegan, which is regrettable, especially as trans experience is so often overlooked, ignored and silenced.

Methodologically, I also feel the study could have gone further in terms of 'queerness'. What had the potential to be a predominantly visually project in the initial stages, ended up containing fewer visuals than I had initially hoped. Some of the reasons for this were discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology. Whilst I feel the visual data presented here is rich and diverse, it might be argued that I could have gone further with the project of 'troubling' or 'queering' the text. For example, when I began exploring the use of comics in academic context, I was studying for a Masters in Research Methods. I presented comics alongside my dissertation, in in one of those comics a character 'broke free' from the panels of the comic and escaped into the main body text of the thesis, literally and symbolically troubling the representation of the research and the division of visual and textual data, through the inclusion of a comic character on the page. This project has also 'troubled' the conventional experience of reading a research project, through its use of comics, particularly my own autoethnographic comic. I hope that in future work I can go further in 'queering' the text and in challenging the norms of representation in academia, that being said, I am very pleased with the way comics have been utilized in this project on the whole.

## Future Projects

As well as demonstrating the potential for further use of comics in academic projects, this project offers a variety of other potential paths for future exploration; such as the idea of 'narrative maps' (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Sparkes, Pérez-Samaniego and Smith, 2011), and of veganism as a 'mental space' (Schutze and Schroder-Wildhagen, 2012; Young, 1994).

### Veganism and 'Narrative Maps'

A recurring conceptual theme of the research was access to narrative diversity, and the idea that journeys towards veganism invariably involved exposure to previously inaccessible narratives, often ones that challenged normative perceptions of veganism. This was seen through the application of Smith and Sparkes (2012) concept of a 'cultural menu'.

We have seen a number of examples of an individual's 'cultural menu' being expanded through being exposed to different forms of culture. For example, Bea's interest in veganism was sparked by listening to punk bands, similarly, Diane's discovery of straight edge gave her a means of maintaining a coherent rebellious identity, whilst also being sober. In several of the participants' stories, music and culture has a significant role to play in them becoming vegan, and in their motivations for staying vegan. One such example was Bea's experience of becoming involved in the punk scene in a small town in the USA, discussed in

Chapter 6: Demonstrating Veganism. Prior to her discovering punk music, and in particular the music of vegan punk band 'Propagandhi', Bea had never considered veganism, nor had she really heard of it. It was through participating in punk shows, listening to music, reading lyrics and talking to and meeting other vegetarians and vegans that she eventually made the decision to go vegan herself. Similarly, though Geoff had already become aware of veganism through his brother, his personal involvement with a social centre in Manchester opened up possibilities for his own engagement in activism. Meeting activists and spending time in a space devoted to activism, Geoff saw new horizons for his own participation that previously had not been as available to him (Chapter 6). Dianne's participation in Straight Edge sub-culture, provided her with a means of resisting the binge drinking culture she had participated in at university without being limited into the role of 'prude' (Chapter 5). It provided her with an identity that was radical and critical, but did not involve drinking alcohol or eating animal products. These alternative vegan narratives were significant aspects of the vegan biographies, and challenged normative understandings of veganism (for example, in Bea's case challenging the perception of vegetarianism and veganism as being for 'hippies' as based on her family experiences, through discovering it in the context of a punk subculture). In order to develop this further, we may relate this to the idea of a 'Narrative Map' as an important concept emerging from biographical and narrative sociology. Conducting research into aging and embodiment with university based athletes exploring their narrative maps; Phoenix and Sparkes (2006) argue "*life and story are… connected and are always interlinked with the lives and stories of others in a relational manner. These others may operate to construct, deny, confirm, or problematize stories of the future in relation to aging and embodiment. They do so by offering those who have less knowledge of what lies ahead a narrative map of the future*" (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006: 109). 'Narrative maps' therefore provide us with a means of envisaging our own potential future and structure the realms of possibility for our own lives and experiences.

These maps can also be found in cultural products, as well as in social relationships. Sparkes, Pérez-Samaniego and Smith (2011) have examined the ways that people use social comparison and cultural products to make sense of their own experience. Cultural products provide 'narrative maps' for individuals to draw from, though social comparison mediates this process. For example, conducting research

with a terminally ill athlete called 'David', the authors explored the way that Lance Armstrong's autobiography provided a 'narrative map' through which David could chart his own experience. Various factors impacted upon the manner in which David chose social comparison targets, and how these comparisons were framed by Armstrong's biography varied. Reflecting on the consequences of the use of these social comparisons and narrative maps, the authors argue that in some instances, these can be restrictive, offering only certain narratives. In David's case, he clung firmly to the narrative of restitution and recovery offered by Armstrong, and found it difficult to engage with the possibility that this might not be applicable to his story. Sadly, David died of his illness, and the authors discuss their concern that David's ardent faith in the narrative of recovery negatively impacted on his experiences at the end of his life (for example, not saying goodbye to loved ones and being unable to even utter the word 'death' in some instances). We might apply this idea to vegan experience, exploring the 'maps' available to vegans, and how they understand their own experience in relation to dominant cultural narratives.

Freeman (2000) coined the term 'Narrative Foreclosure' to describe the processes by which individuals come to believe that their life story is effectively over, as a result of old age. Researching in the field of Narrative Gerontology, Freeman describes 'Narrative Foreclosure' as "*the unshakable conviction that it is simply too late to live meaningfully*" (2000: 83). This can result in a lack of narrative resources by which individuals may live their lives meaningfully and productively (Freeman, 2003 in Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006). It might be interesting to explore how similar processes can impact on the lives of vegans. When thinking about the idea of 'narrative maps' and the limiting potential of the repetition of certain cultural narratives, it might be that vegans' experience is closed off in some ways based on the dominant understandings of veganism. For example, not even knowing what veganism is, effectively closes off that area of the map. Vegans have explained how they discovered veganism (for example, through punk music) as being significant in opening up previously closed avenues. This research has demonstrated the resistance vegans pose to limiting understandings of their identity and ethics, and the ways that their identities are fluid within social interaction. It would be interesting to consider the ways that vegans understand narratives of veganism, and whether they feel that their experience is pigeon holed or 'foreclosed' in certain ways and contexts.

The narratives presented here suggest that access to cultural narratives relating to veganism is important in the experience of vegans. Veganism is something that various participants in the study discovered through experiences like punk subculture, music and activism. Discovering what veganism is, and its underlying motivations, is a necessary part of the process by which people can critique human-animal relations and consider the political significance of eating meat. I would be interested to see future research focussing specifically on narrative maps in the context of veganism, and the importance of access to positive, diverse narratives of veganism in leading people towards animal advocacy.

**Veganism as a 'Mental Space'**

Another idea that might be developed in further study is that of veganism as a representing a 'mental space' akin to other collective but contested identities, such as that of 'European membership'. Psychoanalyst Robert Young (1994) explored and problematized the notion of a 'mental space', and the possibility of shared 'mental spaces'. Building on this, Shutze and Schroader-Wildhagen (2012) sought to discover whether or not everyday citizens in European states identified with the European entity as a collective identity that is biographically meaningful to them. The authors acknowledge the "*complex situational and biographical circumstances*" that contribute to meanings and understandings of identity (Schutze and Schroder-Wildhagen, 2012: 255).

The conceptualization of Europe as a mental-space draws on Anderson's (1991) notion of 'imagined communities'. An imagined community is one based on the members' mental perceptions and understandings of mutual affinity. Given the findings of this research, and the biographical significance of veganism, particularly in relation to processes of normalization, it might be interesting to explore the idea that veganism represents a mental space, in a similar sense to European identity. This space is arguably produced through dominant hegemony surrounding meat-eating, and through the normalizing processes which see veganism subordinated and perceived as 'abnormal'. We might consider the fact that vegans across national boundaries share more in common with each other, than they do with non-vegans within their own nation. I would like to see a study that focused on this idea of veganism as a mental space, and how vegan identity is fluid across time and space.

Just as the English teacher in Germany felt more European when she was in Germany than when she was in Great Britain, it might be interesting to explore the ways that vegans feel more or less vegan in certain contexts and how these might potentially cut across traditional boundaries, such as national borders. For example, it could consider the impact of being at an animal rights gathering, or in a vegan restaurant, on the feeling of 'vegan-ness', and examine how this impacts on people from different countries. It could also be helpful to ask vegans to describe their conception of vegan identity, and to explore how much the image vegans have of veganism can be understood as something that unites or divides them.

## Summary: From Theoretical Foundations to Findings

Here I return to, and expand upon, the Tables (2, 3, 5 and 6) presented earlier in the thesis, providing a full, concise synopsis of the project, from theoretical foundations through to the findings. This chapter has provided a recap of the project, explained where I started, what I did (regarding methods), what I found (regarding research questions and data) and demonstrated my unique theoretical and methodological contribution to knowledge.

**Table 6- From Theoretical Foundations to Findings**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theoretical Foundations | Interpretivist Epistemology; Constructionist Ontology; Intersectional Feminism/Critical and Queer Theory. |
| Guiding Concepts | Phenomenological focus on Specificity and Subjectivity; Law's (2004) Mess in Social Science; Queer Critique of Formal Modes of Representation; Lorde's (1977) Epistemological Critique; Fluidity of Identity as 'Relational Achievement' (Jones and Adams, 2010); Challenging Value Dualisms; Situated Knowledge; Reflexivity. Normalization. |
| Research Questions | 1. Which events and experiences have been significant in shaping the biographies of vegans? 2. To what extent can vegan identity be said to be fluid? 3. How have vegans expressed their political and ethical beliefs? 4. Do comics represent a useful research tool methodologically and/or as a mode of representation? |
| Methodological Paradigm | Biographical research; autoethnography; visual methods |

| | |
|---|---|
| Methods | Biographical interviews; participant produced comics; autoethnographic comic. |
| Findings | - See Chapters 5 to 8 for specific biographical accounts of vegan experience.<br>- Vegans in this study have taken great care over who they open up to about their veganism, and as such vegan identity can be seen to be fluid. This process can be understood as a form of 'coming out', especially within a normalizing context.<br>- The vegans in this study have expressed their ethics and politics in a variety of ways. These have often been mediated by normalizing forces, which have ranged from social and peer stigma to police brutality and imprisonment. The political and ethical expressions are often rooted in embodied experience.<br>- Having access to cultural narratives about veganism was important in the experience of participants.<br>- Comics provided rich, complex, fluid and diverse accounts of biographical experience and perspectives; thus comics are particularly well suited to queer methodological approaches. However, the project also had issues with attrition, and not all participants produced comics. Nevertheless, there is scope for further exploration of comics as a biographical method. |

Finally, It is my hope that, as well as having contributed to the fields of biographical research, queer theory and CAS, this thesis can also be of some use to animal advocates *"valuable resource for political groups and emergent social movements"* (Perks and Thompson, 1998: 184-185 in Roberts, 2004: 4). I hope that this does not read as simply as an examination of a social group, but also as an insight into the voice of animal advocates, complete with my own voice and experience as an advocate. I hope that activists might potentially read this and not feel alienated from it, as they have been with other research (Upton, 2011), and that the thesis is dynamic and interesting, and does not read as a sterile, fixed representation of a fluid identity and movement.

As discussed in this chapter, I have contributed to the field of biographical and visual research through the use of innovative, creative methods, and to the field of CAS through providing an intersectional and reflexive analysis of vegan identity. I have found that, in tension with the relatively rigid 'rules' of veganism, vegan identity is necessarily fluid and flexible, and performances of veganism differ in various contexts. These performances are tied up in other social dynamics, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, subculture and sexuality. Vegan identity is subject to normalizing processes, which are almost certainly best described in terms of hegemonic

discourses like vegaphobia (Cole and Morgan, 2011). This is especially so if we are ever to overcome them, and accept that they form part of the same system that allows the inconceivably awful treatment, of non-human animals and the environment to continue unabated. I have also offered my own biography and experiences of the research, in the form of an autoethnographic comic and, in reading this, I hope that the typical process of reading a thesis might be troubled to some extent.

Veganism is a huge part of who I am, although I rarely talk about it with strangers or colleagues unless asked, and it challenges otherwise unproblematic experiences every day. I am constantly reminded of my veganism, not by myself, but the world I live in, a world in which I am frequently portrayed as a weirdo, a hippy, an extremist or a loon. My values remain relatively fixed, but my identity moulds to the surroundings, enabling me to achieve vegan identity in different contexts at different times. Being vegan does not make me an extremist, and experiencing life as a vegan demonstrates the political power of these sorts of terms. Animals are constantly being tortured and slaughtered, for human food (much of which is wasted) or entertainment. I reject this, and I hope that eventually people will look back on the widespread exploitation of animals as something extreme and unnecessary, and on those who rejected it as kind and compassionate. Recently, a friend, and fellow vegan, showed me a comic that resonated with my experience, and with those of the participants in this study (Vegan Sidekick, 2014). In it two people are sitting in a fancy restaurant looking at a menu. One of them says, "*I think I'll have the ravioli, but I'll have to check to make sure that the sauce doesn't have milk in it*". The other replies "*Okay, I think I'll have the corpse of a sheep, but I'll have to make sure it's a baby*". Below the caption reads: "*Vegans: so fucking extreme*". After almost seven years of veganism and four of working on this project, I can say with some confidence that these things are almost always relative.

## Word Count: 90,752

*Includes footnotes and endnotes, excludes the bibliography, appendices, tables, diagrams and images.*

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1. Selected Timeline of Contemporary Animal Advocacy

The following timeline provides a brief overview of some significant events in the recent history of animal advocacy. It illustrates a diversity of tactics and actions, significant pieces of legislation, the forming of organizations and campaign groups as well as a variety of events. This is important as it allows us to examine the trajectory of animal advocacy activism and to further contextualize the project historically and socio-politically. It illustrates a variety of events that have occurred in the recent history of animal advocacy, with a particular focus on instances of direct action, legal developments, criminal cases and the formation of prominent animal advocacy organizations. This is a very brief, and partial overview of a complex, heterogeneous movement, and as such, should not be read as a definitive history. Instead, it provides a historical, legal and cultural frame, through which the chapter, and project can be understood.

| Year | Events |
|---|---|
| **1898** | British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) is founded in the UK. (BUAV, 2014) |
| **1911** | UK Parliament passes 'Protection of Animals Act'. First comprehensive legislation relating to farm animals and includes provision for the offense of 'unnecessary suffering' (McConnell, 2012). |
| **1924** | League Against Cruel Sports is founded in the UK (LACS, 2014) |
| **1944** | Donald Watson founds the Vegan Society in the UK on November 1st. This date is now annually celebrated as 'World Vegan Day' (Vegan Society, 2014). |
| **1963** | Hunt Saboteurs Association founded; aims to "actively oppose blood sports"; eschews lobbying/campaigning in favour of direct action (Best, 2004). |
| **1968** | UK Parliament passes the 'Agricultural (Miscellaneous Provision) Act' (applicable alongside 1911 'Protection of Animals Act'). The bill is explicitly concerned with the welfare of livestock, and sets out guidelines for the prevention of unnecessary pain and distress (McConnell, 2012). |
| **1972** | Band of Mercy (BoM), progenitor of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), is formed by Ronnie Lee and others members of the Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA) (Molland, 2004). |
| **1973** | BoM activists participate in arson against a Milton Keynes based pharmaceutical company, and against boats preparing to take part in a seal cull off the Norfolk coast. Various animal rescue raids also take place between 1973-4 (Molland, 2004). |
| **1974** | Ronnie Lee, and fellow activist Cliff Goodman are arrested for taking part in a raid on an Oxford University laboratory in Bicester. They are nicknamed the Bicester two. They are each sentenced to three years in prison (Molland, 2004). |
| **1975** | 'Animal Liberation' by Peter Singer is published (Singer, 1975). |
| **1976** | Upon his release, Ronnie Lee forms the ALF, with other ex-members of the BoM (Monaghan, 2000). |
| | First recorded ALF fur farm raid: 1,000 foxes released from Dalchonzie fur farm in Scotland (Mann, 2007). |
| **1977** | London based Conditox Laboratories closes after ALF direct action causes $80,000 worth of damage. ALF claims this as a victory (Mann, 2007). |
| | Animal advocacy group 'Animal Aid' is founded. (Animal Aid, 2014) |

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|---|---|
| | 'Earth Force Society' (which later becomes 'Sea Shepherd Conservation Society') is founded by former Greenpeace activist, Paul Watson. (Sea Shepherd, 2014) |
| **1979** | What is reported to be the first ever ALF raid in the USA takes place, where a cat, two dogs and two guinea pigs are taken from the Medical Centre at New York University (Mann, 2007). |
| **1980** | A GlaxoWelcome employee's garage is vandalized, in what is believed to be the first example of an animal researcher being personally targeted (Mann, 2007). |
| | People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (PETA) is founded. (PETA, 2014) |
| **1981** | The Silver Spring Monkey's are removed from a laboratory by the police after undercover PETA activist Alex Pacheco exposes unacceptable living conditions (Guillermo, 1993). |
| | First recorded ALF animal rescue raids take place in France and Germany; first reported ALF action in Canada after a butcher's shop is targeted (Mann, 2007). |
| **1982** | 48 beagles are taken from a laboratory in Zurich, in the first reported Swiss ALF raid (Mann, 2007). |
| | First ALF action reported in Australia (Mann, 2007) |
| | ALF falsely claims to have injected Mars Bars with rat poison, costing Mars $4.5 million as it halts production (Gamer, 2004). |
| **1983** | First ALF actions reported in Malta, New Zealand and South Africa (Mann, 2007) |
| **1984** | First ALF action reported in Denmark (Mann, 2007) |
| **1985** | ALF activists remove 'Britches', the macaque, from the University of California. Britches was separated from his mother at birth, had his eyelids sewn shut, and had an electronic sonar device attached to his head as part of a three-year sensory-deprivation study. Video footage revealing the nature of Britches experience leads to eight animal research projects being discontinued (Best, 2004) |
| | The term 'speciesism' (coined by Richard Ryder) is entered into the Oxford English Dictionary (Wise, 2004). |
| | Some of the first Swedish ALF actions takes place (Mann, 2007). |
| **1986** | UK government bans experiments on Great Apes (Guidberg, 2009). |
| **1987** | Ronnie Lee, who by this point had become full-time press officer for the ALF, is sentenced to 10 years in prison for ALF action (Mann, 2007). |
| | First ALF actions reported in Spain, Italy and Austria (Mann, 2007) |
| **1988** | Activists (including Barry Horne and Mel Broughton) attempt to rescue 'Rocky' a bottle nosed Dolphin being kept in captivity in a small concrete pool at Marineland in Morecambe. Rocky had been kept alone for 17 years. The rescue attempt failed and resulted in prosecution, but a later PR campaign led to Rocky's release into the wild. The Rocky campaign was instrumental in changing the British public's attitudes towards Dolphin intelligence (Hughes, 2001). |
| **1990** | The 'Environmental Protection Act' gives local authorities and police statutory responsibilities regarding stray dogs (RSPCA, 2010). |
| **1991** | Several pieces of legislation are passed including the 'Dangerous Dogs Act', the 'Welfare of Animals at Slaughter Act' and the 'Badgers Act', which updates previous legislation protecting badgers, to include their setts (RSPCA, 2010). |
| **1992** | First ALF actions reported in Israel (Mann, 2007) |
| | USA passes the 'Animal Enterprise Protection Act' (AEPA) (Mitchell, 2006) |

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|---|---|
| **1993** | European Union Directive 93/119/EEC 'Council Directive on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter and killing'. This regulates the handling of animals to prevent unnecessary suffering during the slaughter process (RSPCA, 2010). |
| **1994** | First ALF actions reported in Poland (Mann, 2007) |
| | ALF activist Keith Mann is sentenced to 14 years in prison for setting fire to several meat lorries. The sentenced is reduced to 11 years on appeal. (Mann, 2007). |
| | Vegetarians International Voice for Animals' (Viva!) is founded. (Viva!, 2014) |
| **1995** | The UK 'Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations' implements Council Directive 93/119/EEC that regulates the handling of animals to prevent unnecessary suffering during the slaughter process (McConnell, 2012). |
| **1996** | First ALF action reported in Norway (Mann, 2007) |
| | The 'Cosmetic Products (Safety Regulations)' implement a EU Council Directive meaning that any reference to testing on animals in labeling must clearly state whether the tests carried out involved the product itself or its ingredients (RSPCA, 2010). |
| **1997** | Consort Beagle Kennels closes following a ten-month campaign of daily protests and raids by the ALF (Mann, 2007) |
| | ALF activist Barry Horne is sentenced to 18 years in prison (the longest given to any animal rights protestor) for offensives including planting incendiary devices. (Hall, 2001) |
| **1998** | First ALF action reported in Belgium (Mann, 2007) |
| | Hill Grove Farm closes down following ALF campaign (Mann, 2007) |
| **1999** | Greg Avery, Heather Nicholson and Natasha Avery (née Dellemagne) set up 'Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty' (SHAC) in opposition to Huntingdon Life Sciences- Europe's largest contract animal testing lab (Jonas, 2004). |
| **2000** | Shamrock Farm and Regal Rabbits both close after ALF campaigns (Mann, 2007) |
| | Parliament accepts 'Welfare of Farm Animals Regulations' updating the regulations adopted under 1968 Act. This means the act is now applicable to all animals kept for farming purposes, except wild, laboratory animals, invertebrates, and animals intended for sole use in competitions/sports/shows (McConnell, 2012). |
| **2001** | Imprisoned ALF activist Barry Horne dies of liver failure aged 49 due to complications from repeated hunger strikes (Mann, 2007). |
| | Centre on Animal Liberation affairs (CALA) founded in the USA by Anthony Nocella and Steve Best. This later became the Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS, 2014). |
| **2002** | ALF activists assault Huntingdon Life Sciences director Brian Cass using pick-axe handles (Goodwin, 2003). |
| **2003** | The ALF successfully released 1000 mink in its first fur farm raid in Ireland (O'Keeffe, 2004). |
| | SPEAK' is founded by Mel Broughton in Oxford. The group campaigns to end animal experimentation in the UK. (SPEAK, 2014) |
| **2004** | UK Parliament passes the 'Hunting Act' making it illegal to hunt wild mammals with one or more dogs unless the hunting is exempt. Exempt hunting includes the hunting of rabbits and rats, according to certain conditions. The penalty for these activities is a £5,000 fine (RSPCA, 2010). |

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| | Radical animal rights direct action magazine 'Bite Back, issues a '2004 direct action' report, in which it is claimed that 17,262 animals were "liberated" and 554 acts of sabotage, vandalism and arson were carried out (Bite Back, 2004). |
| | First reported ALF action in Turkey, as three butchers windows are smashed (Mann, 2007). |
| **2005** | US Department of Homeland Security names the ALF as a 'terrorist threat' (Rood, 2005). |
| | UK Parliament passes the 'Serious Organized Crime and Police Act' (SOCPA); it specifically targets Animal Rights related 'interference' and 'intimidation' (SOCPA, 2005). |
| **2006** | UK Parliament passes the 'Animal Welfare Act' which consolidates legislative protection of farm animals, repealing the 1968 Act and the almost century old 1911 Act. It increases the clarity of the animals that the act is applicable to, relative to the 1911 Act, and introduces the main offences applicable to farm animals today: Unnecessary Suffering, Duty to Ensure Welfare, Regulations to Promote Welfare (McConnell, 2012). |
| | USA passes the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA). It is a federal law prohibiting any action done "*for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise*" (Mitchell, 2006). |
| | Seven SHAC activists are charged with conspiracy to violate the AETA, they become known as the 'SHAC 7'. Eventually, six of the activists are found guilty of having used the SHAC website to incite attacks on those who do business with HLS, they receive prison sentences and are forced to pay a joint restitution of $1,000,001.00 to HLS (Kocieniewski, 2006). |
| | Newchurch Farm closes following an ALF campaign (Mann, 2007). During this campaign the grave of Gladys Hammond (mother-in-law to the owner of the farm) is robbed by an ALF splinter group known as the Animal Rights Militia (ARM) (Ward, 2005). |
| | 10,000 animals are taken from a Russian breeding facility, in one of the largest ALF animal removal operations in history (Bite Back, 2007). |
| | Animal rights activist Donald Currie receives a 12 years prison sentence, for planting homemade bombs on the doorsteps of senior Huntingdon Life Sciences employees (Addley, 2006). |
| **2007** | North American ALF press office reports that the number of underground animal liberation actions has doubled since the previous year, with even more going unreported (Knickerbocker, 2008). |
| | Van Der Looy ceases involvement with production of a Life-Science Industrial park, after a sustained campaign by the ALF. The company describes the ALF's attitude as "*unacceptable intimidat[ion]*" (Indymedia, 2008) |
| | A series of raids known as 'Operation Achilles' take place against SHAC across Europe, involving 700 police officers in England, Amsterdam, and Belgium. It results in the arrest of thirty-two people. Among those arrested are Greg and Natasha Avery, and Heather Nicholson, who are charged with blackmail, along with nine others (Laville, 2007). |
| **2008** | The Animal Agricultural Alliance reports that attacks from animal rights protestors and environmentalists has increased by 42% between 2007 and 2008 (Drovers, 2009). |
| **2009** | A group calling itself Militant Forces Against Huntingdon Life Sciences (MFAH) issues a communiqué via Bite Back, claiming to have targeted the vehicles of HLS customers (Bite Back, 2009). |
| | Heather Nicholson, Gregg Avery, Natasha Avery and others receive lengthy prison sentences for their part in illegal SHAC campaigning, which included hoax bomb threats and false allegations of child abuse. Nicholson is sentences to 11 years; Gregg and Natasha are sentenced to 9 years. The charge is 'conspiracy to blackmail'. Prosecutors' evidence is formed from email surveillance, informer testimony and covertly recorded conversations. The Judge describes the campaign as 'urban terrorism' (Bowcott, 2009). |

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| **2010** | Having originally had a 2009 sentenced overturned due to unreliable DNA evidence, ALF activist Mel Broughton is jailed for 10 years for conspiracy to commit arson against an Oxford University laboratory (BBC, 2010). |
| **2011** | An ALF Action in Vancouver, Canada destroys 25 leather and fur coats at a Fur Salon causing $50,000 in damage. |
| **2013** | Mel Broughton is released after serving over five years of his ten-year sentence. (Tidings, 2013) |
| | UK and Ireland are affected by 'Horsemeat Scandal' after it foods advertised as containing beef were found to contain as much as 100% horse meat (Meikle and McDonald, 2013). |
| **2014** | SHAC spokeswoman Debbie Vincent is sentenced to six years in prison for 'conspiracy to blackmail' in relation to her involvement in prolonged animal rights campaign against Huntingdon Life Sciences (Press Association, 2014). |
| | SHAC announces the end of its campaign, citing increased police and government repression of animal rights activism as a key factor (SHAC, 2014). |

## Appendix 2. Table of Animal Advocacy Tactics

| Name | Description |
|---|---|
| Hunt Sabotage (or 'Hunt Sabbing') | Direct action intended to interfere with hunting activity, with the aim of saving the lives of animals. May include disarming traps, creating visual/audible distractions, laying down decoy trails/scents and physically getting between hunters and pray. Non-interventionist tactics include photographing or videoing hunters, to use in court or to disseminate in public. |
| Stalling | Setting up a mobile stall in a public place, with information on campaigns, issues. May also collect money or solicit signatures for particular causes. |
| Boycott | Deliberately eschewing or avoiding consumption/support of a product/company/organization as an expression of protest at their actions. |
| Direct Action | Broad term used to describe activities intended to promote political causes. Can range from non-violent legal to violent and illegal. Stands in contrast to electoral politics/formal methods of political participation. |
| Property Destruction | Intentional damage done to property of people/businesses deemed to exploit/abuse animals. Often done with the aim of removing profit incentive from animal exploitation. Debates persist as to whether property destruction counts as a form of 'violence'. Arson may be used in extreme cases. |
| Vandalism | Criminal damage (such as graffiti) towards the property of people/businesses deemed to exploit/abuse animals. Often damage has symbolic significance (e.g. spray-painted slogans). |
| Animal Liberation or Rescue | Action taken to save the lives of animals from harm/exploitative circumstances. E.g. breaking into a vivisection lab and rescuing rats. |
| Violence | Physical attacks on individuals (e.g. Assault/Letter bombs/explosives). This is rare and condemned as a tactic by almost all animal advocacy groups. |
| Lobbying | Attempts to directly influence government officials, legislators or other people in power; lobbying is often done by organizations, private firms, or advocacy groups (e.g. BUAV lobby MPs on animal testing). |
| Street Demonstrations | A gathering of people in favour of a social or political cause. Sometimes takes the form of a march with a set start and end point. Sometimes a rally with speakers. Sometimes a protest will occur in a fixed spot, outside or opposite a symbolic target (e.g. a shop selling foie gras). |
| Intimidation, Threats | Blackmail, death threats, malicious phone calls, bomb threats. (e.g. theft of the corpse of Gladys Hammond in 2006) |
| Community Outreach | Actions intended to engage and educate wider community on issues surrounding animal advocacy and veganism. For example, through vegan food stalls at gigs, free vegan food fairs etc. |
| Concealment versus Disclosure | Used to describe whether actions are done anonymously (e.g. through the use of masks) or with the identity of participants deliberately on display (e.g. through 'open rescues'). These terms may apply to many of the tactics mentioned and may differ from individual to individual (Davis, 2004). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Consumer Activism | Can include boycotts as well as campaigning, lobbying, and courting media attention in order to exert power over character/quality/availability of products and services. |
| Petitioning | Soliciting signatures in support of a campaign, often to be presented to public officials to encourage them to act on an issue. |
| Online Activism | The use of the internet/social media to promote particular causes (e.g. setting up a Hacebook group for a cause, e-petitions). Radical forms include 'hacktivism' (i.e. breaking internet laws to achieve political objectives) |
| Sit-Ins and Occupations | A form of direct action in which groups occupy a specifically chosen (and often symbolically significant) area to promote political causes. Occupations often expand to the functional use of the space occupied encouraging the redefinition of specific areas, and challenging ideas surrounding 'ownership'. |
| Volunteering | Unpaid work in aid of animals. (e.g. helping at animal shelters, vets who offer free services to injured ownerless animals). |

## Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet

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**Participant Information Sheet**

Friday, 22 April 2011

Dear _____,

**Re: Study of Vegan Biographies/'Life Histories'**

My name is Nathan Stephens Griffin, I am a doctoral researcher at Durham university. I am also vegan. I have been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to do research on the lived experiences and biographies (or more simply, lives) of vegans. The research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of vegans and their motivations.

As part of this study I am conducting biographical interviews with vegans. These will last between one and two hours. I am also asking research participants to create and contribute their own comic (or other visual-textual document) to the research.

I would be very grateful if you would be willing and able to participate in this study. An example of some of the topics I would like to discuss during the interview can be found at the end of this letter (overleaf). Here you will also find some more information on the comic element of the research. If you do wish to participate, let me know and I will contact you soon via email or telephone to arrange a convenient time and place for the initial interview to be held.

The information you provide will be used to write a report that may eventually be published (You will maintain ownership of and copyright on the comics you produce; the research will adhere to the UK Data Protection Act 1998). I will not identify interview participants personally by name in the report (unless you desire otherwise). If you have any questions that you would like to ask before deciding if you want to participate please contact me on +44(0)XXXXXX, n.d.s.griffin@dur.ac.uk or nathanisacynic@gmail.com.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Nathan Stephens Griffin

**INTERVIEW GUIDE (notes for participant)**

Interviews will not follow a conventional question and answer style format, but will instead focus on discussion themes. Here are some of the key themes I wish to cover in the interviews. The interviews are designed to be deliberately flexible and informal; any/all of these themes may or may not be covered, depending on the flow of the conversation. You do not have to answer any question or discuss any topic that you do not feel comfortable discussing. You are free to stop participating at any time.

**PART ONE: GROWING UP**

Example 1) Family/Household Structure
Example 2) Turning Vegan
Example 3) Other Veg(etari)ans

**PART TWO: WORK/EDUCATION/SOCIAL LIFE**

Example 1) Veganism as a conversation topic at work/in education
Example 2) Convenience
Example 3) Respect and Understanding from others

**PART THREE: ACTIVISM**

Example 1) Your experiences of activism
Example 2) Law breaking
Example 3) Media portrayals of animal rights activism
Example 4) Motivation

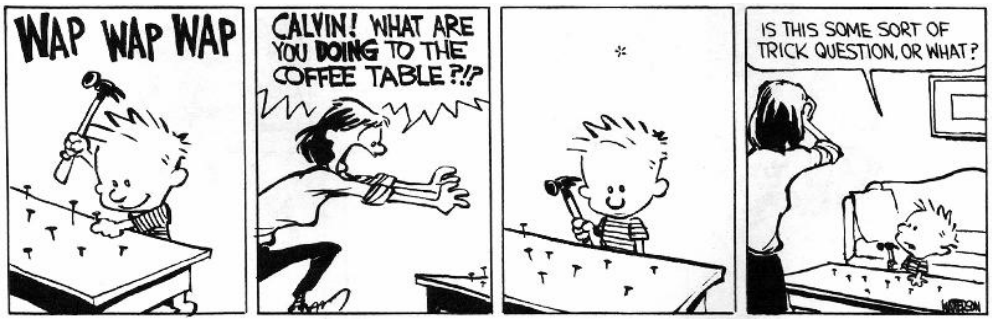
**PART FOUR: GENDER/SEXUALITY**

Example 1) Gender among activists
Example 2) Femininity/Masculinity and meat eating/veg(etari)anism
Example 3) Prejudice and meat eating/veg(etari)anism

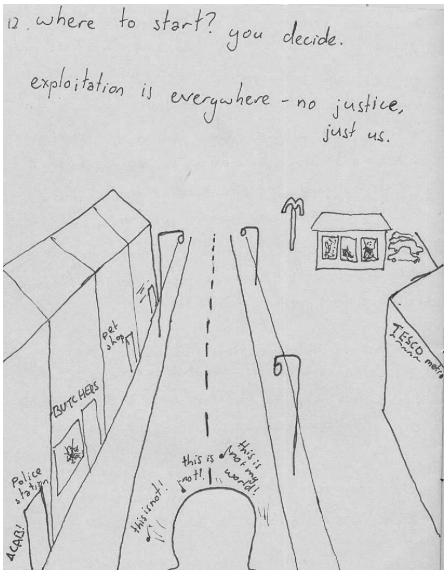
**COMICS**

Comics combine words and text to tell a story or communicate ideas. Comics are distinctive because they do not rely simply on words to convey meanings. As part of this project I am asking participants to create their own comics (or other form of visual-textual document). I hope that this will allow participants to have a more creative role in the research, and will give them a chance to express themselves outside of the interviews.

Don't worry about your ability to draw; stick figures are fine. In asking you to do this, I hope to encourage you to be creative and to communicate in a way you would not normally be expected to. Comics usually consist of a number of panels within which words and images are contained.
An example can be seen here (from Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson):




Here is a sample of a comic drawn by someone who has taken part in previous research.




I would like you to create a comic which deals directly with issues surrounding veganism, animals, animal rights etc.

**Structure**

Here are some tips for making your comic:

- Use images and words to tell a story or communicate some ideas.
- It could be autobiographical, fictional, journalistic, polemic etc. It's up to you.
- Make sure it relates to veganism, animal rights, human-animal relations etc.
    - The interviews are likely to be a source of inspiration for what to base your comic on.
- If you are unsure of how many panels to have, try folding a page in half, then in half again. Open it up and you should have four separate sections. Try using these sections as your panels.
- Aim for a minimum of four pages.

Remember!

- The drawings do not have to be 'realistic' or 'good' they just have to be drawn by you!

**Alternatives to hand-drawn comics.**

If you'd rather do something else instead of a comic that's fine, providing it combines words and images. Here are some examples of alternatives:

- Annotated photographs
    - Take some photographs, which visually link to the issue of veganism, animal rights etc. Make notes explaining the photos, and describing the way the photos make you feel.
- Found images
    - Perhaps there is a particular photograph, illustration or other image that has significance to your veganism. Provide a copy of it, with notes.

If you have any questions/suggestions, don't hesitate to get in touch (n.d.s.griffin@dur.ac.uk).

## Appendix 4. Consent Form

**Consent Form- Study of Vegan Biographies/'Life Histories'**

In signing this form I consent to (please tick boxes):

- participate in the research, which has been explained to me in full □
- my interview being recorded and transcribed □
- comics and/or other works of art I create being used in the research report and other project publications □
- extracts from the interviews being incorporated into reports and research related print and/or web-based publications □
- I understand that I will retain the copyright to any comic/other artwork I submit to the project □
- I understand that all the information I give during the interview/in my comic, and names given, will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others. □
- I understand that this research will comply with the 1998 Data Protection Act. □
- I understand that I can withdraw from the project at anytime, without giving a reason □

**PLEASE TICK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

I would like my real name to be used in the research in relation to my comics/other artworks, but kept anonymous in relation to interviews □
I would like to be completely anonymous in the research □

Signed: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____