

BECOMING AN ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST: AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE,
SOCIALIZATION, AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION

by

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(Under the Direction of James J. Dowd)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines dominant cultural beliefs about human-animal relations and the challenge to this ideology posed by animal rights activists. Through an analysis of the conversion narratives of vegan animal rights activists, the dynamics of socialization and re-socialization are considered against the backdrop of a culture that harbors contradictory, contested, and changing views regarding the acceptable treatment of nonhuman animals. The political ideology, beliefs, and worldview of animal rights activists will be examined, and the process of conversion to a vegan animal rights perspective and lifestyle, which is usually punctuated by dramatic turning points, will also be considered. How does a person become an animal rights activist? How does a routinized activity like meat eating, which achieves taken-for-granted status for most members of American culture following the completion of the normal socialization program, come to be seen as an arbitrary, problematic, and amoral convention? The construction of an alternative sense of morality regarding the human-animal relationship and the redefinition of conventional boundaries will be examined in light of what is often a gradual process of identity transformation. The effect of the identity shift on personal relationships and social interactions will also be considered.

INDEX WORDS: Activism, Animal rights, Boundaries, Conversion, Culture, Emotion, Identity, Morality, Rationality, Social construction, Social movements, Socialization, Turning points, Veganism

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the animals and the people who defend them, and to Jeff, my favorite vegan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISM, CULTURE, AND SOCIALIZATION

The Animal Rights Movement: Background and Context

Since its emergence in the early 1980s, philosophers and historians have produced most of the scholarly work regarding the contemporary U.S. animal rights movement (Finsen and Finsen 1994, Singer 1975, Regan 1983). Within the past decade, however, social scientists have increasingly begun to pay the movement some attention (Groves 1995, Herzog 1993, Kunkel 1995, Arluke and Sanders 1996). However, scholars working in the social movement tradition within sociology have, for the most part, not applied their theories to the animal rights movement. The animal rights movement is a theoretically interesting case, as it shares much in common with other twentieth century social justice movements while at the same time retaining significant differences that make it unique. For instance, compared with other social movements, such as the anti-war movement or the civil rights movement, the animal rights movement is more transformative in that it pervades every aspect of the lives of activists. The significant lifestyle changes required of activists are so totalizing that it is almost impossible for them to keep these changes a “secret” or to compartmentalize the issue from their daily, non-activist lives. How are activists recruited to this movement? Or do they tend to seek out the movement themselves?

Consonant with recent trends in social movement theory that have begun to emphasize cultural and social psychological factors (Buechler 1993; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001), my research on the animal rights movement was motivated by the belief that it would provide a

productive site for the refinement of some of the basic theoretical concepts within social movement theory, especially recruitment. No matter what the social movement, questions of participation, motivation, and recruitment are always central for sociologists seeking to understand the dynamics of mobilization and resistance. Further, I anticipated that the animal rights movement would provide fertile ground upon which to explore culture and cognition as it pertains to movement participation and activism. One of the issues that my dissertation addresses is food classification, that is, cultural rules concerning what may or may not be eaten and individual adherence to these rules. These initial interests in recruitment, culture, and cognition have led me ultimately to focus upon the concepts of socialization and conversion, which will be the main themes explored in this dissertation. Becoming an animal rights activist is essentially a process of identity transformation and hence questions pertaining to recruitment and participation in the animal rights movement are intimately connected to questions of identity and re-socialization.

What is the Animal Rights Movement?

There's a schizoid quality to our relationship with animals, in which sentiment and brutality exist side by side. Half the dogs in America will receive Christmas presents this year, yet few of us pause to consider the miserable life of the pig—an animal easily as intelligent as a dog—that becomes the Christmas ham (*New York Times Magazine*, “An Animal's Place,” by Michael Pollan, 11/10/ 02).

The beginnings of a movement for animal rights, which is also sometimes referred to as the animal liberation movement, has been traced in the U.S. (its British counterpart emerged about a decade earlier) to the publication of Australian utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer's groundbreaking book, *Animal Liberation*, in 1975. The back cover of the third edition, published in 2002, refers to it as “the book that started a revolution,” which, despite the grandiosity of such

a claim, may in fact not be far from the truth. Singer's book articulated a concise philosophical argument for animal liberation while at the same time providing chilling descriptions of "factory farms" and animal experimentation, which had heretofore been unknown to the public. *Animal Liberation* was one of the first books to provide such descriptions and many readers responded with shock and outrage, which, for some, translated into action. In addition to the publication of Singer's book, corresponding changes in animal agriculture that had been set in motion earlier in the century were accelerating.

Why has an animal rights movement emerged in the past decade? No doubt there are many social forces at work here, but surely prominent among them is simply the revelation of the facts of animal suffering on such a massive scale. That such suffering is endorsed as normal practice by a variety of industries and institutions is also a significant factor, leading to the necessity of a more powerful critique than the traditional categories of compassion and cruelty could supply. Those who read Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) found his descriptions of intensive farming and animal research both riveting and horrifying, and they found in his philosophy a moral ground for their feelings of outrage (Finsen and Finsen 1994, p. 22).

What exactly did Peter Singer's book expose? Why was a "more powerful critique" of animal abuse necessary? The advent of "factory farming" has played a major role in the development of the contemporary animal rights movement. While farming methods had been steadily changing during the latter half of the century, these changes had taken place behind closed doors and were generally unknown to the public. Finsen and Finsen (1994) provide an overview of these general historical changes, which Singer's book revealed to a mass audience, in accessible language and with accompanying photographs of animals on factory farms and in research laboratories. The impact of these changes being revealed to an unsuspecting public, who still pictured farm animals living outdoors in traditional and comparatively idyllic barnyard settings, should not be underestimated.

Farming methods...changed drastically in the period following World War II, from small diverse farms in which animals roamed outdoors to current intensive farming operations. The transformation in scale has vastly changed the very institution of animal agriculture, as well as increased the numbers of animals consumed each year. At the same time, animal agriculture has come to be conducted behind closed doors, removed from the public eye. Today, billions of farm animals are raised indoors in conditions largely unknown to the public...
 ... Most of the animal foods eaten today in this country are the products of agricultural systems developed earlier in this century, known as 'intensive farming' – or, more pejoratively – 'factory farming.' The key to intensive farming is to increase the density and number of animals housed together, to mechanize as many processes as possible...and thereby decrease labor costs... Such 'intensification' means that farmers cannot attend to the health of individual animals...and animals are exposed to less and less natural conditions, greater amounts of stress, and a variety of problems imposed by the intensive conditions...(p.7).

Singer's book not only revealed the specifics of these changes in farming methods to a mass audience; he also provided a moral and philosophical argument for animal rights that was not based in optional kindness and charity but rather in principles of justice, equality, and fairness. This emphasis on "justice" distinguished it from the earlier humane movement, as did the animal rights movement's critique of the *institutions* that promote animal exploitation, and the underlying ideology upon which these institutions rest, as opposed to focusing only upon isolated acts of cruelty committed by *individuals*.

A movement to protect animals against cruelty emerged in the late nineteenth century, the 'humane movement.' By the late 1970s a newly revitalized movement – the animal rights movement – was emerging, in some ways continuous with the earlier humane movement but also differing sharply from it... The humane movement promoted kindness and the elimination of cruelty without challenging the assumptions of human superiority or the institutions that reflect that assumption. The animal rights movement, on the other hand, does not seek humane reforms but challenges the assumption of human superiority and demands abolition of institutions it considers exploitive (Finsen and Finsen 1994, p. 3).

The abolitionist goal of the animal rights movement, and its concomitant focus on animal exploitation, are important distinctions that set it apart from both the earlier humane movement and the contemporary animal welfare movement.

...animal rights recognizes the inherent right of all animals to lives that are free from exploitation and undue interference... Animal welfare insists on certain minimal standards for the treatment of animals, but it does not necessarily recognize the rights of animals to not be exploited by humans; animal welfare is more concerned with kindness than with rights...By way of analogy, think of the welfare advocate as working for the humane treatment of slaves and the rights advocate as working for the abolition of slavery (Achor 1996, p. 12).

The distinction between the goals of animal “welfare” advocates (reformists) and animal “rights” advocates (abolitionists) is sometimes summarized as the difference between fighting for “bigger cages” versus “empty cages.” Although there is an important philosophical disagreement that lies at the center of the difference between an ideology of abolition versus one of reform, in practice, animal welfare and animal rights advocates often work together to achieve practical political goals.

Another important distinction between the animal rights movement and the animal welfare movement is that the former seeks to extend moral consideration to all animals rather than to just dogs and cats. Animal rights advocates see no viable logical justification for lavishing affection on dogs and cats while denying pigs and chickens the basic consideration of their most fundamental interests. As the quote at the beginning of this section suggests, our relationship with animals is inconsistent at best (incidentally, Michael Pollan, the author of the article from which that quote is taken, is not a vegetarian himself); animal rights advocates seek to eradicate such inconsistency of treatment from social institutions and their own personal lives through veganism. Animal welfare advocates, on the other hand, are typically not vegetarians and limit their attention to dogs, cats, and other companion animals. For animal rights activists, limiting advocacy and moral concern to only pet animals constitutes an unjustifiable bias.

On what basis do animal rights activists challenge the inconsistency that exists in our culture with regard to differential treatment of certain species of animals? Singer’s argument for

animal rights is based upon what he calls the “basic principle of equality” and the principle of “equal consideration,” which is not the same thing as equal treatment. But what exactly does the phrase “animal rights” mean, if not equal treatment? According to Singer, the granting of certain “rights” to animals should depend upon the particular species in question and their individual requirements.

There are obviously important differences between humans and other animals, and these differences must give rise to some differences in the rights that each have... Since dogs can't vote, it is meaningless to talk of their right to vote... The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups...[it] does not require equal or identical *treatment*; it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights (Singer 1975, p. 2 [emphasis in original]).

According to Singer, the characteristics of those who are affected by our actions should be the guiding factor in deciding what our concern or consideration requires us to do.

...concern for the well-being of children growing up in America would require that we teach them to read; concern for the well-being of pigs may require no more than that we leave them with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to run freely (Singer 1975, p. 5).

A concept that is central to animal rights ideology is *speciesism*, which is analogous to sexism and racism according to Singer:

It is on this basis that the case against racism and the case against sexism ultimately rest; and it is in accordance with this principle that the attitude that we may call ‘speciesism,’ by analogy with racism, must also be condemned. Speciesism...is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species. It should be obvious that the fundamental objections to racism and sexism...apply equally to speciesism. If possessing a higher degree of intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his or her own ends, how can it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans for the same purpose (p. 6)?

Singer believes that our concern for other beings should not be determined by their species membership alone; this attitude constitutes “speciesism” and relies on the same mindset as

ideologies of racism and sexism. “Speciesism...is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (p. 6).

According to Singer, sentience (or the ability to feel pain), rather than species membership or intellectual capability, should be the morally relevant criterion for determining whether we take another’s interests into account. Rather than arguing that factual equality of abilities should lead to identical treatment, Singer believes that sentience is the key to having interests at all. In other words, it is the capacity for suffering that gives a being the right to equal consideration.

Singer’s argument, and the beliefs of many animal rights activists, can be summarized as follows:

If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – insofar as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. So the limit of sentience...is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some other characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary manner. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin color (pp. 8-9)?

As can be seen, the animal rights argument challenges moral and social boundaries and is concerned with analyzing what constitutes fair rather than arbitrary treatment of animals by humankind. The ideology of the animal rights movement is based upon a philosophical critique of our purported inconsistent treatment of animals, on the one hand, and our allegedly unjustifiable violation of their basic interests, on the other. Despite the centrality of intellectual arguments to the animal rights movement, emotions like compassion and empathy also play a powerful role. The dual role of rational arguments and emotions in motivating animal rights activists will be discussed further in Chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say that veganism

represents the extension of animal rights ideology into activists' personal lives and the embodiment of those principles in the realm of the everyday.

How is the Animal Rights Movement Unique?

The animal rights movement is different in important ways from other movements that have been labeled “new social movements,” because it ideally requires a commitment to embrace certain ethical principles at the everyday or lifestyle level of social reality,¹ manifested in the adoption of veganism as a way of life, *in addition to* participation in more organized, collective forms of action.² It is also an advocacy or altruistic movement, with participants fighting not to extend their own rights or even the rights of other members of their own species, but rather to provide a “voice for the voiceless,” standing up for a powerless (and biologically diverse) group of “others” that can neither defend itself nor join the struggle (the anti-abortion movement is also altruistic in this way, except that the putative beneficiaries are members of one’s own species).

¹ Also, there is no common identity (or ascribed status) binding members together, as is usually the case with the so-called “identity movements” (for example, those centering on nationality, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation). The animal rights movement most closely resembles the anti-abortion movement in that it is an altruistic movement whose participants are united primarily by a common moral cause rather than a collective identity, and whose beneficiaries cannot participate, or even speak. The main difference between the two movements, however, is that the anti-abortion movement is centered on shared religious beliefs. The animal rights movement is more widely disparate in terms of religious and political orientation, and tends to take its ideological cues from moral philosophy.

² Here I only refer to ethical vegans, or those who adopt veganism out of a concern for animals. There are other reasons that people choose to become vegan, including those motivated by a concern for health, environment, or religion. Vegans, or strict vegetarians, do not consume or use any animal products (including dairy, eggs, honey, leather, and wool) or products that have been tested on animals, and avoid places where animals are exploited for entertainment, such as circuses, zoos, and rodeos.

And finally, the cultural entrenchment of animal exploitation³ in our society creates an issue for which there is no neutral position, unlike those championed by many other social movements. Because food-ways are such an embedded cultural phenomenon, animal rights ideology intrudes at the most basic level of lived experience, where consciousness is fused with taken-for-granted social reality,. Although we may be unsure about our position regarding abortion, the death penalty, or any number of issues that do not (usually) confront us directly in our everyday lives, we make a tacit choice about animal rights each time we sit down to a meal and choose what to eat. Hence, animal rights issues are “near” to us in our everyday lives and manifest themselves as something over which we have direct agency.

The proximity of animal rights issues to everyday life is both an advantage and a disadvantage for the movement. On the one hand, the fact that people exercise direct control through their consumption choices can be seen as a positive circumstance, in that this potential for agency can give a concerned person a sense of efficacy rather than a feeling of powerlessness, as may be the case with more “remote” issues like war, sweatshops, or a myriad of global human rights issues. However, this proximity also gives our consumptive uses of animals an equally powerful “taken-for-granted” quality, and hence makes it less likely that people will turn a critical eye on these practices in the first place, due to the powerful influence of socialization and culture.

It is this entrenched quality that makes it especially important to consider culture and cognition when analyzing this particular social movement. Although cultural and cognitive dynamics certainly play a role in any oppositional movement, in the animal rights movement they comprise the very foundation of action. Cultural meanings lie at the center of the animal

³ I refer to the term’s most basic meaning, “to make productive use of: UTILIZE” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition).

rights debate, and the adoption or rejection of these principles manifestly aligns one with either an oppositional culture or one that upholds the status quo, in terms of dominant cultural definitions of the proper relationship between human and non-human animals. Carol Adams (1994) discusses this absence of neutral space and the struggle over interpretive meanings regarding animals and meat:

Vegetarians and corpse-eaters approach the same phenomenon – the consumption of dead animals – and come to opposite opinions: is it ‘meat’ or a corpse? life or death? humane slaughter or murder? delicious or repulsive?...Corpse eaters see vegetarianism as a fad; vegetarians see eating animals as a larger fad. Corpse eaters see vegetarians as Puritans, legislating others’ enjoyments; vegetarians see animal eaters as resisting awareness, indulging in fantasy about where flesh comes from...The ‘moralistic’ vegetarian and the ‘vested interest’ corpse eater cannot meet on neutral ground to examine their conflict over what appropriately should be consumed by human animals and the facts that inform this debate. Not only is there no disinterested observer to this tradition –i.e., one is implicated either by choice of flesh or resistance to flesh – but there is no impartial semantic or cultural space in which to hold a discussion (p. 26).

The centrality of animal rights ideology (or resistance to it) in everyday life, which contributes to the lack of impartial cultural space discussed by Adams, is a distinctive feature of this social movement. So it is my contention that the animal rights movement, while sharing many important qualities with other contemporary social movements (especially other rights-based movements), is also unique in important ways. For this reason, the animal rights movement does not neatly fit within existing models that analyze social movement phenomena, but instead can be used to refine and extend existing paradigms, highlighting lacunae in current recruitment theories and illuminating areas that may benefit from further development. In this dissertation, I hope to shed new light on social movement recruitment by focusing on issues of socialization and identity transformation.

Socialization, Conversion, and Activism

Particularly interesting for the question of how people come to identify with and participate in the animal rights movement is the fact that animal rights ideology runs counter to normal patterns of socialization in many ways and, concomitantly, to the dominant cultural ideology⁴ regarding animals, as the majority of people (including animal rights activists) are not raised in vegetarian or vegan households. Eating animals is (supposed to be) internalized as a “normal” practice. Due to the centrality of food rituals to a culture, this is a very important aspect of socialization, but it does not always “stick.” Why not? This is a central question guiding my research. Why does this pattern of socialization come “undone” or not work properly with certain individuals? Conversion to an animal rights perspective can be conceptualized as a form of secondary socialization, which results in significant identity transformation; how does this process unfold?

To answer this question, I will reconstruct the recruitment process of animal rights activists to analyze the process of replacing former ideological commitments with new beliefs, with the requisite implications for action and lifestyle change. As each individual undergoes a process of de-socialization, in which they begin to question dominant norms, values, and behaviors regarding animals, so too will they undergo a re-socialization or conversion process, during which time an alternative set of ideas is considered. “Conversion” is used here to describe the process because animal rights ideology (and the vegan lifestyle) is a radical departure from normal socialization and dominant cultural values. After the conversion process is complete and the alternative set of ideas is accepted comes the identity transformation and lifestyle change that accompanies going vegan. This is the first stage of recruitment: *lifestyle*

⁴ Throughout the text, I use the word “ideology” simply to refer to a system of beliefs or a set of ideas, i.e. as a “value-free” descriptive concept. I am not using it to denote “false consciousness,” which is sometimes the connotation of this word among sociologists.

activism. The second stage (to which many animal rights vegans never progress, or may occupy only temporarily) is politicization, in which the individual becomes a participant with a social movement organization and the goal becomes to work for social, not just personal, change. This more traditional form of collective action constitutes the second stage of recruitment: *political activism*.

I use the term “total recruitment,” borrowing from Goffman’s concept of “total institution,” to refer to the radical overhaul of one’s personal life and identity that in theory must accompany a complete ideological commitment to the cause of animal rights. This added dimension of recruitment, the lifestyle component, is similar to Goffman’s “total institution” in that the compartmentalization of roles diminishes or ceases to exist altogether. Goffman refers to individuals becoming completely subsumed by the organization (such as a prison or mental hospital); I refer to the fact that almost every aspect of one’s life is affected by involvement with this movement.

Of course, there are obvious differences between “total institutions,” as Goffman used the term, and “total recruitment” as I am using it here, chief among them the fact that commitment to a total institution is typically involuntary and has a coercive aspect, whereas total recruitment is a voluntary exercise of individual agency. However, I think that the comparison is useful in that I wish to highlight the fact that almost all pertinent aspects of a person’s life are affected by commitment to a vegan animal rights ideology; this form of activism is not compartmentalized because it typically “spills” over into other realms of the person’s life. Although this is not to gloss over the very important difference between voluntary and involuntary commitment to a social movement, on the one hand, and a total institution, on the other, just as all aspects of an

individual's life are subsumed by the organization in a total institution, in the case of total recruitment the movement penetrates many aspects of everyday life.

Total recruitment is an "ideal type" in the Weberian sense, meaning this condition (level of integration) manifests itself in varying degrees among different activists. Being an animal rights activist means more than joining a social movement organization, yet it also means more than being vegan. A moral commitment resulting in a change of self must accompany meaningful action on the collective level. It is for this reason that I have divided animal rights recruitment into two distinct stages: (1) becoming a vegetarian or vegan (object of change = self); (2) becoming an animal rights activist (object of change = society).

Both categories are important for the movement's success, although people who are vegan for animal rights reasons (as opposed to health, religious or environmental reasons) are not usually defined as "activists," neither by themselves nor by others in the movement. But ethical vegans, while not activists in the traditional sense, are much more than sympathizers, who may cheer from the sidelines but invest few resources in the movement's goals. Becoming vegan is an investment of emotional and personal resources that expresses and enacts ideological commitment at the micro-level (as opposed to traditional activism, where the primary goal is more obviously directed externally and outward, i.e. toward institutional and social change). However, the goal of ethical vegans is not *just* personal change; they also wish to see animal exploitation abolished. They believe in the goals of the animal rights movement and express this desire for social change through their lifestyle choices. Although they sympathize with the movement's goals and are indeed necessary for its success (for one of the main goals of the animal rights movement is to persuade people to go vegan, hence changing the face of consumer culture), ethical vegans are not activists in the traditional sense of the word. Those vegans who

do become activists pass through a second stage of recruitment. The difference in passages through these two levels is not the main focus of this dissertation, but I draw attention to the two levels to demonstrate the unique duality of animal rights activism.⁵

The fact that the lifestyle and political arenas are equally represented in the social world of animal rights activism suggests that a reexamination of the meaning of fundamental concepts such as recruitment and activism themselves would be useful. Since animal rights activism requires “total recruitment” in a sense, meaning the life world will have already been colonized by the movement’s philosophy prior to engaging in “official activism,” the idea of recruitment itself needs to be expanded from a one-step event to a sometimes lengthy process of re-socialization, which is punctuated by turning points and sometimes takes place over years. The next section will examine recruitment as it has been conceptualized in the sociological social movement literature. However, as central as the idea of recruitment is to the subject at hand,

⁵ While not the case with every social movement, this duality is perhaps not strictly unique. “The personal is political,” a slogan popularized during the second-wave feminist movement, captures this distinction very well. The idea being that to create widespread social change, the consciousness of individuals must first be changed. An awareness of this micro-macro link is at the heart of animal rights philosophy as well, and perhaps becoming vegan is similar to the consciousness-raising that accompanied becoming a feminist, in that one’s mental landscape changes, and this mental change in turn affects the everyday level, especially personal relationships, but that this consciousness change alone does not *necessarily* mean the new feminist or vegan will take the extra step to become actively involved with a social movement organization. However, this level of involvement – consciousness-raising resulting in an ideological shift and change in identity and lifestyle – is different from the anti-abortion movement (to which I compared the animal rights movement above), which has both traditional activists and sympathizers but lacks an intervening lifestyle-recruitment level. If one believes that abortions are immoral, one can choose not to have one or become active to change the laws and culture. In this sense, it is much more of a single-issue movement, although of course the ideology that drives anti-abortion activism is derived from a larger, more comprehensive belief system, that of Christian fundamentalism, which itself does operate on a lifestyle and consciousness level. However, the goal of the anti-abortion movement is not to convert people to Christianity but rather to make abortion illegal, a much narrower goal, although the driving force is ideological and stems from (an already deeply felt) moral commitment.

socialization is an even more important process, which precedes, frames, and gives meaning to animal rights activism in significant ways.

Through the forthcoming analysis, I hope to weave together the concepts of recruitment, socialization, and identity to illuminate the process of becoming an animal rights activist. Specifically, I will demonstrate the importance of dynamics of socialization, de-socialization and re-socialization, as well as the role of turning points, in the conversion process that results in recruitment to the lifestyle and political stages of animal rights activism. As discussed above, central to my argument is the idea the animal rights movement differs from other social movements in the commitment of its members to a set of moral and ethical principles and subsequently to an alternative way of life. So, we are dealing *not only* with recruitment at the individual or personal level of lifestyle activism or veganism *but also* with recruitment to political activism at the collective level of organized action. Veganism may be conceptualized as “passive” resistance, as opposed to social activism, which comprises “active” resistance.

Table 1. Animal Rights Orientations

Dominant Culture/ Socially Accepted Uses of Animals	<i>Passive Acceptance</i> Most people are here (don't actively promote it but participate in culture)	<i>Active Acceptance</i> Much smaller group (those with vested interest: ranchers, fur farmers, vivisectionists, hunter)
	<i>Passive Resistance</i> Larger group than the “active” cells (vegetarianism, veganism)	<i>Active Resistance</i> Very small group (activism, protest, outreach)

The chart above is meant to suggest that most people lie somewhere in between the two poles of vegan animal rights activist and active animal oppressors (i.e. those who profit directly from animal exploitation). Animal rights orientations can be thought of as a continuum, with my sample residing in the cells of active resistance, but the individuals in the passive resistance cells

probably underwent many of the same socialization and re-socialization dynamics. I will now provide a brief overview of social movement theories of participation and recruitment in order to contextualize the upcoming chapters, which will deal more directly with re-socialization and identity change. Since the outcome of these processes is participation in the animal rights movement, it makes sense to first discuss recruitment more broadly before turning to my specific case.

Social Movement Theory: Participation and Recruitment

Questions of participation, mobilization, and recruitment have long been of interest to sociologists who study social movements. Within the pre-1960s Collective Behavior tradition – which, it is important to remember, emerged against the backdrop of fascism (Buechler 1990) – participation in social movements was conceptualized as an inherently *irrational act*, often resulting from personal pathology or collective hysteria and crowd-influenced behavior. In contrast, Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), which emerged within the context of the social movements of the 1960s,⁶ focused on the *rationality* of participation in social movements by conceptualizing it as an extension of regular politics by other, or irregular, means. As theorists began to redefine protest as a rational activity and social movement participation as the result of *structural imperatives* (grievances being equal), rather than *individual personalities*, a calculated drift away from social psychology ensued.

⁶ The evolution of social movement theory provides a good example of the social construction of knowledge. Since most sociologists were supportive of the social movements of the 1960s, as opposed to the fascist movements of the 1930s, their theories changed to reflect this sympathy, i.e. participants in social movements were now considered to be rational actors pursuing reasonable goals, etc. (again, in contrast to the pathological model of protest inherent in the collective behavior/ mass society tradition).

Culture as a variable in protest activity was jettisoned along with psychology, and the sociological focus shifted in social movements to a “hard-nosed” organizational and political process perspective (McAdam 1985), with an emphasis on the *rational-choice* calculation of strategy and tactics. Within this now ascendant resource mobilization approach, both recruitment and social movement participation were reconsidered; recruitment was recast in terms of *social networks* rather than unstable personalities, and participation was re-conceptualized as a rational act, an outcome of available organizational and personal resources and perceived likelihood of movement success. While grievances and other social psychological factors took a front seat in the collective behavior tradition, albeit in a distorted form, within RMT grievances were always assumed to exist; the more interesting question was *when* did individuals *act* upon these grievances? With this theoretical shift, the emphasis and primary unit of analysis moved from the *individual* to the social movement *organization*.

Resource mobilization theory served as a needed corrective to the central tendency within the Collective Behavior tradition, but while RMT has made great strides in advancing social movement theory, scholars have also begun to recognize its limitations (Buechler 1990, Jasper 1995), foremost among which has been its relative inattention to culture and cognitive processes. Buechler (1990), Hirsch (1986), and Lichterman (1998) provide three instances of this critical literature. Buechler’s (1990) studies of the women’s movement, for example, have led him to critique, among other theoretical assumptions, the RMT concept of the “rational actor.” He challenges this definition of rationality, which activists (such as radical feminists) often explicitly reject. Hirsch (1986) argues for the importance of group level processes in creating solidarity and commitment, which act as incentives to continued participation, as opposed to both the rational choice model of incentives inherent in RMT and the confusion and insecurity

which compels people to join social movements in the Collective Behavior view. Finally, Lichterman (1998) has emphasized the importance of using participant observation in order to uncover “implicit meanings” embedded in social movements, to view things from the perspectives and cultural locations of movement participants themselves in order to uncover, among other things, the subjective meanings of activism itself.

In addition to these weaknesses, neither the Collective Behavior nor RMT traditions has paid much attention to the animal rights movement, with the exception of recent research by Jasper and Poulsen (1995), which connects a traditional RMT concern – recruitment – with renewed attention to questions of culture and cognitive processes. They compared recruitment patterns in the animal rights movement with recruitment patterns in the anti-nuclear power movement and found significant differences, which I will discuss later in more detail. First, I will briefly consider other theoretical applications that are more cultural in focus.

The Importance of Culture in Social Movements

Although not addressed explicitly in social movement theory, the animal rights movement has been discussed by scholars working in a cultural vein, though usually only receiving a brief mention in a list of “new social movements.” McAdam (1994) includes animal rights, along with women’s and civil rights, in a list as one of a number of new social movements whose goal is to extend the “democracy frame” (p. 49). While this is true, the animal rights movement also contains an important altruistic or “other-centered” component not found in human-centered rights movements. Gusfield (1994) makes a distinction between *linear* and *fluid* movements, whereby linear movements present a straight line narrative and represent a means to an end. The arena of action is public and the movement seeks institutional or political change. Fluid movements are harder to specify:

Since they imply changes in how values and realities are conceived, they occur outside or in addition to organized and directed action. They may involve contention with others and with alternative meanings and constructions. Yet, they are less likely to be drawn into such collective actions as strikes, boycotts, pickets, or demonstrations. They occur in the myriad actions of everyday life; in micro and less public acts. It is harder to identify success or failure. The women's movement and feminism occur in more than the efforts at constitutional amendment, equal rights legislation, and affirmative action. They also involve relationships and interactions between men and women in micro and even intimate relations (p. 64).

So it is with the animal rights movement. Though a political movement, the animal rights movement is ultimately concerned with transforming everyday "values and realities," including symbolically and materially reproduced constructions of the proper relationship between human and non-human animals. To bring about animal liberation would, in effect, necessitate a cultural revolution (moral philosophy being a component of culture). No matter how much legislation is passed or how much a particular institution is targeted, the cultural level (and not just specific industries, laws, or institutions) must change in order for the animal rights movement to see significant progress. In other words, the change must be comprehensive. As mentioned earlier, a society's food-ways, which stem from routinized eating habits and norms of edibility, operate and are enacted at the level of everyday cultural practices and social interaction.

Curiously, however, Gusfield places animal rights squarely in the first arena – the public – and characterizes it as a "linear" movement. He further distinguishes between the *institutional* level of a movement, most important for linear movements, and the *everyday or interactive* level, which is more important for fluid movements. The institutional level is located in efforts to change the rules and procedures of organizations and institutions. Gusfield argues that the state is often either the target of change or the instrument through which the linear movement hopes to gain change. He goes

on, however, using Jasper and Nelkin's research (1992), to characterize animal rights as a prototypical linear movement operating solely on the institutional level:

The animal rights movement or the anti-nuclear movement are illustrations of linear movements where the effort is toward protest of current procedures at the levels of the state and such organizations as research laboratories. Changes in the institutional rules are the goals of the movement. The animal rights movement, for example, is an attempt to change procedures of medical research so that animals are no longer used for research purposes (p. 65).

The above is certainly true of animal rights, yet it simultaneously, and perhaps more importantly, operates on another level, that which Gusfield calls the "everyday or interactive" level. Gusfield contrasts linear and institutional movements like animal rights with fluid movements that may not have an organizational base (his examples are the "hippie" movement and many health movements). With fluid movements, the dissidence is not directed at changing the state or an institution, but is instead found in a set of alternative ideas and the individual responses to those ideas as they affect lifestyles. The animal rights movement simultaneously embodies both of these movement levels and contains both linear-political and fluid-everyday elements. The growing number of vegetarians and vegans who adopt such diets and lifestyles out of ethical concern for animals represents the everyday level, whereas organized collective action and specific targeted campaigns reside at the institutional level. However, each is part of the same whole, and each type of action is important for bringing about the goal of animal liberation.

Veganism and lifestyle change correspond to the cultural realm, while collective action tends to target specific institutions and practices, which exist at the structural level. There is overlap between these two levels, which I am discussing here as typifications for purposes of clarity, for instance as can be seen in groups primarily dedicated to outreach and education to

promote veganism.⁷ These groups operate on the collective level but endeavor to promote an alternative way of living (compassionately as a vegan), rather than targeting specific institutions and trying to make them change. In a capitalist system, this tactic is aimed at the level of consumption (especially in the area of food) rather than production, whereas certain other campaigns are aimed more at the productive realm (for instance, those that target specific department stores with demands to stop selling fur garments). The assumption is that once consumer demand (culture) for animal products dissolves, the structural level (production) will take care of itself. Many animal rights activists, while promoting veganism, maintain that this sort of individual-by-individual change is too slow and therefore should not be the *only* tactic used, although it can be used effectively in conjunction with other tactics. Each of these levels also corresponds to different levels of recruitment to the broader animal rights ideology (i.e. veganism and activism), rather than constituting descriptions of the movement as a whole, which is multi-faceted and operates both on the personal and political plane.

Gusfield (1994) states that lifestyle movements, in a sense, bypass institutions rather than change them. Animal rights activism does both, by adopting veganism and refusing to participate on a personal level in any practice involving the institutionalized exploitation of animals, and at the collective level by seeking to eradicate institutionalized animal abuse, through legislation, political action, demonstrations, petitions, boycotts, civil disobedience, and educating the public. Gusfield concludes that, “social movements studies have shown an undue emphasis on the political and have understated the importance of movements that create changes in everyday living outside the institutional structure of modern life (p. 75).” The animal rights

⁷ Vegan Outreach, for example, is an organization whose primary activity is to print and distribute copies of *Why Vegan*, the seminal pamphlet that provides ethical arguments for veganism.

movement provides an excellent instantiation of these two distinct but related planes of action and social change in a single social movement. As McAdam (1994) states:

Given the entrenched political and economic opposition movements are likely to encounter, it is often true that their biggest impact is more cultural than narrowly political and economic. Although the topic has never been systematically studied, the examples of movement-based cultural change would seem to be numerous and extraordinarily diverse (p. 49).

The animal rights movement is an ideal place to start this quest for culture in social movements, paying particular attention to the increase in the number of vegetarians and vegans over the past decade. Accompanying this increase is a growing number of vegetarian and vegan options (in grocery stores and restaurants) and an awareness of these alternatives evidenced in the increasing incorporation of vegetarianism and animal rights themes into mainstream popular culture.⁸ An emphasis on culture and animal rights activism will also lead to questions about socialization, which will be taken up in the following chapters.

Recruitment to the Animal Rights Movement

Jasper and Poulsen (1995) found that recruitment to the animal rights movement occurred irrespective of *preexisting social networks*, which has been the dominant explanation within social movement theory. They found that many new participants in the animal rights movement are strangers to the movement with no prior history of activism. They, in effect, recruit themselves. For such a recruit, it is less the social networks than it is rhetorical appeals and what Jasper calls “condensing symbols” that matter. This is surprising given that recruitment has been such a heavily studied area and that previous research (Snow, Zurcher, and Eckland-Olson 1980) found that the single most important factor in explaining individual

⁸ A 1997 Roper Poll estimated the number of vegans in the U.S. to be between 600,000 and one million (source: Vegan Outreach).

recruitment is *previous contact with someone in the movement* (i.e. social networks). Structural proximity, derived from having a friend or relative in the movement, or from prior activism with another movement, is the key. Once contact with the movement organization is established, organizers can then set to work “aligning” their “frames” with those of the potential recruits in order to construct and have accepted a common definition of the situation (Snow and Benford 1988). “For strangers to join a movement,” according to Jasper and Poulsen, “they must already have opinions and feelings of their own: They already detest abortion or care deeply about animals. They are recruited to a group or movement, not converted to a belief system” (p. 497). In this view, recruitment is not a process of conversion per se, but rather an extension or expansion of beliefs that the recruit already values.

Essential to an understanding of recruitment to the animal rights movement, as argued by Jasper and Poulsen, is the experience of a “moral shock” or other “triggering” realizations. Such shocks constitute the first step in the recruitment of strangers:

When an event or situation raises such a sense of outrage in people that they become inclined toward political action, even in the absence of a network of contacts ...those who have been shocked often search out political organizations (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, p. 498).

Consonant with this finding, my project focuses on the recruitment process from the perspectives of the activists themselves, as opposed to analyzing how movement organizations recruit new members. Of course, this subjective focus is not what distinguishes the present study from resource mobilization approaches. Within a resource mobilization framework, one could pursue this question from either direction. I simply state the direction from which I will work for the sake of clarity, and because the efforts of established social movement organizations to recruit people and the subjective experiences of those who have been recruited will be conceptually different and lend themselves to different research questions.

Jasper and Poulsen found that animal rights activists tended to be recruited as strangers, through condensing symbols⁹ by way of moral shocks, in contrast to the anti-nuclear power activists, who tended to be recruited through conventional patterns of formal and informal social networks.¹⁰ Though the anti-nuclear power and animal rights movements share certain broad-based themes, including a critique of instrumentalism and an emphasis on harmony with nature, the anti-nuclear power activists were able to “tap into an extensive subculture of political activism, whose members had been active in a wide range of protest movements,” and while this was somewhat true for animal rights, “this movement also extensively recruited those not previously active” (p. 501). Their results suggest that animal rights recruitment patterns may differ significantly on a number of grounds from those of the more intensively studied social movements, and particularly on the relative importance of strangers, compared with friends, family, or acquaintances, to the recruitment process, and on the decisive role of moral shocks in the creation of activists.

The primary mechanism, or at least the first step, in recruiting strangers to animal rights ideology seems to be through the transfer of (new) cultural meanings, symbols, and ideas by way of moral shocks, which are needed to penetrate the wall of socialization. Jasper and Poulsen explain:

Cultural meanings and moral shocks may be especially important as a substitute when social networks are missing. More generally, the role of beliefs, symbols, and ideas in protest movements needs to be rethought... The mental life of social movements can be regained without the pejorative psychology that limited earlier

⁹ “Condensing symbols are verbal or visual images that neatly capture-- both cognitively and emotionally – a range of meanings and convey a frame, master frame, or theme. Organizers use such symbols to recruit members, especially strangers” (p. 498).

¹⁰ These shocks were also instrumental in spawning anti-abortion activism, in which *Roe v. Wade* (1973) acted as a moral shock that mobilized people with no prior political involvement. For the anti-abortion activists, *Roe V. Wade* shocked existing religious and moral beliefs; for the animal rights activists, the experience of moral shock stimulates the development of a new moral outlook consonant with the concept of animal rights.

work. An appreciation of cultural meanings can allow us to see protesters as reasonable and purposive, even when they don't pursue their own self-interest in a calculated way. Frames and themes are a good start on an improved cognitive and social psychology for research in social movements (p. 509).

The importance of culture to analyses of animal rights activism cannot be overestimated. The very foundation of the animal rights movement is a challenge to the dominant cultural paradigm and an attempt to resist the values and norms into which we were all socialized as members of our society, which encourage conceptualizing (certain) animals as commodities, objects, and economic units. The animal rights movement is a struggle to create an alternative culture and to re-draw the boundaries between the species. It is for this reason that attention should be focused on socialization processes with regard to the development of animal rights activists. The dominant culture through routine socialization normalizes and legitimates current animal production practices through powerful institutions from schools to families to popular culture.

These legitimations draw upon a long tradition of cultural sensibilities involving non-human animals and their (subservient) relation to humans, as well as expensive advertising used by the representatives of animal agriculture, which draw upon cultural traditions to persuade people to consume more animal products, despite emerging nutritional evidence that contradicts the meat and dairy industry's perennial claims of the wholesomeness, healthfulness (and in more recent years, humaneness) of their product.¹¹ A central question addressed in this dissertation is

¹¹ Carol Adams (1994) writes: "According to the American Meat Institute, the years from 1938 to 1956 saw a declining rate of corpse consumption. Working closely with the government United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), they reduced the number of food groups while allotting greater space to their specific products. The four basic food groups are a literal representation of how a question of production and promotion becomes a nutritional consideration.... Through the USDA's four basic food groups we have government sponsorship of an animal-based food diet. Instead of being seen as industry-sponsored propaganda, it can be viewed neutrally as government-sponsored education, lifting cultural promotion to an even greater coercive dimension" (pp. 33, 36). In April 1991, the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) introduced a new food-groups pyramid consisting of whole grains, vegetables, fruits and legumes.

why are some people “under-socialized” into the culturally prescribed food-ways? I argue that the emergence of a movement for animal rights indicates that more widespread cultural changes are underway, especially with regard to the human-animal relationship, which increasingly constitutes problematized and contested terrain. In order to analyze recruitment to the animal rights movement, it will be essential to focus considerable attention upon the dynamics of socialization and re-socialization with regard to culture, cognition, and food classification. An interesting phenomenon in this regard is when children decide that they no longer wish to eat meat because they do not want to harm animals. The expression of this desire, however, is often met with resistance from the parents. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter I will describe the methods I used to collect data for the project. Following this, I will discuss the beliefs, worldview, and political ideology of animal rights activists in Chapter 3, paying particular attention to the interplay of cognition and emotion in the motivational accounts and conversion narratives of activists. In Chapter 4 I will discuss the predisposing factors and early incidents that were experienced by many activists prior to their actual conversion, and in Chapter 5 I will discuss the turning points that punctuated this conversion process. Activists typically experienced at least two distinct turning points, one for vegetarianism and one for veganism. In Chapter 6 I will discuss the effects of going vegetarian and vegan on the personal relationships of activists, particularly the reactions of significant others to the identity change and the ways activists adapted to these reactions. Chapter 7 deals with the transformation from being “just” vegan to becoming an activist and deciding to devote one’s life to the cause of animal rights. This chapter also explores how the transformation from vegan to activist further affects activists’ personal relationships. In the concluding chapter, I will discuss morality construction and boundary work, especially as it pertains to role-taking

capabilities and the adoption by activists of the perspective of an imaginary animal “other.” I will also discuss the connection between socialization, identity, and social movement theory.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND DATA

Methodological Overview

I used a variety of qualitative methods in my study of animal rights activists, including semi-structured interviews, participant-observation, and text analysis. Although formal, open-ended interviews are the primary source of data for this research, I entered the field as a participant-observer before I ever began conducting structured interviews. This preliminary fieldwork was invaluable because it enabled me to “get my feet wet” (Geertz 1973) and to attain a level of familiarity with the social world of animal rights activism. My complete lack of experience with this social world and with political activism in general made it essential for me to gain a level of background knowledge of the movement’s history, ideology, participants and relevant issues as a first step in embarking upon the research project. Also important was achieving an understanding of the implicit meanings and taken-for-granted assumptions at work in this setting.

Although I had no background in animal rights activism and knew very little about the movement, I had been a vegetarian for approximately 14 years at the start of this project. So while I was in most ways an outsider to the movement, my personal background situated me in such a way as to be more easily accepted into the unique social world of animal rights activism. I identified myself from the outset as a sociology graduate student writing a dissertation on animal rights activism, and did not withhold this information when I met people in the field (this

is not to say that I identified myself as a researcher to every person at each event; this would have been impractical, if not impossible, at the larger public demonstrations that I attended). But from the very beginning, as I attempted to gain access to this setting, I was perceived in a dual way: both as newcomer to animal rights and as a researcher (my personal history of vegetarianism prior to beginning this research meant that I was perceived by activists as being sympathetic to the movement's goals). This dual role served me well in that most people whom I encountered seemed willing to share information with me about the movement. In addition to my being perceived as open or sympathetic (or at least not hostile) to the movement, this sharing of information seemed also to be based, in part, upon what Adler (1993) calls the "norm of reciprocal exchange." Regarding the norm of reciprocal exchange, and the related process of developing trust, she writes:

We actively tried to cultivate the trust of our respondents by tying them to us with favors... Here we often trod a thin line, trying to ensure our personal safety while putting ourselves in enough of a risk position, along with our research subjects, so that they would trust us. While we were able to build a "web of trust"...with some members, we found that trust, in large part, was not a simple status to attain in the drug world (p. 19).

While I had a considerably easier time developing trust in my setting than did they in the illegal, highly secretive, and potentially dangerous social world of drug trafficking, I did risk arrest at my very first demonstration, a risk of which I was unaware prior to attending and for which I was quite unprepared. I felt that my actions and demeanor would be important at the first protest that I attended, and I wanted to avoid drawing negative attention to myself in front of these experienced activists, some of whom I hoped would eventually become key informants and introduce me to other activists. I wanted to make sure that I did not stand out and hence tried to go along with the crowd and blend in with the other protestors, even though I was feeling very nervous and uncertain of what to expect when the police arrived and began ordering people to

leave and threatening to arrest us if we did not disperse. My attempts to “blend in” nearly got me arrested, along with the five people who actually were arrested, but I was able to evade the police by jogging off quickly in another direction. So although I am not sure that the “norm of reciprocal exchange” was actively engaged by either myself or other members in the setting, I do feel that by attending various social movement events and demonstrations, thereby “helping” or showing support, made activists more willing to help me, talk with me, and share information.

Regarding the ease with which I was able to enter the setting, one might think that gaining entrée to a social movement would not be especially difficult, as the movement’s organizers should hypothetically be eager to have a potential new convert or activist in their midst. This was certainly the case with my entrance into this setting. The activists I met seemed genuinely pleased to have another body at a demonstration or another person to pass out leaflets (this was true everywhere, but especially in Atlanta, where the animal rights community was very small) and, in accordance with the norm of reciprocal exchange, I was always willing to help out in whatever ways I could, which undoubtedly contributed to my general feeling of being welcomed.

However, alongside of this apparent eagerness for newcomers to show interest in the movement existed another attitude, that of distrust and suspicion of “outsiders.” This attitude of general wariness was quite evident at the time I started this project, and especially with the groups with which I was a participant-observer, as these groups were part of the segment of the movement that uses more radical and sometimes illegal tactics (i.e. various forms of civil disobedience) and also supports the underground actions of groups like the Animal Liberation Front, so were often the target of police surveillance. Several activists in the U.S. were under investigation by the FBI during the time of my research and there was a pronounced suspicion of

infiltrators among activists who identified with the self-proclaimed “grassroots” segment of the movement, which were the first activists with whom I came into contact and were represented by groups like Animal Defense League (ADL) and Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT).

Suspicion of infiltrators exists not only among the more radical groups in the animal rights movement but in the environmental movement’s more radical counterpart as well (i.e., groups like “Earth First!”). Both of these sectors could be characterized generally as supporting the extra-legal, covert activities of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), respectively, although it is important not to conflate *support for* the ALF with *membership in* the ALF. These are two very different things. The ALF has no official membership (one cannot “join” the ALF; one becomes part of the ALF through one’s individual actions, which are not supposed to be discussed with other activists) and exists entirely underground with little or no contact between individual “cells.” The credo and guidelines of the Animal Liberation Front (taken from their web site) are as follows:

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) carries out direct action against animal abuse in the form of rescuing animals and causing financial loss to animal exploiters, usually through the damage and destruction of property. The ALF's short-term aim is to save as many animals as possible and directly disrupt the practice of animal abuse. Their long term aim is to end all animal suffering by forcing animal abuse companies out of business.

It is a nonviolent campaign, activists taking all precautions not to harm any animal (human or otherwise). Because ALF actions are against the law, activists work anonymously, either in small groups or individually, and do not have any centralized organization or coordination. The Animal Liberation Front consists of small autonomous groups of people all over the world who carry out direct action according to the ALF guidelines. *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.*

The ALF guidelines are:

1. 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.

2. TO inflict economic damage to those who profit from the misery and exploitation of animals.
3. TO reveal the horror and atrocities committed against animals behind locked doors, by performing non-violent direct actions and liberations.
4. TO take all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human and non-human. (http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/alf_credos.htm)

Some groups that represent the more mainstream sectors of the animal and environmental movements condemn the activities of the ALF and ELF as immoral (because illegal) and harmful to the movement as a whole, while the more radical groups tend to support and champion this underground activity and perceive it as a morally defensible because they believe that life is always more important than property and profit (and that any law stating otherwise is unjust) and pragmatic supplement to the legal, “above-ground” work being done to advance the cause of animal liberation and earth liberation, respectively.

So in this environment, the fact that I was perceived as, and in fact was, generally sympathetic to the goals of a movement dedicated to helping animals made entrée easier for me than I believe it would have been had I been a meat-eater or otherwise perceived as in some way hostile to the movement’s general ideology. This is not to say that I could not have gained access to the setting as a meat-eater or would not have been welcomed at demonstrations, but I am dubious about the degree of acceptance a total outsider would have been granted, especially one whose ideals or lifestyle seemed to be antithetical to the movement’s goals.

As mentioned in the previous chapter,¹² there is no “neutral space” from which to approach the topic of animal rights. Each person is implicated in one or the other side of the moral debate each time we sit down to have a meal. I believe that activists would have been less

¹²“The ‘moralistic’ vegetarian and the ‘vested interest’ corpse eater cannot meet on neutral ground... Not only is there no disinterested observer to this tradition –i.e., one is implicated either by choice of flesh or resistance to flesh – but there is no impartial semantic or cultural space in which to hold a discussion” (Adams 1991, p. 26).

helpful in introducing me to other key activists in order to build my snowball sample, and far less candid with me in discussing various sensitive aspects of the movement (such as strategy, tactics, and internal divisions) if I had I been perceived as a total outsider. If this had been the case, activists would have been much less likely to trust me with this “sensitive” information, which is not widely publicized due to the constant threat of surveillance and infiltration from not only the government but also anti-animal rights organizations mostly comprised of front groups for the industries most threatened by the movement (i.e. fur, meat, dairy, and the various industries that have an interest in animal experimentation, including pharmaceuticals and biotechnology), which plant spies on animal rights listservs or in movement organizations to glean information which can be used to thwart the movement’s goals. However, the fact that I was also an outsider enabled me to enter the setting with fresh eyes and a non-native perspective, which allowed me to see things that I could have otherwise easily have missed had the setting been familiar to me. So while I needed to achieve a very basic level of verstehen (Weber 1949), I think this understanding was deepened by fact that the setting was strange to me.

Settings for Participant Observation

I did participant-observation in a variety of movement contexts, including structured events like public demonstrations and activist meetings as well as in less structured circumstances, such as the informal interactions, casual conversations, and general socializing activities (meals, etc.) that typically took place before and after the structured event. In addition to interacting with the participants themselves, I was able to observe the semi-ritualistic forms of public behavior and interaction that commonly occur at demonstrations, both among protesters and between protesters and passersby.

In addition to attending various demonstrations, I was also a participant-observer at “outreach” events where leaflets are handed out to passersby on street corners, and at information tables, where “educational” literature is made available to the public. During these tabling sessions I informally questioned activists about various aspects of their participation in the animal rights movement and inquired about their opinions regarding various issues pertaining to animal rights. These informal interactions helped me to develop “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1969), interview questions, and potential hypotheses. Whenever possible, I would request a formal interview at a later date.

I also attended organizational meetings, observed a closed-membership animal rights listserv (discussed further in the next section) in addition to a few that were open to the general public (with general animal rights news and action alerts), collected and analyzed copious amounts of primary materials (both animal rights and anti-animal rights literature) and did extensive research on the Internet, which contains hundreds of web sites about animal rights and veganism. The primary materials often contain essays, stories, and testimonials about various aspects of conversion, which I found particularly helpful in augmenting my interviews. The listservs, websites, and print materials also gave me a keen awareness of the various debates within animal rights, as well as the most salient issues and ideological divisions within the movement itself, which tend to revolve not around philosophy or goals but the choice of tactics, a fact that I found interesting.

Participating in these events gave me a context and an understanding of the movement, the issues involved, and a firsthand sense of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in various ways of trying to reach the public. As mentioned above, it also helped me to gain a sense of belonging or efficacy in this setting, in terms of absorbing a mass of relevant knowledge of this

social world so that I could demonstrate a familiarity with the issues when speaking with insiders.¹³ The research notes generated by my preliminary fieldwork also guided me toward concepts with which to construct my interview guide, and enabled me to follow up on items of possible theoretical interest that I had observed in the field later, during formal interviews. Without the cultural context provided by doing participant-observation, it would have been difficult for me to formulate sensible questions or to imagine what kinds of probes or follow-ups to interview questions might be appropriate. The numerous informal conversations I had with activists at these protests also helped to point me in a relevant direction in terms of formulating my research questions.

After attending demonstrations and other movement events, I wrote up detailed field notes, within twenty-four hours, regarding, among other things, the particulars of the demonstration, conversations I had and heard, remarks and insults shouted by passersby; basically I recorded, or tried to record, everything that had happened and that I had witnessed down to the smallest detail. I continued this process until I started seeing the same things over and over again, which happened once I became more familiar with the setting and with what was going on. At this point I began doing less recording of minute details and more recording of things which seemed to be unique or special in some way, or that were of some particular interest. Here I began forming concepts that would find their way into my interview questions.

¹³ Bayley (1998) writes of his research on differential policing practices in the U.S. and Japan: “One method of building rapport is to demonstrate shared expertise. People in most occupations like nothing better than to talk about their work to interested and informed outsiders. I have studied police operations in several countries...The police institution is not new to me. By referring to police practices elsewhere with appropriate detail, I could convince Japanese officers that I was a serious student of their work. As my knowledge of Japanese procedures grew, I could compel more frank exchanges by citing specific observations and facts. On several occasions when a pointed question of mine was met with vague generalities, I responded by noting gently but frankly that I had seen the contrary. Rather than being affronted, my informants consistently paused, laughed, and complimented me on the unusual penetration of my research. They would then go on to supply additional information...” (p. 94).

Also included in my field notes are daily letters written to my key informant while he was in jail for about a month during the winter of 1999. These are interesting from an auto-ethnographic standpoint because this was my first experience with the penal system and my letters show my general emotional state and frustration with trying to navigate the correctional system. During this time I became keenly aware of the risks willingly faced by the activists that I studied. I also saw how the incarceration of activists affected their relationships with significant others and fellow activists on the outside, who tried to navigate the legal system through self-teaching and reliance on the handful of attorneys with animal rights sympathies who did pro-bono work for jailed activists.

In the Field

My fieldwork was conducted primarily during 1998-2000 in Atlanta. However, I was also a participant-observer at demonstrations, meetings and conferences in New Jersey, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and New York City during and after this time. The role I occupied was somewhere between a “peripheral” membership role (Adler 1998) and a complete membership role, as I participated in numerous activities as a complete participant, but did not engage in organizing these activities, as did most of the other members in the settings that I studied. In other words, I took part in whatever events had been organized, but did not take an active role in the planning of these events. This prevented me from becoming a complete member, although I do think that participants often hoped that I would take on more of an active “organizer” role. It

was this internal tension (between the observer and participant aspects of my role)¹⁴ that caused me to finally remove myself from the “closed” organizers’ email listserv of which I had been a member, and from which I did gain valuable insights into the politics, problems and central concerns of those engaged in grassroots level organizing.

However, after several months of basically “lurking” (observing but not participating) I began to feel that since I was not actively organizing and was in fact resisting taking on a leadership role, my presence was disingenuous, and so I un-subscribed from the email list. The fact that I was allowed access to this list shows that I was trusted and held in relatively high regard by my key informants (and, more significantly, that they hoped that I would become more involved as an organizer). In order to gain access to the email listserv, an individual must be nominated by a fellow activist in good standing and then two other activists must “vouch” for the nominee. Then, provided there are no objections from fellow activists (which was not uncommon during my time on the list), one is granted membership.

¹⁴ Adler (1993) writes about how she and her husband sometimes experienced “competing pulls between our detached, observer role ...and our involved, participant role” in their field study of upper- level drug dealers. This tension is inherent when one is doing research in naturalistic settings where one necessarily develops relationships with participants yet at the same time needs to retain a sense of neutrality, reflexivity, detachment and objectivity. However, taking a membership role is absolutely essential, especially when studying illegal, deviant, or, I would add, oppositional, subcultures. Adler writes: “Our modern, pluralistic society is so filled with diverse subcultures whose interests compete or conflict with each other that each subculture has a set of knowledge which is reserved exclusively for insiders. In order to survive and prosper, they do not show this side to just anyone. To obtain the depth of insight and information I needed, I had to become like a member in certain ways. They dealt only with people they knew and trusted, so I had to become known and trusted before I could reveal my true self and my research interests.” This is less true in my setting; I probably could have contacted activists and asked them if they would like to be a part of my study. But participant-observation really serves to augment the information I am able to obtain through interviews. The field research part of the study enables me to understand much better the social world of animal rights activism and the subculture of this radical social movement.

Gaining Entrée

As mentioned above, I knew practically nothing about the animal rights movement before I began this research project. When I decided to study this movement as my dissertation topic, I conducted an Internet search for animal rights groups in the general area of the Southeast. I was surprised to see a group listed in Atlanta and reached the contact person via email, approximately a week before Thanksgiving in 1998. One of the biggest national protests of the year is “Fur-Free Friday,” which takes place in many major cities all over the country on the supposed busiest shopping day of the year, the day after Thanksgiving. This demonstration was my first foray into the field. I went to this protest and met Jason, the organizer, as well as his roommate, Jack, and his girlfriend, Noelle, who were both co-organizers of the Atlanta chapters of Animal Defense League (ADL) and Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT). I told him that I was researching animal rights activism for my dissertation and that I thought I would probably focus on recruitment (which was the gist of what I knew myself at that early stage).

After this first meeting, Jason was extremely helpful in sending me information, introducing me to other activists, and answering my (seemingly endless) questions about the movement and various distinctions within and between organizations, issues, and campaigns. I began attending his group’s weekly protests, tabled with them a few times, went to an organizational meeting, and eventually was invited by Jason to join the “closed” listserv for grassroots organizers mentioned above so that I, as he put it, could have access to other grassroots activists for my research. It was necessary for me to be formally nominated to this list by him and then my nomination had to be “seconded” by two other activists who would guarantee that I was as reliable and trustworthy.

I stayed on this list for about eight months and then removed myself because I started to feel that I should not continue hanging around on it if I was not (and had no intention of becoming) an organizer. I did not want to go “overt” to the approximately one hundred activists on the list, at least not in that particular forum, and I did not feel comfortable continuing to inhabit a “covert” role with most people. Although I never hid my status as a researcher on this list, and indeed my introductory statement to the list stated that I was doing my dissertation research on recruitment to the animal rights movement, I did not make an explicit announcement saying that I was using the list as “data.” But during these eight months I obtained much interesting information, and was also able to meet a few key people who were able to help me with interview contacts in the future. As discussed above, there is a general wariness within the movement of outsiders poking around asking questions, so it was important that a few “key” activists knew me and could vouch for my trustworthiness to others when I was seeking my initial interviews. This became less of an issue during later stages of my project, as during the third year of my research I was employed at a national animal protection organization and by this time was relatively well-known and definitely trusted by others in the movement in Washington DC, which became my second major research site.

Shortly after my first protest (Fur Free Friday, November 1998), I traveled to New Jersey, where I met with a few activists from the New Jersey chapter of the Animal Defense League (with whom my contact in Atlanta had put me in touch). I attended one of their demonstrations and was enthusiastically welcomed when I told them that I knew my contact in Atlanta, who is a well known and respected activist in the grassroots animal rights community. During this trip, I attended an anti-fur protest in New Brunswick, had dinner with the organizers, asked them informal questions, and went back to their apartment and looked at their ADL

scrapbook (full of newspaper clippings, photographs, and other artifacts dealing with their local campaigns and actions). My main objective at these initial protests was to collect field notes, find my legs in the setting, and to try to meet people and arrange for later interviews. I also tried to observe whether significant regional differences seemed to exist regarding these protests and the local animal rights communities, and took note of how my observations in other places checked with the ones I had done in Atlanta.

To sum up, I gained access through a key informant who introduced me to other key people in the setting and helped me to orient myself in this social world, which I think I was able to do relatively quickly. This was corroborated by a few activists themselves, more than one of whom commented upon how quickly I seemed to have picked up on the central issues and concerns, philosophical and tactical, of the movement, as well as its strengths and weaknesses in attempting to communicate with the public and gain sympathizers. I was able to relatively quickly familiarize myself with the pertinent debates, divisions and issues facing this young movement, especially aided by Internet research and print materials like philosophy books and other animal rights publications. Also, as discussed above, I am certain that my status as a long-time vegetarian helped me to gain entrée and trust of members. I do not think a meat-eater could have gained access to this setting or obtained the information that I did. The movement is understandably protective of itself against outsiders, and I was accepted as an insider as well as a researcher, so that my role was member as well as observer, a true participant-observer, with both aspects pretty much in balance.

The groups with whom I was a participant-observer in the first two years were mostly grassroots groups, who come together for various large regional protests and stay connected with one another via publications like the activist newspaper *No Compromise* (“The Militant, Direct

Action Newspaper of Grassroots Animal Liberationists and Their Supporters”), which is published four times a year, and *The Animals’ Agenda* (“The World’s Premier Animal Rights Magazine”), which used to be published bi-monthly, and through other channels such as a closed listserv for organizers and more general listservs containing news items and calls to action for rank and file activists.

The groups with which I did participant observation and from which my interview participants are drawn include Compassion Over Killing (Washington, D.C.), Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (Atlanta), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Norfolk) Animal Liberation League (Minneapolis), Mercy for Animals (Ohio), The Animals’ Agenda (Baltimore), Animal Defense League (Atlanta, New Jersey, New York City, and Chicago), In Defense of Animals (Atlanta), Students for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Athens, GA), The Fund for Animals (Silver Spring, MD), and Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary (Poolesville, MD).

Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 35 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with vegan animal rights activists, particularly focusing on the reconstruction of their recruitment and re-socialization process. This narrative reconstruction was elicited by asking them how and when they first became aware of animal rights issues, when and why they first became vegetarian and then vegan, and how they became “activists” – that is, actively involved in one or more movement organizations. I asked them to tell me in their own words, as best they could remember, the circumstances surrounding each transition (from meat-eater to vegetarian to vegan to activist) and what they considered to be the most important factors or circumstances at each stage spurring on the process of greater involvement and increasing commitment. A key

question was whether the transition happened all at once or more gradually over a protracted period of time. I also asked several other general questions about animal rights and the movement.

The format of the interviews was a focused biography, and the effects of the often-dramatic transition from meat-eater to vegan were considered, as was the impact of this identity-lifestyle shift on the personal relationships and social lives of activists. Questions were also asked to elicit motivational accounts and justifications for activism, and animal rights in particular; because most participants in my sample had sympathies with other “progressive” social movements, I was curious why they had chosen to devote their time and energy to animal rights. These interviews were conducted between November 1999 and March 2001.

Interview Sample

I located activists using the “snowball” or opportunistic method of sampling. I began with a key informant who introduced me to other activists, and they in turn would lead me to other potential interviewees, and so on. My criteria were simply that they were ethical vegans and participants in some form of organized animal rights activism. I defined activism as taking part in the activities of a social movement organization. For this reason, basic membership in PETA would not meet my sampling parameters; the person had to be proactive in some way for animals beyond simple dues-paying membership in an organization.

My method of operation was to begin with the individuals who represented the most committed “type” of activist in the movement – i.e. vegans who were also active participants with an animal rights organization – in order to understand the recruitment process. My sample consists of those at the farthest point of one end of the animal rights continuum, those who

display the greatest degree of “moral consistency” in their lifestyles and beliefs and whose commitment is manifest on both personal and social fronts. I used the “known-groups” method (Becker 1958) of sampling and, in accordance with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), continued to conduct interviews until theoretical saturation was achieved. My sample consists of those who have already been recruited; in other words, I look at those who are known to have the “condition” in question rather than using a general survey to see who will develop it in the larger population. Like Lofland and Stark (1965), I began with people who had been recruited and then worked backward to reconstruct the recruitment process by breaking it down into broad stages. I used analytic induction (Znaniecki 1934, Robinson 1951, Turner 1953) to reconstruct the recruitment process and develop generic conceptual categories. In other words, I worked back from a sample of full-fledged activists and tried to reconstruct the process that made them what they are.

Again, my criteria were that the interviewee be both vegan and an active member of a grassroots or national animal rights organization. These criteria gave me clearly definable parameters for the population from which I drew my sample, i.e. vegan animal rights activists. These are the people that I consider to be “total converts,” both on the personal and political front, in that they are involved with organized efforts to effect broad social changes, as well as the personal change involved in adopting veganism at the lifestyle level. However, it is possible to be a “total convert” and not be an activist, i.e. someone who embraces some form of animal rights philosophy and lives out these ideals in their personal life, yet is not a political activist in the traditional sense of the word.

Ethical vegans are “true believers,” even though they do not necessarily engage in active efforts to convert people, and therefore could also be considered “total converts.” Yet I made an

analytic distinction between these two categories, and for this project I have restricted my sample to vegans who are also activists. Although I could have studied the lifestyle (as opposed to activist) vegans, too, in an effort to understand the dynamics of recruitment to an alternative ideology, I simply needed to divide my work in some reasonable way (Turner [1953] discusses the logic of restricting subjects in order to observe uniform principles).¹⁵

By “total converts,” to further clarify what I mean here, I refer to those who accept the basic tenets of animal rights ideology, of which veganism is the ideal-typical representation. This idea of total conversion also refers to the process of de-socialization followed by re-socialization, concepts that I will further develop. As compared with “total converts,” there are many others at any given time who are at various stages of converting, either progressing toward the ideal of veganism or remaining at one or another intermediate stage, which means they may embrace one or more principles of animal rights but reject others. In this category (i.e. “partial” converts), we would also find people who are “single-issue” types without a more radical or “complete” animal rights orientation, for example, people who eat meat, yet are repulsed by the sight of captive wild animals in zoos and circuses and who believe these institutions should be abolished, and, on the other hand, (ethical) vegetarians who feel that zoos are acceptable environments for animals. Neither of these represents a “total convert,” as I am defining the term, although each embraces some or another aspect of animal rights ideology, even if it is only on a single issue. So animal rights ideology is like a cafeteria line of possibilities where people

¹⁵ Articulating the method of analytic induction, Turner writes: “The effort at causal homogeneity is evident in the refinements of definition that accompany the method. In the process of attempting to generalize about addiction Lindesmith had to distinguish between those drugs that produce withdrawal stress and those that do not. Early in his work he concluded that it would be futile to seek a single theory to explain both types. Cressey points out that he could not study everyone who is legally defined as an embezzler. Unless he restricted his subjects, for example, to those who entered the situation in good faith, he could not form valid generalizations having universal applicability” (p. 608).

may pick and choose from a selection of dishes, or opt for the complete line. The existence of people who are neither “total converts” nor “non-believers” further reinforces the notion that animal rights ideology, and therefore recruitment itself, represents a multi-stage continuum. This continuum is not necessarily linear or teleological.

My sample transcends a single organization, although all of the organizations from which it was drawn shared in common an abolitionist perspective regarding animal exploitation (i.e. they had an “animal rights” as opposed to “animal welfare” orientation). Studying a singular organization was not necessary, as my primary conceptual interests were in the area of socialization and micro-sociological processes rather than in organizational or macro-sociological processes. My intent was to analyze the lived experiences of individual activists and the meaning with which they imbued these experiences. In other words, I have looked at recruitment from the perspectives of the activists themselves rather than from the perspective of any one social movement organization. So the theoretical question that I have asked is not “how do movements (or specific movement organizations) recruit people?” but rather “how do people bring themselves to the movement?”

These are really just two sides of the same question, but my focus follows the direction of activist-to-movement, rather than movement-to-activist. For, as I have tried to illustrate, animal rights recruitment is a multi-dimensional process, and thus at certain points the movement’s outreach efforts may be very important in recruiting activists (most likely at the stage of becoming “active”), whereas at earlier stages (becoming vegetarian or vegan), other factors having little or nothing to do with the organized movement itself may come into play. For instance, cognitive-emotional dynamics at the individual level, like trigger experiences, moral shocks, and other unidentified mental disruptions may precipitate self-recruitment, as “shocks”

and “triggers” catalyze the eventual activist into action, seeking out movement organizations of his or her own volition, or at least being more receptive to the organization’s message.

Although I began my research there, Atlanta did not ultimately end up to be the primary site for the rest of my project. There was, as recently as 1999, not a large enough contingent of vegan activists for me to interview. However, Atlanta did prove to be a rich site for participant observation, especially when the original members of the Animal Defense League (who all moved out of the city in 2000) were still living there. After the three core members left, another Atlanta activist re-formed the ADL chapter there. She seemed very committed and began organizing weekly demos, but she was only sixteen years old at the time and I did not plan to include minors in my study. The dynamics of animal rights activism in Atlanta were significantly problematic¹⁶ that I decided to continue data collection elsewhere. One could say that I ended up “chasing my data” as I began to travel back and forth to geographic regions with more potential interviewees, primarily the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic.

Eventually I moved to Washington, D.C. where I was a participant-observer with three different social movement organizations: Compassion Over Killing, an energetic and expanding local group, The Fund for Animals, a well-established national organization, and the Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary, a sanctuary for farmed animals founded and operating upon animal rights principles. I carried out the majority of my interviews in the Washington, D.C. area during the year 2000-2001. I continued to use the snowball method of sampling as I did in Atlanta, but

¹⁶ The south in general has a reputation for being a less than energetic place for activism, at least for animal activism, and Atlanta itself, though having a handful of people who organize occasional events and the teenager who organizes weekly demos, has a sporadic and less committed membership. This is manifest by the irregularity of attendance at events and the lack of involvement on an organizational level. On any given day it is uncertain whether or not anyone will show up for scheduled protests, and often people who do are atypical in some way. Movement participation in Atlanta, and other southern cities for that matter, does not reflect participation nationwide in comparably sized cities (according to comments made repeatedly by activists and from my own personal observations).

in Washington I had a second key informant who put me in touch with many key activists in the area before I moved there. Eventually, after I moved to Washington, I met enough people on my own to broaden my sample, especially through my contacts at The Fund for Animals, where I was employed for a year.

In terms of “generalizability,” there seem to be some regional differences among activists, most especially regarding attitudes on political issues besides animal rights. But my observations of the movement seem to be reasonably generalizable. I was able to ascertain this to a reasonable degree through the simple fact that I was able to ask activists directly about this issue. How typical, for example, is the Atlanta animal rights scene compared to the rest of the country? How does it compare with the Northeast? How does the East coast compare with the West? The more involved activists seemed to have a pretty well developed sense of this kind of thing. And most of them are relatively mobile, traveling to different parts of the country for various conferences and large regional or national demonstrations and rallies at least a few times a year, and keeping in touch with activists from other parts of the country. As the animal rights movement is not necessarily aligned “left” or “right” politically (Hornick 2004), activists can be divided on a number of other social issues. I have observed conservative activists lamenting the fact that the general public associates animal rights with leftist causes in general and that this misconception needs to change if the idea of animal rights is ever to gain a broad constituency. Of course, there are also activists who very neatly fit the ultra-leftist stereotype, especially typified in the anarchist contingent within the movement, mostly concentrated in the Pacific Northwest (at the time of this study).

One social issue on which animal activists are divided, and which tends to break down along regional lines, is abortion, with East coast activists tending to be “anti-abortion” and West

coast activists tending to be “pro-choice.” The abortion issue is almost universally avoided within the movement. These differences are usually put aside in recognition of the necessity of working together for animal rights. Other differences include some polarization on the issue of global/ corporate capitalism and its degree of culpability in animal exploitation and how much energy should be spent opposing this hydra.

The question of whether or not to bear children is a good example of one of the philosophical divides within this social world. There is a contingent in the movement that advocates “zero-population growth” or “voluntary population control.” These “anti-breeders” feel that adoption is the more responsible method if one wishes to have children. Many of these people live their ideals through voluntary sterilization; I met a few men (some of them quite young) who had, or were planning to have, vasectomies to remove the possibility of reproduction. Not everyone in the movement is opposed to breeding, however. A primary reason for those who are opposed to having children is the possibility that their children, despite being raised vegan or vegetarian, will decide to eat meat once they are old enough to make the decision themselves. The desire to avoid bringing another meat eater into the world is behind many an animal rights activist’s decision to not have children. The rationale for adoption is that the child already exists whereas bringing another potential meat eater into the world is just not necessary or good for the animals whom activists spend a great deal of their energy trying to save.

The fact that animal rights is not consistently conservative or liberal, but rather can be a “swing” issue, is evidenced in a recent uproar on the Seattle city council, which was voting on a proposal to ban circuses within city limits as I wrote an early draft of this chapter. The council was divided almost completely down the middle on the issue of whether or not circuses should

be banned in Seattle. The vacillation of one councilman who initially supported the ban while campaigning but who later switched sides produced an uproar within the council. His vote would be the tie- breaker, causing the ban to fail. Another councilwoman, who supported the ban, took him to task for this reversal and the resultant bickering between these two council members became highly public. But this division does not appear to adhere to traditional political lines, which suggest that animal rights supporters are always liberal/ leftist while those opposed to animal rights are always conservative/ rightist.

Veteran council members were somewhat surprised by the public bickering, which is something of a rarity even on a council more ideologically divided than it has been in years. More surprising still was that the sparring partners share the council's political middle ground (*The Seattle Times*, Feb. 4, 2000).

The point I am trying to make here is that although activists may be clearly unified on many issues involving animals, this does not necessarily or uniformly hold true for other political issues. The reverse is also true; when people in the general public share the same political association or ideological world-view, this does not mean that they will agree on issues involving animal rights. But I do believe that my observations and interview results will be broadly generalizable because they deal mostly with animal issues and not the broad spectrum of political opinion. In terms of reliability, my findings can be cross- checked with other sources and against the observations of other members in the setting.

Characteristics of the Sample

Age, Gender, and Race

I originally interviewed 34 activists for this study. I removed two of these interviews from the sample (because I realized upon later reflection that they did not really fit my sampling criterion of being currently active with an animal rights organization, although they were both

animal rights sympathizers and vegans), for a final total of 32. Of these 32, 14 were women and 19 were men. The youngest activist in my sample was 18 years old; the oldest activist was 62 years old. The average age was 29. The median age was 44. There were multiple modes, each occurring three times: 20, 23, 26 and 31. All interviewees were white. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews lasted an average of two hours.

Social Class

I used self-reports and parents' occupations and level of educational attainment to determine participants' socioeconomic backgrounds. I initially coded each participant as either working, working middle, middle, upper middle, or upper class.¹⁷ I then collapsed these six into three broad categories: working/ working middle, middle, and upper middle/ upper. These labels refer to the participants' family background and not their current status, primarily because many of the participants were relatively young and therefore not yet "established," or were willingly working in low wage jobs (or for non-profits) in order to be able to do animal rights work. My participants were distributed evenly across these three categories: 10 were coded as Working/ Working-Middle Class, 10 were coded as Middle Class, and 12 were coded as Upper-Middle/ Upper Class.

SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND:

Working Class: 6

Working-Middle Class: 4

Middle Class: 10

Upper-Middle Class: 6

Upper Class: 6

Working / Working-Middle Class = 10

Middle = 10

Upper-Middle / Upper = 12

¹⁷ I coded social class background based upon the self-reports of respondents and the occupations of their parents.

Education

All but two of my 32 participants had some education beyond high school. Ten had completed or were pursuing graduate degrees (MA, M.F.A., Ph.D., or J.D.). Sixteen had completed or were pursuing undergraduate degrees (BA or BS). Four had completed some college but were no longer attending school at the time of the interview. Two had obtained no education beyond high school, although one of these was an 18 year-old home-schooled student not yet out of high school.

EDUCATION (HIGHEST LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT):

Graduate Degree (completed or pursuing): 10

1 JD
 2 in law school
 2 in doctoral programs
 5 Master's Degrees

BA/ BS (completed or pursuing): 16

11 completed
 5 college students

Some College: 4

1 dropped out because she didn't like it
 1 dropped out so he could have more time for activism
 1 dropped out when he ran out of money and had to get a full-time job
 1 was planning to go back and finish

High School: 2

1 still in H.S.
 1 a few years out (no plans for college)

Geographic Region

Interviewees grew up in a variety of regions of the country. Some were from college towns, others were from suburban or small towns, a few grew up on farms or in rural/ semi-rural areas, and some were raised in or near cities. Participants came from most regions of the country, including the South, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and West.

Occupation

Fourteen of my interviewees were employed by animal rights/ animal protection organizations at the time of the interview (one was a summer intern). Organizations where activists worked at the time of the interview include The Fund for Animals (7), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (1), The Washington Humane Society (1), Animal Liberation League (1), The Humane Society of the United States (2), Farm Animal Reform Movement (1), and The Animals Agenda (1). One man was conducting a job search to find employment with an animal rights group (hoping to make a career transition from college teaching); I met him when he came to interview for a position at The Fund for Animals, where I worked from 2000-2001. Another had started her own business, an all vegan retail store. Two participants, who were married to each other, had co-founded their own organization, an animal sanctuary, where they worked full-time. Two participants worked at non-profit organizations representing feminist issues. One was an attorney who did animal law and represented animal rights activists on a pro bono basis. Two were full-time graduate students. Five had jobs unrelated to animal rights. Three were full-time college students and one was still in high school.

Beyond job or school obligations, all of my interview subjects volunteered copious amounts of time to animal rights activism, whether as part of their paid work or as volunteers. Many of those who worked for animal rights organizations as paid employees also participated in the actions of other local groups, either after work or on the weekends. Some had started their own animal rights groups. All of them could be considered “lifestyle activists,”¹⁸ in that they

¹⁸ I have adapted this term from Kidder’s (2004) study of bike messengers, in which he discusses the difference between “occupational messengers,” for whom messengering is only a job, and “lifestyle messengers,” for whom the occupation constitutes a significant part of their identity, provides membership in a valued subculture, and is therefore meaningfully integrated into their non-work lives. Activism is of course different than an occupation, but some forms of activism, like animal rights, probably lend themselves to more integration than others.

attempted to integrate their activism with the rest of their lives as much as they could. They did not engage in significant “boundary work” between activism and the rest of their lives (following Nippert-Eng’s [1996] distinction between home and work). In this way, their activism was very much a part of their core identity or “true self,” as opposed to “activist” being a role they occupied in their spare time or during the workday only. Very little role differentiation seems to exist with regard to activism among the members of my sample.

Marital Status and Family

Of the individuals in my sample, 20 were single, 8 were married, and 4 were divorced. Two of the men in my sample had children (not together) and one of the women and her husband were foster parents to a crack-addicted inner city baby, whom they were hoping to eventually adopt. None of the others had children, although some were planning to. The dearth of parents in my sample is both a function of the relatively young age of my participants as well as an over-representation of anti-breeding types in the animal rights movement. Although many lived with companion animals, I was surprised that more did not. Some felt that having companion animals would be difficult (as well as unfair to the animal) given some of their hectic schedules revolving around activism (which entailed frequent travel and sometimes time in jail). All believed they would be vegan for the rest of their lives, although some could imagine a time when they might not be activists per se, or at least not as active as they were at the time of the interview. Three of my participants were twins (in each case they were the only twin involved in activism at the time).

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS AN ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST?

Introduction

PARKER: ...oppression is oppression is oppression. There are different degrees of it, and unfortunately animals always seem to bear the greatest degree, but there's no difference between viewing animals as inferior as there is viewing blacks as inferior or women as inferior or foreigners...whether you believe in male supremacy or heterosexual supremacy or white supremacy or human supremacy it's the same mindset. Again, unfortunately for animals, the mindset of white supremacy doesn't lead to nearly as much suffering as the mindset of human supremacy does...

What is an animal rights activist? What kind of person is this? The most visible aspects of animal rights activism are the practices of activists: protests, demonstrations, education and outreach events, rallies, civil disobedience. But an examination of the practices of activists does not quite capture what is different about them; to understand this we must try to examine the less visible realm. In other words, we must ask, what is inside an animal rights activist's head?

This chapter will examine activists' beliefs, emotions, political ideology and worldview. Animal rights activists share some ideological elements with other political activists. For instance, the majority of activists tend to be leftist or at least liberal in their political outlook and their worldview is an extension of the general leftist sensibility that believes that boundaries are usually negative, for instance those constructed between genders, communities, races, and other ascribed statuses. Animal rights activists extend this boundary blurring sensibility to animals as well. Speciesism refers to the practice of using the biological category species as the sole criterion for deciding whether or not a sentient being should be given moral consideration, and

the underlying rationale of animal rights activists who fight against speciesism is identical to arguments used by other activists to combat racism and sexism.

At issue is the question of how to divide the world. Animal rights activists are very concerned with arbitrariness; hence the movement's close connection with philosophy. The question of how we should divide the world as well as which boundaries we place between others and ourselves is essentially a moral and philosophical one. Yet it is also a sociological question, for how we categorize people and animals is fundamentally an act of social construction and in this sense culturally driven. Americans do not keep dogs in the house and pigs on the plate because of biological differences between the two types of animals; which animal should be loved and which should be eaten is a question answered by culture.

It is not only a cognitive apprehension of, and resistance to, the conventional moral boundaries that have been placed between humans and all other animals that motivates activists. Emotions are also a driving and powerful force. In fact, many activists claim to be motivated more by emotion than by rational arguments, though they understand and use both. Although many activists believe that appeals to logic and philosophical arguments centered on abstract principles of fairness were more likely to convince others, they themselves were often more motivated, at least initially, by emotion.

Despite the prominence of emotions as motivators, and despite the popular image of activists as overwrought hysterics prone to mindless acts of terrorism and random acts of violence, animal rights activists are thinking people who make moral judgments. Both emotions and cognitions are important in constructing the worldview of the animal rights activist. Cognitive moral judgments and moral emotions interact in the mind of the animal rights activist to create a worldview that departs from the one provided by the dominant culture regarding

animals. To understand the thoughts and emotions of activists and how they come to believe what they believe, it is helpful to look at their conversion narratives, which came in response to the question, “How did you become involved with the animal rights movement?”

Cognition, Emotion, and Morality Construction

Activists reconstructed the story of becoming involved with the animal rights movement using two main framing¹⁹ devices: an emotional frame, which emphasizes sympathy, empathy, and compassion, and a cognitive frame, which emphasizes logic, justice, and rationality. These two frames are similar to Carol Gilligan’s (1982) identification of two primary moral conceptions derived from the different developmental constructs of men’s and women’s lives (p.19). She identifies these two conceptions of morality as an “ethic of care,” which centers on responsibility and relationships, and an “ethic of fairness,” which ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules. De Waal (1996) calls these types “sympathy-based morality” and “rule-based morality” (p. 119). In Gilligan’s research, women tended to identify with an ethic of care that was grounded in sympathy whereas men were more likely to employ an ethic of fairness that was grounded in rules.

Some critics have argued that Gilligan’s proposed sex differences represent convenient stereotypes and expectations regarding gender, and some studies attempting to replicate her

¹⁹ I borrow this term from Goffman (1974) and Snow and Benford (1988), although here I am using the term “framing” to refer to the mechanisms used by individuals to situate their conversion accounts within a larger vocabulary of motives (Mills 1940, Scott and Lyman 1968). The Goffmanian usage of the term is as a framework or cognitive schema that helps people interpret events and the world around them. These frames were unconsciously activated. In social movement theory, and in media studies, the term has been recast as a more active, conscious process, whereby individuals or groups deliberately frame events, bracketing off some parts of reality and highlighting others (Konig N.d.). My usage refers not to the framing of particular situations or issues, but rather to the way individuals frame their responses to themselves and others.

findings have found no significant differences in the moral orientations of men and women (Walker 1984). However, there is some evidence that empathy may be better developed in females.

On the basis of a wide range of studies, Martin Hoffman concludes that whereas the sexes are equally capable of assessing someone else's feelings, girls and women are more strongly *affected* by the resulting knowledge: 'Females may be more apt to imagine that what is happening to the other is happening to them; or, more specifically, to imagine how it would feel if the stimuli impinging on the other were impinging on the self' (Hoffman 1978, p. 718, quoted in de Waal 1996, p. 21 [italics in original]).

Whether these differences in empathic capacity and moral orientation, if indeed they do exist, are rooted primarily in biology or socialization is beyond the scope of this chapter. The relevant point is that both sympathy-based and rule-based orientations are available as cultural resources to be drawn upon to make sense of morally problematic situations that may arise in everyday life. These resources are part of the cultural "toolkit" that helps people to construct and maintain moral identities (Swidler 1986).

Animal rights activists often moved back and forth between justifications of the head and justifications of the heart in describing their conversion careers. A common pattern was for the heart (feelings and intuitions) to initially bring people into the movement's orbit; however, the more familiar they became with what is essentially a philosophical movement,²⁰ the more likely

²⁰ The emergence of the modern animal rights movement in the U.S. virtually coincided with the publication of utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975). Later philosophical works, such as Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), were also influential.

they were to learn the intellectual or “rational” justifications for what they feel.²¹ Groves (1997) uses the term “learned emotion” to describe this tendency to substantiate emotional responses with intellectual justifications. The animal protection advocates whom he studied characterized themselves as having progressed to greater levels of sophistication regarding their responses to animal cruelty, the longer they were involved with the cause. As one of Groves’ subjects succinctly expressed:

‘I think you go in under emotion,’ Linda said. ‘The longer you stay in it, the more educated you become. The emotion is still there,’ she added. ‘I don’t think it subsides. But it’s more a *learned emotion*’ [emphasis in original] (Groves 1997, p.143).

The theory that emotion precedes cognition exists in various academic disciplines, including biology (de Waal 1996), philosophy (Fox 1999), and sociology (Groves 1995, 1997).

²¹ In his very interesting ethnography of the controversy surrounding the use of live animals in scientific research in a university town, Julian McAllister Groves (1997) analyzes how both sides of this debate, animal protection advocates and pro-animal research scientists, utilized emotion and rationality to justify their positions to the public. Among the animal protection advocates that he studied, there was considerable ambivalence about emotion and its place in the movement. He found that although many came to the movement because of their emotional attachments to animals, they did not consider themselves to be emotional and instead favored a “rational” approach to dealing with animal cruelty, which emphasized scientific or philosophical justifications for animal protection (p. 27). He found that both older and younger activists devalued and downplayed emotion because they believed it trivialized animal protection. He also found that, “drawing on classic dichotomies between rationality and emotionality, most activists believed that their emotions alone could not justify to outsiders or themselves why they should take part in the movement” (p. 137). They thought that they would be easily dismissed by skeptics and opponents on the basis of emotion alone. Although they did not want to abandon their feelings altogether, they believed that they needed intellectual justification for what they felt so strongly. For this intellectual justification, they turned to the statistics found in animal rights literature and philosophical writings. Because emotion was perceived to be an illegitimate basis for action in the larger culture, activists privileged philosophical arguments. In part, they were responding to the notion that moral authority rests on substantiating feelings (about animal cruelty) with scientific, intellectual, or rational arguments (p.152). Because of this, according to Groves, “the people that the activists most respected rarely talk about pets. They talk about philosophy. The philosophers themselves are the high priests of the animal rights movement” (p.141).

Of the “meat insight experiences” (which I call “resistance to meat” and “meat epiphanies”) discussed by Amato and Partridge (1989), Fox (1999) writes that they:

... spring from basic emotional reactions and evidently bypass any conscious thinking process that could transform them into reasons for the agents concerned (although we – and they – might retrospectively so identify them). In these cases a decision has already been made to give up meat, apparently very directly and quite independently of the sort of logical deliberation and choice that, for philosophers at any rate, generally serves as a model of self consciously rational behavior (p. 65-66).

Fox also believes that emotional responses involving compassion, love, reverence, and even feelings of disgust or squeamishness (p. 110, p. 117, p. 121, p. 57), should be considered *moral emotions*, which are inborn ways of reacting. An important part of socialization (especially socialization to roles compatible with traditional masculinity) is learning to suppress emotion. Paraphrasing Richard Ryder (1987), he writes:

Crucial to this process of maturation is the ability to overcome squeamishness, which we teach to our children so that they can enjoy and participate in fishing, hunting, farming, meat-eating, and – if we think necessary – waging war... Ryder maintains that we customarily condition our young (and ourselves) to hold in check certain inborn responses that would, if cultivated, connect us to other animals and develop in us a gentler, more compassionate nature (Fox 1999, p. 59).

In this view, emotions (at least the moral emotions with which Fox is concerned) are innate; we are born with the capacity for these feelings, but we learn through the process of socialization how to suppress or channel them appropriately. We also learn the rational justifications for our emotions in retrospect, after already acting upon them.

This view is consistent with sociological accounts of emotional socialization (e.g. Thoits 1989, Groves 1995), which stress how our culture or social group basically teaches us how to feel, or how to feel about having certain feelings. In these views, cognition follows and gives meaning to emotion. In philosophy, as well, it is commonly believed that “moral sentiments come first; moral principles, second” (de Waal 1996, p. 87). In other words, emotion precedes

reason. Despite the fact that scientific and rational justifications for action are privileged in American culture, evidenced in part by the historical tendency for moral emotions to be subsumed under abstract principles of ethics, philosophy, or logic in order to lend them legitimacy, emotions may be more important for individuals as motivators of action:

Despite Immanuel Kant's opinion that kindness out of duty has greater moral worth than kindness out of temperament, if push comes to shove, sentiments win out. This is what the parable of the Good Samaritan is all about. A half-dead victim by the side of the road is ignored first by a priest, then by a Levite – both religious and ethically conscious men – yet receives care from the third passerby, a Samaritan. The biblical message is to be wary of ethics by the book rather than by the heart: only the Samaritan, a religious outcast, felt compassion (de Waal 1996, p. 87).

In this line of thinking, the locus of the “true self” may be found in the heart rather than the head; emotions are the windows to the soul and, as such, are thought to be authentic indicators of this true self. Again, in this view, emotions are innate responses that cognitive processes imbue with meaning after the fact.

Another, contrary, thread of research has analyzed the inauthentic character of emotion in modern times (Hochschild 1983). Human feeling has become commercialized and emotions are just another commodity to be bought and sold, especially for service workers, primarily women, for whom self-presentation is particularly important in customer interactions and who are expected to engage in “emotional labor” as part of performing their job duties. According to Hochschild, this emotion work can cause people to become alienated from their own feelings. Although emotions are often thought to come before rational justifications, at times rational calculation precedes the display of emotion, as in the case of the flight attendants whom Hochschild studied. For the purposes of this chapter, the important point is that both emotion and rationality are used to give meaning to the experience of conversion and morality construction among animal rights activists.

Types of Emotional and Cognitive Accounts

In this section, I will discuss the themes subsumed under each frame. Each element contains features of the other but they are presented here as ideal-types. I characterize them based on the dominant or most salient process at work. For example, meat ephiphanies, which I include under emotional responses, are the result of an act of cognitive linking. However, the emotional response to the cognition is what gives the act its meaning, hence its being included within the emotion-intuition frame. Also, cognitive empathy involves an evaluation that is perhaps not devoid of emotion; indeed, one can argue that no act of cognition is without emotion and vice versa. However, compared with “sympathetic” empathy, the “cognitive” form is more reliant upon some application of a universal principle and hence my dividing empathy into these two forms.

Moral Intuitions Versus Moral Principles

The emotion-intuition frame contains responses motivated primarily by 1.) sympathetic empathy; 2.) intuitions; and 3.) moral shocks (including meat insight experiences). *Sympathetic empathy* is an emotional response that entails mental projection into another’s situation and vicariously feeling what he or she would, as if it were happening directly to you. This response is embodied by the quote: “It hurts me to see it.” Empathy does not necessarily lead to sympathy (de Waal 1996), for empathy alone is not enough. For instance, empathy can lead to *Schadenfreude*, which is the direct opposite of sympathy, in other words, taking pleasure in another’s pain or discomfort. Hence, the very same ability can lead to a different and opposite response.

However, empathy may lead to sympathy if combined with attachment (de Waal 1996, p. 85). I believe it is the connection with animals felt by my respondents that leads their empathy to take the form of sympathy. De Waal writes, “Identifying with and caring about another without losing one’s own identity is the crux of human sympathy... this requires certain cognitive abilities, the most important one being a well-developed sense of self and the ability to assume another individual’s perspective” (p. 82). As Mead argued (1934), role-taking is essential for the development of the social self. Mead was writing specifically about human social actors taking the role of other human social actors. When role-taking involves taking the role of the “animal other,” however, sympathetic empathy rooted in identification and attachment may occur, as the individual perspective taken is that of a nonhuman animal.

The primary difference between sympathetic empathy as I define it and cognitive empathy, which I define below, is that sympathetic empathy involves taking the role of a specific animal other and “feeling into”²² them, whereas cognitive empathy involves more detachment and a stronger barrier between self and other. Cognitive empathy is characterized by the logical application of moral principles involving fair treatment, with consistency and without prejudice, and as such is less “personal.” *Intuitions* are vague, unarticulated feelings of discomfort or uneasiness (about eating meat, for instance), which often precede specific conversion-related

²² On the emotional versus cognitive bases of empathy, de Waal writes: “...if some scientists believe that empathy is based on language or that helping involves a rational weighing of costs and benefits, they are probably overestimating the power of human reasoning and underestimating the role of emotions and subconscious motivations. The word ‘empathy’ was coined as a translation of *Einführung*, a German term that became popular in academic circles early in this century. Inasmuch as *Einführung* literally means ‘feeling into,’ in the sense of getting inside the feelings of someone else, the German word exquisitely balances the interpersonal and affective sides of the process. In a time in which empathy is discussed largely as a cognitive feat, and in which cognition is often compared to the working of a cold-blooded computer, we should remember that the human mind knows no neat dividing lines between thought and feeling. One individual’s caring for another depends on a *mosaic* of factors ranging from rational and cognitive to emotive and physiological” (p. 79 [emphasis in original]).

experiences, but are remembered in retrospect. They are commonly remembered as having occurred in childhood, but can be experienced by adults as well. The matter of intuitions will not be explored here because it is discussed further in the next chapter on predispositions.

*Moral shocks*²³ involve strong negative reactions to things seen or read, for example, a video depicting animal slaughter or a pamphlet describing animal testing. Such experiences elicit intense feelings of surprise, disgust, guilt, compassion, injustice, or sadness.²⁴ Meat epiphanies are also included in the category of moral shocks. They occur when an explicit connection is made between the meat one is eating and the animal from whence it came; this is a function of cognitive linking, but the result is an emotional wave of shock and discomfort. Meat epiphanies also occur when an individual makes a connection between the animal that they are eating and other animals, such as pets. In this case, the boundary between “food” and “pet” collapses and is suddenly and discomfortingly perceived as an arbitrary social construction. The person is left with only the category “animal” as meaningful. Meat epiphanies were experienced by many of my respondents in childhood. These childhood epiphanies took the form of early attempts to resist meat, a preference that their parents either indulged or vetoed. The phenomenon of childhood meat resistance and its frequency of occurrence among my respondents will also be discussed further in the next chapter.

The logic-rationality frame contains responses based on abstract principles having to do with logic or fairness, such as 1.) cognitive empathy/ speciesism²⁵; 2.) moral consistency; and 3.) moral equation. *Cognitive empathy* is the ability to put oneself in the “shoes of [another] entity without losing the distinction between self and other” (de Waal 1996, p. 69). Cognitive empathy

²³ The term “moral shock” is borrowed from Jasper and Poulsen’s (1995) research on animal rights activists.

²⁴ These are the emotions that Fox (1999) calls “moral emotions.”

²⁵ Although Richard Ryder originally coined the term “speciesism” in 1970, it was popularized outside of academic philosophy by Peter Singer (1975).

is different from sympathetic empathy in that the person does not necessarily imagine what it would feel like if whatever is happening to the animal is happening directly to them. It is based on role-taking but the distinction between self and other remains strong, in contrast with sympathetic empathy, in which a manifest blurring of the boundary between self and other occurs.

Cognitive empathy is embodied in the principle of “the golden rule,” which states that one should treat others as one would like to be treated (in this case the rule is expanded to include animal “others”). This is a moral principle that can be applied in a variety of situations without necessarily identifying directly with the *feelings* of the other. *Speciesism* is a philosophical construct comparing animal exploitation to racism and sexism. It is not necessary to know this term in order to use the logic behind it as a justification. Crucial to its invocation as a justification is the arbitrariness of the purported boundary between humans and animals, and as such it is an outgrowth of cognitive empathy.

Moral consistency is characterized by attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance (the tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions) and to create harmony between beliefs and actions (Festinger 1957, Heider 1946). This is a very explicit exercise in logic and relies heavily on cognitive rather than emotional processes. *Moral equation* is a form of reasoning that involves a cost-benefit analysis, which weighs the pleasure or convenience of consumers against the suffering of animals. In these calculations, the animal’s interests are

explicitly taken into account along with the interests of the human actor, a form that is not typical of cost-benefit analyses, which usually only consider costs and benefits to the individual.²⁶

These two types of vocabularies of motive are not mutually exclusive; in other words, elements of each can be found in the conversion career of a single activist. As noted earlier, recruitment to the animal rights movement can be experienced as either a quick change or a gradual process. When conversion happens more gradually, the process is sometimes characterized by distinct steps, in that years may pass between the time the person went vegetarian and the time they later go vegan or “join” the animal rights movement (here I am defining “joining the movement” as an affiliation with a formal social movement organization in addition to the lifestyle level of ethical veganism). Before a person takes the first step of going vegetarian, they may experience moral shocks that trigger sympathetic empathy (consistent with the emotional frame) or certain thought patterns and cognitions (consistent with the rational frame) that put them solidly on the path toward embracing an animal liberation philosophy and lifestyle, even though some time may pass between A.) when the first signs of a new consciousness emerge and B.) when definitive action is taken in this direction and then C.) when the new consciousness and lifestyle becomes integrated into the person’s meaningful sense of self (often developing characteristics of a master status, as I will discuss in Chapter 7).

Because recruitment to the animal rights movement is a process that may take place in stages or over a period of time, different frames of motive may be used at different phases of the

²⁶ For instance, in resource mobilization theory, the primary conception of the social movement participant is as a rational actor pursuing his or her own interests in a calculated manner (Buechler 1993). Rational action in this context does not seem to include pursuing the interests of others, but I think that one could reasonably be an “altruistic” rational actor, pursuing concrete goals and interests not for oneself but for a voiceless or oppressed “other.” This applies in situations other than advocacy for animals. For instance, the white college students who joined the civil rights movement during “Freedom Summer” in 1964 were obviously pursuing goals that would directly affect a group other than themselves (McAdam 1988).

recruitment process. For instance, it was more typical for activists to use rational frames when going vegan than when going vegetarian. And, as stated earlier, it was not uncommon for activists to respond in a more emotional manner at the beginning stages of activism and to later incorporate a more philosophical, rational motivation for their behavior.

The finding that emotion is the major impetus to action, which is only later eclipsed, or at least augmented, by intellectual arguments, is consistent with Groves' (2001) research on emotion work among animal rights activists. He argues that women animal rights activists make the conscious decision to downplay emotion in order to appear more rational to the public. This emotion work is thought to be necessary because emotion is 1.) devalued in the dominant culture and 2.) associated with women, as is the animal rights movement, which results in sexist stereotypes. The women he studied were middle-class professionals and used a discourse that reflected their social position, as well as their struggle to be taken seriously in an environment where being a woman and being labeled "emotional" was perceived to have a doubly deleterious effect. Although it is true that emotion is not considered as legitimate as scientific or "rational" ways of knowing, Groves shows that it is also the association of emotion with traditional femininity that contributes to its denigration; evidence of this may be seen in the double standard whereby men, but not women, in the movement are praised and rewarded for showing emotions in public. Women in the movement believe that in order to be taken seriously, they must avoid appearing emotional. The double standard is that when men display the same emotional behavior, they are rewarded (Groves 2001, Groves 1997).

Groves points out that he is not making statements about what is going on inside activists' heads; he is merely analyzing how they present their arguments to the public, which

may or may not reflect how they actually feel or think. He is interested in the use of the term “emotional” as a political device:

In the setting that I studied, predominantly professional women in a grassroots animal rights organization try to gain legitimacy for their cause in a patriarchal community that trivializes issues that have been traditionally associated with women. The animal rights activists use the term *emotional* to describe those individuals whose approach to animal protection they consider to be less legitimate. The term “emotional” is thus used in a political way. This approach does not answer the traditional resource mobilization question of why individuals join the animal rights movement... Rather, my analysis looks at *why a social movement takes the form it does*. I seek to explain why the animal rights movement embraces a scientific, philosophical outlook rather than takes the form of a movement for compassion and kindness...as its predecessor, the humane movement, did in the nineteenth century (Groves 2001, pgs. 213-214 [emphasis in original]).

Rather than focus on how activists strategically present an image to the public, I am more concerned with how they construct accounts of their own personal involvement. Rather than analyze why the movement has taken the shape it has, I address the traditional resource mobilization question of why individuals join the animal rights movement. Although our research questions are different, like Groves my approach is basically that of symbolic interactionism (p. 213), since I analyze how activists construct and communicate moral meaning when asked to recreate their experiences.

In this chapter I also draw upon Jasper and Poulsen’s (1995) research on “moral shocks” and their role in recruiting potential activists to the animal rights movement. In a survey of animal rights activists who had attended public demonstrations, they found that a majority were recruited through things that they had “seen, read or heard,” rather than through “social networks,” the most salient factor explaining recruitment to social movements within the resource mobilization paradigm (Snow, et. al. 1980). Jasper and Poulsen found that although social networks were in fact the most important predictor of activism for the anti-nuclear power

activists whom they also surveyed, the animal rights activists did not fit this pattern. Although they point out that people are not recruited to an entire belief system – activists already must care about an issue before being recruited – the things seen, read or heard can act as “moral shocks,” which then become a catalyst for persons who may be predisposed by beliefs they already hold to get involved in the movement.

The Emotion-Intuition Frame

Many of the responses that fall under the emotion-intuitive frame manifested themselves at a very young age; therefore these will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, which deals specifically with predispositions and early incidents. It is not only young people who are motivated by emotion and intuition, however; adults, too, are motivated especially by the fact that they actually feel hurt when they imagine another animal in pain and also by intuitions that it is just “wrong” to hurt an animal. For the latter, it has always seemed “obvious” to them that it is wrong to hurt an animal and this obviousness puts them on the path to vegetarianism and animal rights. For the former, a moral shock that exposes the person to some aspect of cruelty, which had heretofore been unknown, can be unbearable when that person’s sense of compassion forces them to imagine what the animal is going through in any given negative situation. The moral shock combined with this sense of sympathetic empathy is a strong catalyst to action.

Sympathetic Empathy, Moral Intuitions, and Moral Shocks

It was common for activists to feel physical or mental anguish when imagining situations of cruelty or suffering. Violet cites sympathetic empathy as being the main impetus for her convictions; in other words, it hurts *her* to think of an animal being in pain:

VIOLET: ... It's really just compassion I guess. The thought of an animal being hurt is just, it's very painful for me, you know? I can feel it, almost... I guess that's it.

Intuitions usually precede specific experiences like moral shocks. Later experiences are often seen as corroborating or bringing to the surface intuitions felt at an earlier time. Intuitions can predispose someone to experience a moral shock. Sometimes intuitions can take the form of the “logic of the obvious,” which could also be summed up by the Bob Dylan lyric, “You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.” Obviousness can take the form of trusting one's emotions or “gut” and questioning the need for experts to tell us what is, or should be, apparent. Katie does not need scientists, philosophers, or other specialists to tell her what she already knows and thinks should be obvious to everyone:

KATIE:... I don't feel like 'I'm a utilitarian and I believe in the teleology of the blah blah blah.' I'm just like, everybody wants to live and be happy. That's so obvious ... who needs a goddamn philosophy to realize that? And everybody should be free to do that, and not hurt other people or other beings in so doing. And no, I don't even need a philosophy really at all... They're suffering; they need help... and it amazes me too that people are like, 'well now scientists are showing that dolphins are very intelligent. They believe parrots may dream.' You know, it's like REALLY?? I mean it's like so obvious...just be around animals. Clearly they're thinking things... we have to have science justify that they just might have self-interests?

Moral shocks (including meat epiphanies), while they can be powerful for the individual, occur in a social context, which means there are competing socializing influences at work; in many cases, especially for children, the dominant culture is stronger. This issue will be explored more thoroughly in later chapters.

Many of my interviewees also expressed feeling a special closeness with animals while growing up.²⁷ While not all of them expressed this fondness for animals, a majority did, which is consistent with Jasper and Poulsen's observation that animal rights activists care deeply about animals before a moral shock can occur, and that people are recruited to a social movement, not a belief system. However, in terms of animal rights, a love of animals or a compassionate disposition only takes a person so far; there is a point at which they do have to be converted to a belief system, or come into contact with an alternative thought community or cognitive subculture (Zerubavel 1997), that provides an alternative to the dominant culture.

Learning to Control Emotion

Like Groves (1997, 2001), I found that some people are initially drawn to the movement out of compassion but later discover they must downplay emotion in order to be taken seriously. As Groves points out, the decision that emotion must be de-emphasized in favor of "scientific" or "rational" arguments particularly affects women, who are aware that they are in a movement that is perceived as female-dominated and emotion-driven, and hence is not perceived as legitimate or serious. The professional activists who deal with representatives of government agencies and members of the public on a regular basis, like Hannah, who is the national director of The Animal Trust, probably engage in this type of emotion-work more often than do rank and file activists.

²⁷ It seems that a fondness for animals growing up, coupled with a more sensitive disposition, may make it more likely that one will not only experience a meat epiphany at some point, but also to act upon it. This is not to suggest that a love for animals and a sensitive nature are prerequisites for later becoming an animal rights activist; but those individuals lacking these traits may be less likely to be motivated by emotion and more likely to report cognitive reasons for changing their lifestyle (i.e. a concern with logical consistency, etc.). I conceptualize affinity with animals and general sensitivity as "predisposing conditions," which I discuss more fully in the next chapter.

HANNAH: ...I went through a stage probably maybe seven or eight years ago when I first got into working at [The Animal Trust] where I felt like I had to be intellectual, and I had to combat the overly emotional side that we're always accused of, and I felt like I had to battle on that front rather than embrace the emotional reasons why I came into the movement, and it was actually a period of growth to realize I was turning my back on something that is the very reason that most people get into this movement and then when you think it through, it's stupid to deny your emotions and there's nothing negative about caring and compassion and here we were like turning compassion into a negative trait, which I think is a mistake... You can have both, the best of both worlds. But I think emotion motivates you much more strongly than intellect.

In addition to the fact that Hannah felt that she had to combat the "overly emotional" stigma placed on animal rights activists, the fact that she was a woman working on a male-dominated issue (hunting) also played a role in her decision to engage in emotion work.

HANNAH: ... I felt that to compete on the male dominated wildlife biologist field that I had to come out very strongly rational... particularly in this field we all get accused of Bambi syndrome, so I found myself just constantly arguing the science of deer management and totally leaving out the deer, which is the whole reason why we're doing this. So you find a balance... you have to play in their field and in a male-dominated field like wildlife biology is you kinda do have to play that card.

Impression-management aside, Hannah finds that she herself is motivated more by intellect than emotion at this point. In addition to intellect supplanting emotion as a motivating force, activists learn to better control their emotions the longer that they are involved in the movement. If emotions were not eventually brought under control then they might get in the way of effective activism. Hannah finds that she is now able to distance herself from her emotions, a feat that she found impossible when she first became involved with animal rights and one which she believes helps her actions to be more efficacious. In some ways, however, she mourns the passing of her strong emotional drive.

HANNAH: ... I actually think I'm much more clinical now, and there're positives and negatives to that. I think the longer I've been in the movement, now the emotional component is contained probably somewhere deep inside me, which I

think allows me to be a hell of a lot more objective, to look at campaigns in a real analytic way of, what do we need to do now to achieve our next goal? And unfortunately I think it deadens the component of why you get into this. It doesn't change the drive but the drive is much more based on intellect now... so it's different.

It is perhaps not surprising that the longer a person is involved in the movement, the more adept they become at controlling their emotions. Without achieving this distance, a person could be easily engulfed by their emotions and sink into unproductive depression.²⁸ Overwhelming emotions can exact a psychic toll, resulting in feelings of despair if some sense of efficacy is not maintained. Activists tend to become better at this as time passes.

VIOLET: ...I used to let it get to me a lot more than I do... when I was younger I used to get the mail and I'd read the letters and just start crying, reading what's going on. But now that I feel like I'm more part of the solution, I'm just better able to put it aside... But it doesn't always work.

The emotional impact of the initial moral shock(s) or other turning point-inducing experience is often mitigated through lifestyle changes (including going vegan or becoming an activist), which enable the individual to resist feeling helpless and to instead feel that she is part of the solution, as Violet stated. The key for many activists is to translate negative emotions, which could become detrimental and overwhelming, into a sense of personal efficacy. If this does not happen, it is less likely that a new convert will stay actively involved with the animal rights movement for any length of time.

As Violet intimated, attempts to harness emotions do not always work. Sympathetic empathy can be a particularly strong response that is not easily suppressed. Once knowledge is gained about animal suffering, through videos, books, pamphlets and other materials, it can be difficult for those prone to feelings of sympathetic empathy to "turn it off." When this happens,

²⁸ Activist burnout is a problem common to all social movements and may be particularly pronounced in movements such as the animal rights movement, which tend to evoke emotional responses and yet provide relatively few tangible successes (compared to the scope of the problem from an abolitionist/ liberationist perspective).

a flood of unwelcome images may haunt the person. These images of animal suffering can cause feelings of despair and sadness, but they also can be an important source of motivation. These images can take the form of memories or scenarios imagined to be occurring at that moment. The common element in post-conversion scenarios of sympathetic empathy is the imagined suffering of the animal, which causes a pain response in the person imagining the scene. A key characteristic of sympathetic empathy is minimal detachment between self and other, so these mental images can be profoundly painful.

FRED: ... it really hurts that we can't do more for the animals. For every minute that I'm upset that no one's going vegan...it hurts because of personal failure. But more than that, the images don't go away, the images of animals being slaughtered, or trapped in a fur farm... the most disturbing thing to me is pictures of animals in cages just spinning around because they're insane, and have nowhere to go, totally divorced from their natural order and their natural lives. It's maddening to watch, and that is just sheer and utter pain. And to be able to empathize with that is... I mean I'm grateful for it, but it's awful to live with at the same time. It makes me often wish that I never went vegetarian to begin with, never made any step toward it – ever.

A significant difference between pre-conversion and post-conversion experiences of sympathetic empathy is that in the pre-conversion condition the empathic response acts as a stimulus to make a personal change, either by changing one's lifestyle or becoming an activist or both. In this way, a sense of personal control and efficacy mitigates the unpleasant experience.²⁹ As Shapiro (1994) writes, "Just as nonhuman animal suffering pervades society, so every aspect of activists' lives – diet, dress, diversions – is designed to expunge the taint of animals exploited for human ends" (p. 11). Removing one's personal responsibility for suffering can make the

²⁹ See Kenneth Shapiro (1994) on the ability to see suffering (and the motivation to do something about it) as a characteristic of animal rights activists. According to Shapiro, activists choose among a variety of coping mechanisms to help them deal with melancholy and potential alienation from the wider society. One resolution, common in all social movements, is to seek or create a community of likeminded individuals. Another resolution, which I have addressed briefly here, is "suppressing the caring" (p. 11), which involves putting one's emotions on hold to protect oneself and to be able work more effectively.

knowledge of this suffering more bearable. But in post-conversion empathy experiences, there is less one can do, other than make a commitment to become *more* committed or to do more.

Noelle is sometimes haunted by images of animal experimentation involving cats.

NOELLE: ... especially when I'll be in bed with Belle [her cat]. I'll be sitting there petting her and sometime I'll just get images of cats with, you know, their brains are sticking out with electrical things in them and I'll just be like, I'm so glad you're not there. I'll just be hugging her, and it's just so horrible. I'll start crying and be like, oh my god, there's actually cats going through this right now, or iguanas, dogs, parakeets, whatever. And it will really, REALLY get to me. I'll just burst into tears sometimes... I feel like I should be out there doing so much more, sometimes, when I think of that kind of stuff. I'm not doing enough. There's so much more I need to be doing right now. There shouldn't be a spare moment in my life... It can just really get to me.

Ferdinand made a deeper commitment to animals after visiting a hog farm and seeing the conditions in which the creatures were kept. Although he was already vegan, it was at this point that he decided to commit himself to the cause of animal rights. These particular pigs became a symbol to him, which he never forgot. His parents took him to this farm because they wanted to show him that conditions for the animals were not as bad as he thought and that veganism was hence unnecessary. However, they ended up being "horrified." His mother is now a vegetarian herself.

FERDINAND: ... one incident after my conversion that really made a strong impact on me was when I went to a pig farm in southeast Minnesota... my grandmother lived in Wisconsin, she knew a lot of dairy farmers and she said, can our family come out and see your places? ... so we went out there and my parents were horrified at what they saw...and they realized that these were small family farms... but I went to this hog farm and it really had an impact on me. There was... enough space in the barn for 240 hogs; it was a very tiny enclosure. It was a single-family operation but it certainly looked like a factory farm. 30-40 of the pigs had just died of pneumonia and they all had their tails docked. They were all standing and laying in their own feces... and I videotaped it, and the pigs would just, they looked into my eyes and I could see their eyes. And I didn't know, but pigs have eyes that are just like human eyes. They have the whites and the irises and the pupils and they were just looking at me, and I felt so totally defeated and powerless in that moment, because I knew exactly the brutality that awaited them beyond the misery that they were already living in, you know, the disease and the

confinement and the filth and the smells that they were bombarded with. You know, [they have] sensitive noses that can smell roots underneath the ground and here they are bombarded in this ammonia saturated air from all of their waste, which is allegedly collected in pits beneath them, but is also strewn all about their own facilities. And I just felt so powerless and helpless. And I just made a commitment to them that I was going to bust my ass to do whatever I could... I went away from there just really committed to fight and make it happen and do whatever it took to help these animals get a better life.

The Logic-Rationality Frame³⁰

Although emotion may lead people to the movement and its ideas, almost all of them at some point learn the intellectual justifications for their feelings, usually in the form of philosophical arguments. Sometimes this is done in a calculated way in order to project a certain image to the public, as Groves (2001) points out, and sometimes it reflects how the individual has constructed (and expanded) their own personal narrative of moral justification, or the reasons that they give themselves and others for their action.

While the feeling frame is used to describe “gut” or emotional reactions, the cognitive frame is used to talk about personal moral philosophies, or how moral calculations find their way into the everyday lives of activists. Themes which fall under the logic frame are cognitive empathy and speciesism, moral consistency, and moral equation. When people frame their involvement in terms of logical arguments they typically talk about the fact that one should be consistent in their positions and not be a hypocrite (logical consistency), or that the pleasure of consuming an animal product does not “equal” the amount of suffering the animal endured (moral equation). And “speciesism” equates animal exploitation with oppression and

³⁰ I do not mean to suggest that the logic-rationality reasons *always* come after and out of emotional responses. Some activists seemed to be involved purely for cognitive reasons and did not mention emotional responses in their reconstructions of their conversion careers and motives. However, the vast majority of my interviewees experienced a combination of both, and a common pattern was for emotional motivations to come first and later be augmented with philosophical justifications and other logic-rationality reasons.

discrimination against human groups and challenges the boundary between the species, in terms of moral consideration.³¹

While many people report initially being moved by emotions and only later learning the intellectual justifications for what they felt or “knew” with their gut, others are converted first with their minds and then with their hearts, or with both simultaneously. For these people, like Jamison below, the equation of “animal rights” with “emotional” can be irritating. He is annoyed by the stereotype of animal advocates as overly emotional, and has an interesting perspective on the relationship between logic and emotion. He thinks that if one holds a belief that is grounded in logic and rationality, then one is more likely to be emotional about it. Sometimes reason may beget emotion, rather than vice versa. Also note his observation that animal rights activists are scrutinized more in this matter than for instance, civil rights activists. The theme that animal rights is perceived as a non-legitimate social cause more than other social movements will be taken up in a later chapter.

JAMISON: ...they think we're different and crazy... that we're emotional. That's the one that bothers me the most – that we have the views that we have based on our emotions, which is to say our flightiness, not backed by reason. And that bothers me a lot because I was converted...in a very intellectually rigorous environment, Yale University, you know, reading philosophy and stuff like that. And I was converted first with my mind and then with my heart or pretty much simultaneously, but the way I first approached it was in terms of rational arguments and reason and logic and stuff. So when people look at us and say, oh you're just overly emotional, you're hypersensitive, that bothers me a lot... We feel strongly about this but that... doesn't mean that our arguments are not based on rational grounds. I think that if you have a belief based on rational, logical grounds then you are more apt to be emotional about it, and feel strongly about it. Martin Luther King was certainly very emotional about his civil rights stuff. Nobody said, oh you're just hypersensitive and hysterical. No, he did both and I think animal rights people do both and do it well. And don't expect us to be non-

³¹ Of this boundary, Shapiro (1994) writes, “Cognitively, many people exaggerate the categorical distinctions between human and nonhuman species of animals. Such overdrawn distinctions then allow ‘outgroup biases’ [Plous 1993, p. 29] to come into play. These further distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’ and support the failure to register their suffering” (p. 6).

emotional about something we feel this strongly about; but that doesn't mean that there's no logic behind what we're thinking.

Cognitive Empathy and Speciesism

While anti-speciesism³² is at the root of moral calculations that give serious moral consideration to the interests of animals, as those listed above, more overt uses of anti-speciesist discourse involve the perceived arbitrariness of common applications of morality. Why are only human beings worthy of moral consideration? What is the essential difference, really, between a dog and a cow (speaking from a biological not cultural perspective)? It is often the exercise of cognitive empathy that makes the anti-speciesism argument persuasive. Often when someone reads a philosophical analysis of animal rights and speciesism it “just makes sense” in the way that, for most people at least, (overt) sexism and racism seem wrong today. One does not have to be emotionally involved or even directly engaged with animals or animal suffering to recognize the concepts themselves as persuasive, and as matters of justice not emotion. Just as human rights activists do not need to love people to be motivated to work for justice, neither do animal rights activists *necessarily* feel any emotion toward animals, although it is commonly assumed by outsiders that they do.

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, many people do come to the movement through emotional frames of action, yet this is not true of all activists. In fact, Peter Singer, who is considered by many to be the founder of the modern animal rights movement, in his preface to

³² Speciesists, according to Singer (1975), violate the principle of equality, which does not require equal *treatment*, but rather equal *consideration* of interests. Comparing it with racism and sexism, he writes: “Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each case” (p. 9).

Animal Liberation (1975), made it a point to tell readers that he and his wife did not “love” animals:

Neither of us had ever been inordinately fond of dogs, cats, or horses in the way that many people are. We didn't ‘love’ animals. We simply wanted them treated as the independent sentient beings that they are, and not as means to human ends... The assumption that in order to be interested in such matters one must be an ‘animal-lover’ is itself an indication of the absence of the slightest inkling that the moral standards that we apply among human beings might extend to other animals. No one, except a racist concerned to smear his opponents as ‘nigger-lovers,’ would suggest that in order to be concerned about equality for mistreated racial minorities you have to love those minorities, or regard them as cute and cuddly. So why make this assumption about people who work for improvements in the conditions of animals (pp. ii,iii)?

Similarly, the following activist frames his motivation almost completely in philosophical and intellectual terms. Rather than originating in emotions or a love for animals, his motivation stems from his perception of animal right as an issue of justice:

NELSON: I'm not really a total animal lover ...I guess maybe it's just the philosophical thing that keeps me going... but in general I don't think of myself as an animal lover... I just feel like it's probably more of an intellectual thing for me... it's like justice is the big issue, you know? I could say, I love justice. But it's not like a warm, fuzzy kind of love. It's a solid thing that really draws my attention.

Aside from the plain fact that some animal right activists are simply not “animal-lovers,” reasons for this distancing from emotions, such as love for animals, include those already mentioned, i.e. the devaluing of emotion in the larger culture, particularly because of its historical association with femininity, and conversely, traditional norms and expectations regarding masculinity and the expression of “feminine” emotions. Also, as Singer states, “The portrayal of those who protest against cruelty to animals as sentimental, emotional ‘animal-lovers’ has had the effect of excluding the entire issue of our treatment of nonhumans from serious political and moral discussion” (p.iii). Why this should be so is an interesting question and similar to those being asked by social movements theorists who, in recent years, have

increasingly begun to incorporate a sociology of emotions into social movement theory (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001).

Rhetorical and political reasons to deny emotion and elevate philosophy aside, there are those whose passions are ignited more profoundly by emotion and compassion, and those who are persuaded more by philosophical arguments, which sometimes serve to corroborate what the person has already been feeling intuitively but lacked the language to express:

EVAN: ... I read *Animal Liberation* around that time and that book just changed it all... I remember reading it that summer... I remember sitting down one afternoon and reading it cover to cover in like a day and just being like, this is definitely, this is exactly what I'm thinking on so many levels. And I think it spoke to me just because it was, I don't want to say intellectual, but it was like he was arguing on philosophical grounds as well and that just made more sense to me. I felt like he backed it up in so many ways.

Sherlock, too, felt that *Animal Liberation* corroborated what he already felt inside but could not articulate. I asked him whether the most important factor in his going vegetarian was having read Singer's book:

SHERLOCK: Absolutely. I mean that was it. But, see Peter Singer's words confirmed and reflected what I already felt but...I couldn't articulate it. It was just a feeling I had inside of me. You used the word epiphany and that's what it was reading his words. It was just resonating. It was like, yes, this makes sense. I agree with this. And so I don't know what from my childhood put that inside of me, but it was there, so when I read the book it was very easy.

Sam did not experience a moral shock, nor did he mention having had an emotional reaction. From the first time that he heard about it, animal rights and vegetarianism just made sense to him and seemed "really logical." He thinks that it probably never occurred to him earlier only because meat eating is made to seem "natural" when everyone around you is doing it.

SAM: ... I sort of remember meeting people who were vegetarians for the first time and they were telling me about why they were vegetarian... and I remember immediately thinking how much sense it made to me. It's just really logical... So I read *Animal Liberation*, this is when I was 14 years old I think, and so shortly after I read that I gradually began the progression towards vegetarianism... it just seemed like I'd never even thought about where my food came from before... I don't think I ever made the connection before that I was eating dead animals...when someone pointed that out to me I was just like, wow, that's disgusting, and then... when I made that connection I was kind of turned off by the fact, the thought that I was eating a dead animal. It was kind of weird...why I never thought about it before. I guess when you grow up and it's just so natural and you're just surrounded by everyone who does it...you never question it.

In between making the lifestyle transition to veganism and becoming an activist, Parker read some of the well-known animal rights philosophy books, including *Animal Liberation* (Singer 1975), *The Case for Animal Rights* (Regan 1983) and *Diet for a New America* (Robbins 1987), which made sense to him on an intellectual level, especially the arguments against speciesism. Boundaries, specifically the perception of their arbitrary nature, are an important issue here. For Parker the meaningfulness of the boundary between humans and other species began to be questioned.

PARKER: ...Singer's book was very easy to understand and I remember thinking yeah, you know, he's right. If racism is wrong, then speciesism has to be wrong because there's no point, it's just an arbitrary characteristic to decide well, you know, we're going to include people of other races, but species is where we draw the line. It's like, why species? Why not phylum or kingdom? It could be anywhere. And to actually pick a characteristic like sentience and to be able to say, yeah, this is what matters and it matters because this is the necessary and sufficient characteristic for interests. You can't have interests unless you can feel pain and pleasure...like rocks don't have any interests at all. It doesn't matter if you kick it or whatever. So something that was actually a morally relevant characteristic, like sentience, I was very enthused by that to say, well, yeah this is not arbitrary like species or race or gender or class. This is something that's really worthwhile. So that got me interested in the philosophy aspect of it.

"The golden rule" (to treat others as you wish to be treated) came up again and again in the moral discourse of animal rights activists. This kind of moral thinking encompasses the idea of cognitive empathy.

SHAMUS: ...it had been obvious to me from a very young age that animals could sense pain and pleasure and so forth. And it's more of like the golden rule. If I were in their position I wouldn't want somebody eating me, and slaughtering me, and vivisecting on me and therefore I shouldn't do it to them. And I never found a satisfactory basis for doing it.

Ferdinand's idea of the golden rule came from his religious upbringing. He was raised as a devout Christian and a pacifist. It seemed obvious to him that he should extend the golden rule, a principle that he already embraced, to animals.

FERDINAND: I was a very devout Christian and it seemed like this was a natural extension of my nonviolent ethic, to embrace animals ... definitely there was emotions involved, but I also thought it just made perfect sense... why do you want to hurt these animals when they haven't done anything to us?

The anti-speciesism rationale also surfaces when activists compare animal rights to other social justice movements. In all cases where speciesism is invoked, its persuasive power seems to emanate from a cognitive dissolution of sorts, a transgressive perception. The relevant characteristic of this new perception is the collapse of moral categories that separate humans from all other animals. Although these categories are reified, they are also essentially imaginary, and hence vulnerable to charges of arbitrariness. Once these socially constructed boundaries are de-naturalized, they are in danger of being seen as reifications and, if recognized as such, they are susceptible to collapse. When they collapse, there no longer appear to be any morally relevant characteristics that separate all humans, on the one hand, from all other animals, on the other. Hence, all struggles for justice and against oppression become part of the same web.

SAM: I totally think supporting animal rights is the same as supporting any other social justice movement because there's no difference in denying rights to animals and denying rights to people. Denying rights because of species membership is no different than denying rights because of someone's race or gender or sexual preference. It's just an arbitrary designation, just an arbitrary reason to discriminate against an individual. So I see it all as interconnected.

It is obvious in these quotes that the speakers already believe in the value of social movements for human rights and against human oppression. The only leap that has to be made is

applying a similar framework to animals, which is a considerable leap for most people, but not to those who become animal rights activists. The possible influence of predisposing schemas that draw a person's attention to the under-dog, victimization, and exploitation of the weak in general will be discussed in the next chapter.

SHERLOCK: So yeah, when I was fourteen this girl Heather gave me Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* ... I think I just read the first few chapters about the connection between animal rights and the civil rights movement and women's suffrage and things like that, and it just made complete sense to me. And then, when I got to the factory farm section I was completely repulsed and was convinced, that's it. And I stopped reading the book at that point....

And Shamus, the attorney, is vexed by apparent illogic of the fact that children, humans in a permanent vegetative state, and even corporations have rights, yet no animals have any legal standing:

SHAMUS:... they're trying to get standing for primates, which a lot of people are resisting, I don't know why... we give rights to corporations, we give rights to trusts, financial trusts...we give rights to children; you can bring a lawsuit on behalf of a child. Even an infant, even somebody who is in a permanent vegetative state, has legal standing to come into court through a guardian and so it seems to somebody like me so logical that a nonhuman animal can be able to come into court through a guardian and litigate his interests.

Avoiding Hypocrisy: Moral Consistency

When asked about the source of his beliefs, Brad prides himself on the logical basis of his beliefs and disdains what he sees as the hypocrisy of so-called ethical vegetarians.

BRAD: ... I was talking to this guy recently... he was saying, you know, I got to give it to you vegans, you guys at least are the most logically consistent.

NICOLE: You like that - consider it a compliment?

BRAD: Yeah, I love that. I think that was a very good compliment... way back in high school I realized if you're going to do something, don't do a half-assed job of it... you know, being a vegetarian is like saying, oh, I love animals, so I won't kill them, I'll just torture them for their whole life... that's like contradictory evaluations of values of life.

On the matter of moral consistency, many mentioned that going vegan was the “next logical step” after becoming vegetarian. The inherent logic of this next step was made especially apparent once the implicit boundaries that they had constructed for themselves suddenly began to seem arbitrary:

AMBER: ...I was like, well okay I won't eat veal. And I'd read about that before. So that must have been the first step I took. Then I guess I stopped eating red meat and I remember vividly one of my friends who was vegetarian coming up to me as I was getting a chicken sandwich in line and she was like, oh, I thought you were a vegetarian and I remember saying like, oh, well for some reason a chicken is different than a cow for me. And I felt so stupid after I said that [laughing]. I was like, why? And then I stopped eating chicken.

NICOLE: So it was kind of gradual. You cut out one thing

AMBER: Yeah, yeah. I had all these boundaries. I was like, oh I can eat a chicken. And then so it was pretty fast, the whole transition. But I did take it in steps. It was probably like a three month or so transition... And so I knew I wanted to go vegan eventually because it was like the logical next step... and totally if you're into the animal rights movement and you're not vegan, you're a total hypocrite...So I was like, well I guess I have to be. But obviously I wanted to be, too.

Below, Arielle talks about her transition from vegetarianism to veganism, which she frames as a consistency issue; this was not the case with her conversion to vegetarianism, which involved a meat epiphany when she was about 12 years old. She remained vegetarian for many years before she became involved with the animal rights movement and realized that she could be called a hypocrite for just being vegetarian. The desire to avoid being labeled a hypocrite partially motivated her decision to go vegan.

ARIELLE: ... I didn't want to have somebody nail me for hypocrisy. Like protesting fur, not that I did protest fur, but if I went out and I said, oh that's so disgusting, that fur coat. Then somebody would say, oh but you're wearing leather. And that would be like a horrible cut-down. So I had to reconcile everything. But it wasn't really one galvanizing event...

Although many activists voiced a concern with being consistent (i.e. being vegan) so that they would not be viewed as hypocrites, Sam had a different take on the issue. He does not think that consistency is crucial, partly because the idea of animal rights is, in his mind, a rather

complex and multifaceted moral issue. Although he is vegan himself, he does not believe that it is essential for activists to be vegan in order to avoid hypocrisy.

SAM: ... another common response we always get is that we're hypocrites in some way, that we either wear leather shoes or in some way we're hypocrites. It's like you can't support animal rights and be a hypocrite or something.

NICOLE: Do you think that makes it important for people to be vegan?

SAM: I don't think it's essential to be vegan. I mean you can oppose one form of cruelty but not others... you can view the killing of animals for some products as wrong, but still not view the killing of animals for food as wrong... I wouldn't view someone as a hypocrite if they opposed fur but not eating animals... a lot of people just have certain issues that they're really active for... There's so many different levels to deal with, that's just another obstacle... for abolishing slavery it was very easy, you know, black people have rights, can't hold them in slavery. For animals, it's which animals have rights, which uses violate their rights?

Shamus believes that the hypocrisy charge leveled against animal rights activists serves an important function for the accuser: to defuse and deflect the message that activists are trying to communicate. In order to persuade the public and create sympathizers, it is important to have a presentation of self that is consistent, or else the messenger (and by association the message) is at greater risk of being dismissed by an indifferent and sometimes hostile public. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that animal rights activists, who operate in the public sphere and are trying to change the minds and behavior of others, are so concerned with being morally consistent:

SHAMUS: ... you see the same phenomenon at any fur demonstration where somebody will say, oh you're wearing leather shoes and therefore, oh well I don't have to think about anything because you're a hypocrite, you're wearing, well they think you're wearing leather shoes. So that they don't have to think about it. It's so illogical. What does that have to do with anything? Maybe it's wrong to wear the leather shoes and you should be thinking about that as well, assuming that the person *is* wearing leather shoes.

Activists are aware that their actions and beliefs are being heavily scrutinized for consistency. Even when they interpret the motivation behind this scrutiny as an attempt to dismiss the message by disparaging the messenger, they cannot help but be concerned with avoiding the

negative stigma attached to the label “hypocrite.” Adherence to a strict vegan lifestyle is the best way to avoid this label.

Balancing the Equation: Preferences and Moral Calculations

The discourse of moral equation measures the suffering of the animal against the pleasure of the consumer. For many animal rights activists, the result of the calculation is clear when taking into account the preferences of both humans and animals and giving them relatively equal moral weight; the harm caused to animals cannot be outweighed by the benefits accrued to humans. The scale is woefully out of balance. The human interests served are seen as trivial, while the animal interests sacrificed are perceived as grievous. In other words, it is not an “even trade.” This is not an emotional defense but rather an argument based on abstract principles of logic and fairness.

STAN: I like how Regan put it in *The Case for Animal Rights*. It’s like a preference issue. I have a preference for a glass of milk and some chocolate chip cookies made with butter and eggs and there’s a baby cow, a veal calf, that has a preference not to be separated from its mother, especially if it’s a male, and sent away to a veal crate. So we have two preferences. We have the preference of the veal calf and my preference...if you line them up together it’s pretty... I don’t see how you can choose otherwise. I guess you can. And I do see how you can. But I don’t.

Another activist echoed this vocabulary of moral equation:

ARIELLE: ... So I might still consider eating a steak but then I’d be like, oh there’s no way that that momentary fleeting gustatory pleasure is even worth the hideous suffering and death. It’s not an even trade; it’s not even close. It’s not worth it...cause you know people always say, oh, I know you’re right but I just could never give up my fried chicken... And I’m like, oh you’re pretty fucking selfish then...

Shamus imaginatively places himself in the position of a generalized animal-other; this projection renders him unable to justify putting any creature through something that he imagines would be so horrifying. His ability to project himself into situations involving animal

experimentation is aided by the fact that he has two pet rabbits (they may be considered significant animal others). Rabbits are often used in cosmetics testing.

SHAMUS: I have a couple rabbits and you think about these eye tests...I just can't even imagine going through that. And being in a position where you don't know what's going on and every now and then somebody comes along and puts stuff in your eyes, it's eating away your eye and it just seems to prolong – I mean those eye tests are among the least cruel things that they do out there. They do horrible things in animal experiments and it just gets me the angriest of anything.

So, while emotion-laden incidents like moral shocks and meat epiphanies tend to be expanded upon to include more “rational” or intellectual justifications, it is still emotions, especially empathy, that retain a privileged place in terms of personal motivation.

Emotion Versus Cognition: Which is More Important?

There is obviously a relationship between the logic-rationality and emotion-intuition frames of motive and there is often overlap between the two. Even though activists at times use a combination of discourses of emotion-intuition and logic-rationality to justify or explain their motives, usually one or the other is more prominent in the way they talk about their own personal motivation. When I asked how important intellectual justifications were compared with moral emotions like compassion in the activists' decision to embrace animal rights, some people emphasized the everyday suffering experienced by animals more than abstract principles like justice.

SERENA: ...I connected so much with the animals suffering that I think it's really all that for myself personally. I just have such a hard time knowing that the animals are suffering, and just that they're so innocent and we're not able really to explain to them what's going on. It just seems so cruel and unfair to me that it's really all about the animal suffering.

Activists can perceive the world through both frames, or use them in different situations or at different times during their activist careers. As mentioned earlier, a common pattern is for

intellectual justifications to come later and overlay the initial emotional motivation. Although activists commonly believed that emotions were more important motivators for themselves, the logic-rationality frame was believed to be more useful in trying to convince others. Hence, it is important to learn these justifications to persuade other people of what the activist already “knows” with her gut. Only after Hannah became an activist did she start reading the philosophical arguments.

HANNAH: ...that’s when I read Peter Singer...as soon as I started joining everything I started reading everything...It gave me like the intellectual and philosophical basis for what I emotionally and, you know, did with my gut... all of a sudden now I had reasons for it, and I could give reasons to other people who didn’t care about the gut.

Amber appreciates the philosophical arguments because they are useful when talking to other people who may be less swayed by emotions like compassion. However, she does not believe that logic alone would have convinced her to go vegan. She believes that it is more advantageous for the intellectual justifications to come later.

AMBER: ...it was good to read that after I had gone vegan or vegetarian or whatever, after I had gotten into animal rights from the compassion aspect because I didn’t want to cause pain. So it was good to read it after, because it gave me a good philosophical background for when I talk to other people about it, other people who don’t have the pictures right in front of them or don’t have the information right in front of them. It’s always good to know a little bit of that. I mean a lot of that, because a lot of people are convinced by logic and I think the most convincing thing is obviously the footage and the pictures but when you don’t have that you have to work with the philosophical background and stuff like that. So I definitely think it’s a good thing to do, but I don’t know if it would have necessarily made me vegan if that was the first thing I read.

Natasha speaks of her beliefs as evolving from emotions like empathy, which resulted in her attempting to put herself in the animals’ position, to becoming aware of the intellectual justifications for what she already believed. But emotion is still her primary driving motivation. Her emotion takes the form of sympathetic empathy, which is characterized by an awareness that she would not want the things done to herself that are done to animals, and using cognitive

empathy to conclude that therefore she should refrain from doing them to other beings (like Shamus above, she is applying the “golden rule” to animals).

NATASHA: ... I guess it was more an evolution, and it's probably a lot based in... the sort of values that my parents had of like, you don't mistreat animals, you don't mistreat other people, and so at first I thought oh, it's mistreatment then I realized later on that even if there's no suffering in their life, killing an animal for food is wrong and so I started off with the whole vegetarian thing and then started...empathizing with how would I feel if I were in this position...now I can argue why I think that my viewpoint's right and I could argue it in scientific reasons, or ...I could go through all the different ethics arguments, but it's more just like an emotional level of well, how would I feel if I suddenly didn't know where I was, and I was in a cage, and people were doing really painful things to me?

Parker offers a rather succinct summation of the relationship between cognition and emotion and their dual presence in activists' lives and personal motivations. He feels strongly about both justice and compassion and goes back and forth between which motivates him more, although he realizes they are not mutually exclusive:

PARKER: Yeah, I kind of oscillate back and forth between whether I feel more strongly about this abstract sense of justice, or whether I feel more strongly about just being compassionate and caring. And of course there doesn't really have to be a contradiction in those two, but they are two different things. And obviously I want to be compassionate, but also I want to be just. And abstractly I can say it's arbitrary and unjust to discriminate based on species, um, you know, but when I actually see what's going on to other animals, not just trying to make a rational argument, if you actually watch what goes on in factory farms and slaughterhouses, then I start feeling like I care more about being compassionate and just trying to do non-harm.

And Jamison, who earlier expressed his irritation with the popular stereotype of animal activists as “emotional”, nonetheless believes that emotion and rationality are intimately intertwined and that either on its own would not be a sufficient motivator for action.

JAMISON: ... I stayed up all night reading Peter Singer when I was in divinity school taking a social ethics course. And I stayed up literally all night and I do remember the dawn coming through the window and I was crying most of the night on and off as I read Peter Singer's descriptions of what happened. And it opened my eyes and I was horrified and very emotionally touched by the whole thing and decided I don't want any part of this anymore...I'm a great believer in the heart and mind having to meld before you can really make a change. You

can't do it simply rationally and you can't do it simply emotionally. And that gets back to why it bothers me when people think of us as solely emotional. We wouldn't change if it was just emotion. But we wouldn't change if it was just reason either probably. You need both. You need them in balance and in my case they both came in balance and strongly.

Why Animal Rights?

The chapter until this point has dealt with emotional and cognitive vocabularies of motive as they are manifested in conversion narratives. Activists also employ post-conversion vocabularies of motive, which pertain more concretely to participation in the movement rather than to the consciousness-shift that typically comes before, and which has its own vocabularies of motive. We have examined some of the reasons why activists became vegetarian or vegan (personal/ lifestyle level), but what justifications do activists give for participation in the animal rights movement as traditional “activists” (collective level)?

The fact that struggles for human rights and animal rights are seen as related results in the tendency for animal rights activists to lean toward the left side of the political spectrum. Rather than replacing compassion for humans with compassion for animals (a common stigma that I will discuss in Chapter 6), animal rights activists tend to see their compassion for animals as an extension of their general compassion for the oppressed, whether human or animal. For a number of reasons, animal rights activists choose to devote their energies to animals instead of oppressed humans, but none are inconsistent with the reasons that might be given by leftist activists fighting against human oppression.

Among these reasons is the belief that animals are the most innocent and yet suffer the most torment as oppressed beings, especially because they are completely powerless. The fact that animals cannot speak or fight on their own behalf, and the fact that so many animals are killed everyday for what are seen as unnecessary and even frivolous consumer products, also

drives activists to choose animal rights out of the panoply of possible leftist causes that they could champion. Despite the common perception of animal rights activists as being concerned with animals *instead* of people, activists typically saw their concern for animals as an *extension* of their concern for people.

SHAMUS: ...That's the image of a lot of people in the animal rights movement – very little concern for people...but people in the movement are among the most liberal, as far as a lot of issues go, women's rights, minority rights, immigrants, death penalty, gay rights... it's almost as if people think we have a limited amount of compassion that if you, you can't care about the dog and the person. You care about the dog; you must not care about the person. When really what it might be, if you're somebody on the street and you're challenging me, I may have more compassion for people than you have and I have more compassion for animals than you have and why couldn't that be? We don't have a limited amount of compassion.

Although compassion often brings people into the movement, the decision to be active for animal rights often involves a rational calculation of why animal rights is a more important cause than others. As mentioned above, most activists are also concerned with other social issues, especially human rights and environmental concerns, and some said they would be active in other social movements if not for animal rights taking up all of their time. However, they all had justifications for why they chose animal rights as their primary arena for activism, even though they were sympathetic with other social movements. This might be because animal rights tends to be stigmatized as a less than legitimate social cause, and activists are often the subjects of ridicule and derision not only by passersby during public protests but also by their own family and friends. Hence, the readily available justifications near the surface, which activists offer out of habit.

There was remarkable similarity in activists' justifications for focusing on animal rights instead of other leftist causes with which they were sympathetic. The primary theme was the idea that animals are the "ultimate victim," or the most oppressed of the oppressed, in terms of

both the quality of injustice visited upon them and the quantity of animals harmed and killed in terms of sheer numbers. Related to animals' status as ultimate victim is the idea that animals are innocent, voiceless, and defenseless. The fact that animals are utterly helpless – coupled with the idea that animal rights is perceived by many outside of the movement to be a fringe social cause and hence will tend to attract fewer people – leads to the decision that the animal rights movement is the place where their energy is most needed. Others attributed their activism to an unexplainable passion for animals; in some cases, these individuals felt that animal rights activism was a “calling.” And still others framed it not as a “choice” but as a moral duty or obligation. The issue of moral obligation will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Animals as the Ultimate Victim

Although most of my respondents expressed compassion and concern for oppressed people, animals were believed to suffer far more at the hands of humans, and in much greater numbers. So, for many who are also sympathetic with other leftist political causes such as those related to human rights, the question becomes where to put one's time and energy given the limited amount of resources available to any activist. For many respondents, animals stood out in a sea of victims who could potentially be aided as the most victimized and the most oppressed. The fact that animals were seen to suffer the greatest atrocities at the hands of humans was exacerbated by the fact that animals are also completely powerless. Lacking a voice, they are unable even to speak out on their own behalf, let alone to fight back against anything a person might do to them.

Shamus considers himself a leftist, but he is annoyed that the left is not more concerned with animals. Although he supports human rights causes and embraces a leftist political

ideology, he thinks that animals need more help than most humans because they are completely without power. He points out that they are very similar to children in this regard; however, the significant difference is that people care about children and will get involved if they think that children are being abused.³³ Animal exploitation, on the other hand, is institutionalized, government-sanctioned, and part of the “normal” way of doing things. Because nobody is looking out for them, Shamus believes that it is essential to come to the defense of animals.

SHAMUS: I'm leftist, yeah...you know, as far as gay rights, women's rights, prisoners' rights, immigrants' rights and stuff like that, I'm pretty leftist... I think I chose animal rights because the atrocities committed against animals are the worst. You take the worst situation against humans, I mean, think about what happens to animals in the laboratories... You can't compare anything that's going on with humans that's that bad... [Animals are] just completely powerless. They're a lot like children in that respect, except...there are other people looking out for children. Everybody's looking out for children. You can't go and vivisect on a child without people being outraged about it. So the only time you'll have an atrocity committed against a child is when it's done illegally, but we have government-sanctioned things going on here against animals. They are one hundred percent powerless, you have to do something... if you find out someone is beating a child people will get involved.

In addition to this condition of utter helplessness, animals are also seen as innocent and undeserving of all that is done to them. The fact that they cannot make meaning out of what is happening to them at the hands of humans is perceived as making their condition of subjugation worse.

STAN: ...I just think they're innocent because...it's a human world that they are subjected to. They don't know what's going on, you know? I know what's going on. Even homeless people know what's going on...

³³ Although Shamus does not mention this, people will also get involved in cases of animal abuse *if* the animal is a dog or cat (i.e. a pet) or if the animal is a creature of the wild. But compassion does not generally extend to farm animals. It is the existence of laws against animal cruelty that allow the average person to eat meat and feel him or herself to be animal-friendly and humane at the same time. However, animal cruelty laws do not extend to farm animals.

On top of all this, animal rights is perceived as the least attractive in a panoply of leftist social movements, therefore enjoying far less support from other political activists than issues related to human oppression, which is seen as a legitimate arena for protest.

All of these calculations lead activists to believe that the animal rights movement is the place where they are needed the most; not only because animals are the “ultimate victim” but because they also have the fewest number of people standing up for them. The phrase “ultimate victim” actually came from one of my respondents:

HANNAH: [Animals]...are the ultimate victim. When I worked with battered women it was the same issue, victimization... I'm always sympathetic for the underdog but the animal was such the ultimate victim and, you know, such the underdog, and there's so many of them, and they are so innocent and so undeserving of everything we do to them...to my dying day I will fight... And they're just so helpless to everything we do to them. And we can basically do anything...because there are so few laws to protect them.

Amber echoes the sentiment that animals are currently the single largest group of beings who are oppressed; they also have the fewest people on their side and are utterly defenseless. For these reasons, Amber was drawn to the animal rights movement.

Although she was also active for human rights in the past, those issues never captured her attention and commitment as much as animal rights did.

AMBER: ... animals are the largest group of beings in the world that are affected by violence... And I feel like not enough people are on their side, and so I feel like that's the most urgent, urgent thing...the vast majority of the suffering in the world happens to non-human animals. So I feel like it's just so urgent and that's where I need to spend all my time. And that's what I felt since I first even got into it...this is where I need to spend my life... I remember in high school after I got into animal rights, I remember telling someone that somehow I just have more sympathy for the animals because there's no way they could ever speak out for themselves.

Pacey is also motivated by the fact that animals are utterly defenseless and that the animal rights movement lacks popularity; therefore, he has decided that animal rights is the social

movement that needs his help the most, even though it may not necessarily be more important than other social justice issues.

PACEY: I think animal rights is the one movement...where the oppressed can't speak up, so I guess to me it seems, I don't know if I'd say more important than any other movement, but at least...it's a movement that I think needs my help more than any other movement.

Nelson, too, supports human rights but thinks that because these issues already have so much more support, among both activists and the general public, than animal rights does, that his energy is more needed fighting for animals. Since animal rights has reached nowhere near the level of legitimacy that humans rights has, and because of his feeling that animals, in general, have it worse than people because they lack even the faintest glimmer of choice or agency, Nelson has decided to devote his energies to the animal rights movement.

NELSON: ... I do support human rights but, again, I think that for one, human rights has a lot of support in national and global levels... And animal rights is still so new that nobody's even contemplating it yet... Obviously there are some people that are being tortured or whatever but even then they have the possibility of being released because most people know that torture is not the standard way of doing things.

Violet, who is diabetic, is inspired to action by the fact that animals cannot rise up on their own behalf to defend themselves. She is also motivated by guilt over the fact that animals have died in diabetes research. And finally, she feels that animal rights is what she was "meant to do."

VIOLET: ...for one thing they don't have a voice of their own. Whereas if people are being oppressed they can, sure it would still be difficult, but they can rise up and do something about it and at least be heard. But animals obviously can't. And just the fact of how I got into it, just like the guilt [laughs] of being alive while all these animals died and here I am and I'm fine and whatever [talking about her diabetes]... I feel almost like I owe it to them now, my life... This is what I was meant to do...It will always be number one on my list. I mean, I'll still care about human things. I'm involved in our student group, Students for a Sensible Drug Policy...but it will never be as important to me as animal rights.

Parker, like Pacey, does not think that animal rights is more important than other social issues, but he does feel that animal rights is one of the few causes where individuals can exercise direct personal control, for instance through their diet and lifestyle choices, unlike the anti-war movement for example. Although he tries to assist human victims in a concrete way when he can, for instance by allowing homeless people to sleep in his apartment during the winter, he feels that it is easier to help animals through his daily actions (i.e. living a vegan lifestyle).

However, he also feels the level of exploitation and suffering is greater for animals:

PARKER: I'm not convinced that animal rights is any more urgent than the anti-war movement, but with the anti-war movement unfortunately with the way this system is set up we really have no choice... It's not like with meat eating; we have a choice. It's not like we can really decide if we're going to fund the expansion of the arms race or research into germ warfare and things. And I do attend many of the anti-war rallies in the area but the reason I'm more involved with animal rights than the anti-war movement is just because it's a lot easier to tell people, look, here is an injustice that's very grave and you can easily absolve your responsibility. A lot of people when they get introduced to social justice issues feel like there's nothing they can do. It's like well, how can we stop funding that American war machine? How can we convince the Chinese government to support basic human rights? How can we stop Indonesian sweatshops? Those are all important issues, which can be campaigned on, but it's not the same as saying well, you are responsible for serious injustices committed against other animals, and obviously I do feel a greater sense of duty to help those who can't help themselves and while I'm not involved that heavily in other social justice struggles, I do try to do my part in helping humans who can't help themselves. During the winter all the time homeless people sleep in my apartment on cold nights. I do try. I fall miserably short, I can't do everything, but I feel like at least if I can reach out to other humans who can't help themselves by letting them sleep in my apartment and giving them food when they're here, or letting them take a shower, or do their laundry here, that's doing something at least. But the majority of those who can't help themselves and are being oppressed are not human.

Evan also feels that animal rights is something over which people can have direct control in their personal lives, which makes him feel empowered in a way that other social movement activism might not because the issues are more remote.

EVAN: ...what I do like about being vegan and about being involved in animal rights...is there's a feeling of empowerment. I feel by making personal choices about my life, being anti-sexist or anti-racist...what's difficult with those is...I'm a very goal oriented person and it's hard to feel like you're doing anything...being vegan, it's like I sit down and I eat and I'm not eating meat. I put on these shoes this morning and I'm not wearing leather. I put on this belt, I'm not wearing leather. It feels good; it feels good to be vegan. And it feels good being an animal rights activist...what's good about it in a way is you can do these things and there is a sense of accomplishment, of like personal choice, a decision about an issue you obviously care strongly about and to me that's empowering, and that's one of the things I really like about animal rights and being vegan. I think animal rights has a tremendous potential for empowering people...

Many of the aforementioned ways of thinking and feeling manifested themselves in pre-activist stages of the individual's biography and were already in place at the time when the turning points to vegetarianism, veganism, and activism began. In fact, many of my respondents had childhood experiences that suggested the presence of predisposing schemas, which may increase the likelihood that a person will be receptive to animal rights ideology later in life, or that they may start on the path at an early age. These predisposing schemas and early indicative incidents are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
PREDISPOSITIONS AND EARLY INCIDENTS:
“THE ANIMAL-VICTIMIZATION SCHEMA”

Introduction

Perceiving is not a matter of passively allowing an organ – say of sight or hearing – to receive a ready-made impression from without, like a palette receiving a spot of paint. Recognising and remembering are not matters of stirring up old images of past impressions. It is generally agreed that all our impressions are schematically determined from the start... In a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. Ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonized with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected. If they are accepted the structure of assumptions has to be modified (Douglas 1966, p. 36).

The activists whom I interviewed did not have identical re-socialization patterns; however, patterns could be identified in three main areas: predisposing factors, situational contingencies (Lofland and Stark 1965), and turning points (Strauss 1959). Predisposing factors are internal in that they are already present in the individual at the time of the turning point, such as personality traits or childhood experiences. Situational contingencies are events that actually bring the person into contact with the social movement; these tend to occur concurrent with the beginning of a turning point. Turning points are the decisive moments of lifestyle change and identity transformation, in which agency is exercised and a course-changing pivot occurs.

Predisposing Conditions: Schemas

In my interviews, I asked respondents to recall, if they could, their very first memories of feeling concern for animals and/ or of acting on this concern. Striking was the relatively young age at which a majority of my respondents reported feeling concern for animals or animal suffering. These concerns typically took the form of rescuing (or trying to rescue) specific animals and/ or expressing a desire not to eat animals; these early attempts at vegetarianism were sometimes thwarted and sometimes indulged, depending upon the parents. Another aspect of this concern was a strong attraction toward animals. Brad, a zoology graduate student, told me that he could not pinpoint the exact time when he became fascinated with animals, but that this fascination was always a part of him. An anecdote about his choice of toys captures his affinity for animals.

BRAD: Yeah, I remember the reason I got into GI Joe toys when I was a kid... was mostly because the first one I saw in the store had a little toy dog that came with it and I wanted the toy dog and the soldier just kind of came along with it... I would definitely say I had a thing for animals.

This early affinity for animals followed him into adulthood and is the reason that he chose zoology as a field of study. The affinity for animals can also take the form of a bond with a specific animal, for instance, a companion animal. However, of the four respondents in my sample who specifically mentioned a bond with an individual animal as having been directly responsible for moving them along the path toward animal rights, all reported these incidents as having happened in adulthood, so they are not included in the predisposing schema discussed here. Two respondents, Sophia and Nick, mentioned getting involved with dog rescue and shelter work following the death of their dog(s) as a way of easing their deep grief. Another respondent, Natasha, mentioned observations of her pet rabbit's intelligence as kicking off a thought chain about how intelligent other animals must be and wondering, therefore, if humans

should we be doing the things that we do to them. And the fourth, Hannah, was a wildlife rehabilitator whose bond with a squirrel that eventually died acted as a catalyst for her to become more involved with animal rights. Since the impact of these incidents was felt in adulthood, these incidents were coded as situational contingencies and not predisposing conditions. All four of these respondents did display other aspects of the predisposing schema, however, so they are still included in the analysis here.

The demonstrable concern for animal suffering and general fondness for animals displayed by many of my respondents can be called the **Animal Schema**. Whatever put this schema in place for these young people, it affected how they filtered the world and how they perceived reality. The Animal Schema stimulated sensitivity to animals and animal issues that may have caused them to be more receptive to the situational factors later in life that ultimately resulted in turning points.

Although a majority of my respondents reported an early sensitivity to animal suffering or a general affinity for animals, some recalled no such proclivity. However, those respondents who lacked an “animal specific” schema were likely to have at least expressed concern with suffering and oppression, although this concern was not limited to, or specifically directed at, animals (at least not yet). These individuals had a general orientation toward victimization and justice, which usually manifest itself in a concern for human rights and the oppression of people. This **Victimization Schema** is easily transposable to animals as a group since they lack power. Once a person has a cognitive orientation that predisposes him or her to notice and abhor suffering in its myriad forms, animals become a logical outlet for such concern, as they are, in many ways (in the words of most of my respondents), “the ultimate victim.”

Although some people seemed only to have the Animal Schema in place and others were working only with a more general Victimization Schema, some were using a schema that weaved together both affinity for animals and general concern for suffering and exploitation. Although the presence of these schemas may not be *necessary* prerequisites for re-socialization and recruitment to the animal rights movement, they may help to temper the effects of normal socialization into the meat-eating culture, and it seems reasonable to imagine that the presence of these mental schemas in children would facilitate a positive reception of an animal rights ideology at a later stage of development.

In describing these schemas in greater detail below, I will collapse them into one overarching predisposition, the **Victimization-Animal Schema**, because the two often overlap. Some respondents who displayed concern for the suffering and victimization of people also had a very strong connection with animals and were concerned about their suffering. In reality, these schemas mostly overlapped to form what could be called one general schema that predisposes a person to respond to and resist any evidence of the exploitation of the weak or defenseless (human or animal). The exception would be those who were extremely fond of animals yet did not report pronounced sensitivity to suffering; however, eventually suffering always becomes incorporated into the strictly animal-oriented schema. On the other side, there were a few respondents who expressed neither a proclivity for animals nor sensitivity to their suffering, yet they displayed a heightened concern for social justice, which usually manifest itself in an interest in human rights causes. These people would be using the general (not animal-specific) victimization schema, but for them, too, the other half of the schema is eventually developed, at which time animals become incorporated into the overall schema.

Distribution of the Victimization-Animal Schema

28 out of 30 respondents reported at least one readily identifiable aspect of the schema:

(1.) affinity for animals; (2.) concern for animal suffering; or (3.) interest in human rights and social justice.

Table 2. The Victimization-Animal Schema

Victimization-Animal Schema	Affinity for animals	Responsive to animal suffering	Concern with social justice/human rights ³⁴	Total ³⁵
Men	8	10	4	22
Women	11	12	4	27
Total	19	22	8	49

The two respondents for whom I could not identify the presence of a schema both reported being suddenly riveted by something they saw or read (both around the same age – 13 and 14 years old), but did not mention a prior fascination with animals or a general interest in human rights.

Sam became familiar with vegetarianism through friends and the book *Animal Liberation*, which he read at age 14.

SAM: ...I sort of learned about it through just sort of the crowd who were friends I had. Since I was really young, I always skateboarded and as I got older and got into the hardcore straightedge scene – I don't remember like a specific moment in time when I thought about animal rights for the first time. I sort of remember meeting people who were vegetarians for the first time and they were telling me about why they were vegetarian and it got me thinking about it and I remember immediately thinking how much sense it made to me. You know, it's just really logical. It just made so much sense to me. So I read *Animal Liberation*, this is

³⁴ Three respondents had an interest in environmental issues prior to becoming involved with animal rights. I have decided not to include these in the human rights/ social justice aspect of the Victimization-Animal Schema because environmentalism does not concern itself with suffering or victimization in the same way that human rights movements do. These three respondents were included under the “affinity for animals” aspect, however. All but the two respondents mentioned earlier fit under at least one aspect of the schema, with many overlapping between the two animal-related categories (affinity and suffering).

³⁵ The totals add up to more than 30, the number of my respondents, because it was possible for people to display more than one of the three aspects of the schema; therefore they could be coded more than once.

when I was fourteen years old I think, and so shortly after I read that I gradually began the progression towards vegetarianism. It was sort of a slow process.

Parker, too, reported nothing of significance before his abrupt turning point, other than that his older brother had tried to convince him to go vegetarian, a strategy which did not work until he showed Parker a video about animal slaughter when he was 13 years old.

PARKER: I guess my older brother had been vegetarian for many years before I was and he had always tried to talk to me about it, but I was really too young to even understand what was going on. I was like ten years old... he's three years older than me. So finally when I was 13 he really was able to get through to me, and he had ordered some photos and videos from PETA about factory farming and slaughterhouses and he showed them to me and I realized right then and there that was it. I wasn't going to eat meat anymore... I instantly became vegetarian. I knew that I couldn't support that.

Interestingly, despite the absence of a discernible predisposition,³⁶ Parker's transition (from vegetarian to vegan to activist) was the fastest in my sample. He went vegan just one

³⁶ The fact that he did not mention a concern for human rights or social justice prior to this seemingly instantaneous turning point may not definitively indicate that there was not some predisposition present. When asked why the video had such an intense and immediate effect on him, Parker readily called upon a vocabulary of justice and victimization. Whether this was his reaction at the time, or if this is more indicative of his retrospective recounting of his reaction (which would be in line with Mary Douglas's quote at the beginning of this chapter), it is impossible to know, but this would get at the question of whether he had a predisposing schema. In the absence of evidence, I must conclude there was no schema, although his description below, again, suggests a latent concern for justice, even though he claims to have never thought about the issue seriously before, other than to make fun of his older brother for being a vegetarian:

I was a total idiot about meat eating before I became a vegetarian. I remember being like 10 or 11 years old and making fun of my brother for being a vegetarian. I remember one time he had said something like really rude to me about it and so I remember I had taken some meat out of the refrigerator while he was sleeping and I put it on his face. I mean, I did some really screwed up stuff. I want to say immature, but what do 11-year olds do that isn't immature I guess. So my brother and I didn't like each other that much before I became vegetarian...[The video] offended my sense of justice, whatever sense I had back then. Really just that these animals are so powerless you know, and just because we were stronger than them and had more power that we were just standing over them with a knife or a gun or whatever and killing them. And I just thought it was so unjust that these animals who can't defend themselves are being barbarically slaughtered and

month after going vegetarian and not long after that he organized an animal rights club at his school, which eventually became a well-known Washington, DC grassroots group that he still heads today.

Other than these two exceptions, everyone else in my sample seemed to be working with a Victimization-Animal Schema *prior* to their turning points. This schema manifested itself in at least one of three general ways during the interviews:

The Victimization-Animal Schema

1. Responsive to perceived suffering of animals (manifest through early indicative incidents).

Takes the form of:

- A. Resistance to meat
- B. “Saving” or rescuing specific animals
- C. Feelings of guilt or sadness over an animal being harmed

2. Pronounced affinity for, and fascination with, animals.

3. Concern with injustice, suffering, and victimization in general (not animal specific; usually human rights related).

Of the 28 respondents who manifest this predisposing schema, only three did not specifically mention animals before the period in their life when the turning point process began; so #1 and #2 above were by far the most common aspects. These three respondents who did not mention animals, however, did mention a concern with human rights (#3 above). Fred, who initially went vegetarian at 14 years old out of concern for food waste, hunger, and human rights but quickly got into animal rights once he became familiar with the issue, does not remember an exact moment when he first became aware of animal rights:

NICOLE: Do you remember how you first became aware of animal rights issues?

confined and it’s not even – not like this would make it okay – but it wasn’t even animals who posed a risk to us like a tiger or something, only docile animals, cows, chickens and pigs and I just thought, I couldn’t think of anything more unjust than that. That’s what got me started.

FRED: First became aware? No, actually I don't. I remember certainly different exposures to different facets of animal rights philosophy, but I don't remember ever being exposed or surprised by the fact that there were animal rights activists, or anything like that. My mother was kind of a hippie and very leftist, so those ideas were always kind of in the air, so I don't think I would remember.

Fred, like Sam above, was also associating with a hardcore straightedge crowd during this time, among which a degree of activism, or at least social awareness, was normative, and he reported that many of his friends were getting into activism at the time. So, for those who did not have a special propensity for animals, it may be important to have ideas about activism already "in the air," that is to say, facilitated through their relational networks and associations. Although Fred's circumstance of having a hippie-leftist mother is unique in my sample, others had friendship networks that were conducive in the form of an affiliation with a hardcore, straightedge, or general "punk" subculture (five respondents identified an affiliation with this general subculture *before*, or simultaneous with, becoming involved with animal rights). A few others became involved in the hardcore-straightedge subculture *after* becoming vegan, but the causal influence is not salient in those cases since the animal rights orientation was already in place.

Aspects of the Schema

1. RESPONSIVENESS TO ANIMAL SUFFERING

The first aspect of the schema that I will discuss is responsiveness to the perceived suffering of animals. This responsiveness is usually manifest through one or more early indicative incidents, in which the child in some way displays concern for an animal being harmed. These early incidents were easily recalled by respondents when I asked them to think back to the first time they could remember feeling concern for animals and their well-being, and

they were revealed in the three main ways mentioned above: (A) resistance to meat; (B) “saving” or rescuing specific animals; and (C) feelings of guilt or sadness over an animal being harmed.

Resistance to Meat

This category includes children who express a desire to abstain from eating meat. Usually this resistance comes in the form of a trigger experience or epiphany³⁷ whereby they consciously realize meat comes from animals and are profoundly disturbed by this fact. Whether or not the child will go vegetarian at this point depends on several factors, mainly the age at which these feelings surface and the response of the parents (which of course will vary in significance depending upon the age of the child).

Feelings of empathy, which involve imaginatively taking the role of the animal-other, can be a major catalyst for a childhood meat epiphany. Empathy was particularly important in Katie’s account below, in which she mentally transposes parts of her own body onto the (chicken) body part in her hand. In a good instance of species-irrelevance and boundary blurring, she realized the chicken bone she was holding in her hand “was a bone like a bone in me, or you, or anybody else.” Five year-old Katie is so impressed by this insight that she brings the chicken bone to school the next day to share with her kindergarten classmates during show-and-tell. Katie was one of the youngest in my sample to go vegetarian; she knew she wanted to be vegetarian at ten years old and was completely vegetarian by age 12.

KATIE: ... We had show and tell and I remember having eaten like a chicken drumstick or something at home and realized that, you know, you get down to the bone – I realized that it was a bone. It was a bone like a bone in me, or you, or anybody else. And it really sort of tripped me out that this was somebody’s appendage and I had their bone in my hand. So I took it to show-and-tell because I thought everyone else would be equally amazed by that, but I don’t think anybody really was. But I just remember making a connection very young that it was somebody’s limb I had just chewed on...and I just remember being so grossed out by that and it was just so clear to me that this was someone’s flesh...

³⁷ Amato and Patridge (1989) refer to these epiphanies as “meat insight” experiences.

so that was a very early memory...I just remember very young recognizing that animals had feelings and that they cared about their lives just as much as we cared about ours. So I was very sensitive to their suffering or their needs or whatever... and I loved meat! Oh, I'd eat raw hamburger, I'd eat meat, meat, meat... I'd eat anything. So it wasn't that I didn't like meat and I was a fussy eater – not at all. Somehow I just realized that it was really cruel to eat them. I'd say by 12 I was definitely all the way vegetarian.

Katie's initial meat epiphany was the result of her connecting the chicken bone in her hand to the bones in her own and other people's bodies, and feeling disgust at the thought of eating another creature so seemingly anatomically similar to herself. The relevant characteristic in this comparison is the focus on anatomical similarity rather than the differences between chickens and humans. Another similar type of meat epiphany occurs when an explicit connection is made between the meat one is eating and the animal from whence it came. Here the relevant cognitive connection is between the meat and the (formerly) living animal, rather than between animal body and human body. Needless to say, it is not the connection per se that is significant in these cases, but rather the disturbing feelings and negative emotions that surface as a result of this connection. Noelle was one of the many people in my sample who went vegetarian as pre-teens:

NOELLE: ... I don't remember how old I was, but I was at a horse show, and I was sitting there on my horse, you know waiting for my class to come up, and I was eating a hamburger and there was this baby cow tied up to a fence next to me and I was sitting there eating that hamburger, and I just kind of looked over, oh, how cute. Then I was like, ahh! What am I eating?! [laughing]

NICOLE: So you just, for some reason

NOELLE: It just clicked. But I didn't go vegetarian right then. I still kind of ate meat and I didn't really think about it... But I was really young. [NICOLE: Under ten?] Yeah, definitely under ten. Because I know I went completely vegetarian when I was in 7th grade, so I don't know how old that would make me – 11, 12, somewhere around there.

While Katie's parents were very supportive of her decision to go vegetarian, and Noelle's mother at least tolerated it, Arielle, Hannah, and Trinity all came up against parental resistance to their meat insight experiences.

NICOLE: Do you remember when you first went vegetarian?

ARIELLE: Oh yeah, I remember that one very well...my dad he brought home a little brown hen for Easter one day. My brother got a computer and I got this hen... I was like oh, I like him. And somehow the connection, I don't know, it wasn't an exact concrete moment, but it was just the time of getting the hen and then all of a sudden I couldn't eat chicken.

This was not the first time that Arielle resisted meat. Even before the hen incident, Arielle had another meat insight experience. This one, however, involved a fish, and, probably because she was so young, she did not attempt to act on her feelings this time, as she did later with the hen incident that prompted her to stop eating chicken. She intimates that at five years old, she probably just unquestioningly did what she was told by her parents.

ARIELLE: ... Once when I was like five we went fishing... and I caught this fish and I honest to god thought it was going to be my new pet. My dad brought it home in a bucket of water and I was like, yay, I have a new pet! ... I remember I caught it and I thought I had this pet that was going to go in the aquarium at home and the next thing I know it was like frying in a frying pan. It was horrible. [NICOLE: ... and do you remember not wanting to eat it that night or] I wish I remembered that much. I probably ate it, just because I ate animals for quite awhile before it struck me that I shouldn't. I probably just did what they told me to. But I remember holding the bucket in the car and then having this horrifying sinking feeling when I saw my mom standing at the frying pan.

Although her ceasing to eat chicken does not seem to have caused a familial stir, she later described a Thanksgiving scene where her mother told her she either had to eat the turkey or leave, and Arielle leaves the house. She was 16 when that later incident occurred.

Hannah, below, did not want to eat the meat being served to her on the day in question below, but her mother became angry with her and told her it was “rude” not to eat what she had been served and that people “think differently about animals on farms.”

Although she did not eat meat that day, the parental resistance seems to have been successful in squelching her budding interest in vegetarianism, as it was not until much later, during college, that she adopted a completely vegetarian diet. Nevertheless, she easily recalls her initial resistance to meat, as well as what triggered it:

HANNAH: ... And my first experience with vegetarianism was feeding my uncle's pigs over the summertime. We spent the summer at an uncle and aunt's farm and I would feed them the table scraps and when we were back for vacation they said, oh, that's Watermelon [a pig] that we're eating. And that was like the big click for me...that was like the first time I realized, oh my god. And I was really upset about Watermelon at that point, but it still took me a couple more years to make the click of all of them being pigs.

Trinity also had a strong resistance to meat at a very young age; as soon as she found out where it came from, she did not want to eat it. Her mother, however, successfully thwarted this resistance and for her, like Hannah above, thoughts about vegetarianism did not resurface until much later in life. Trinity did not finally go vegetarian until she was in her late 20s, despite the strength of the early memory she describes below, about an incident that occurred when she was six years old. She attributes this long latency period to the power of socialization and cultural conditioning.

TRINITY: ...all I remember is that I did not want to eat meat when I was growing up. As soon as I found out that animals were meat I was really upset and I told my mother I didn't want to eat animals and she said, you know she insisted, that I had to, and that's just the way it was, and there was no getting around it. I mean she was not even for a second going to consider that I wouldn't eat that. So I kind of gave it up; I gave up fighting about it.

NICOLE: Were you pretty young

TRINITY: I think I was like six or something... I think I was really young because someone said, you know meat is made out of animals and I said, no it isn't and they said, yes, hamburgers are cows and they started telling me all this stuff, this older kid, and I said, no way. And they said, yeah go ask your parents. And so I did and they said, yeah. And then I was really mad. I was mad at them for not telling me. And mad at them for telling me I had to eat it. But then I just went through my life and never thought about it again. In fact, even when I was in a position when I could have stopped eating meat, it was so ingrained in me this is what I had to do – what I was supposed to do. But I didn't think about it again for a long time...

Sometimes, resistance to meat takes the milder form of a vague repulsion, or even misgivings and uneasiness about the origins of meat. But in these cases, the experience is not as strong as those described above, and does not result in the child deciding to become vegetarian. Yet they are still remembered as significant experiences, perhaps helping to set the stage for later

encounters with vegetarianism and animal rights ideas. And they indicate a discomfort with meat that is, at that moment, unarticulated, lacking sufficient reinforcement from alternative cultural influences, as the child is still ensconced in a world of meat without counter definitions of reality to draw upon. Like Katie above, Sherlock's experience also involves the blurring of boundaries, as he compares the veins in meat with the veins in his own arm.

SHERLOCK: ... when I was growing up I had that, what I thought was pretty normal revulsion to meat. [NICOLE: Oh, you did?] Well not revulsion, that's too strong, but cutting open roast beef or something when I was eating it, I remember images of seeing veins in the meat and just realizing that this, you know, looking at the veins in my arms and then realizing that it was another creature that I was eating. And so that bothered me a little bit but I never took that any further.

Evan recalls having had "sneaking suspicions" that eating meat was wrong because it came from animals but, reminiscent of Trinity's quote above, suggests that the strength of socialization, in the absence of options and cultural alternatives, carries the day.

EVAN: ... I think it was always sneaking suspicions in my head of like what am I eating? Why am I eating this? Or like, what is this that I'm eating? These pre-teen existential questions like why am I doing this? Because you know how you have, I think I always had lingering thoughts of this is an animal, why am I eating this? But I never connected it with oh I can do something about it. [NICOLE: Right] And I feel like that's a pretty common thing among people I know who are vegetarian or vegans now. It's like you always had a feeling that something there was wrong with what you were doing, but you can't express it, you don't know what to do about it ... and it's not until someone presents an option to you that you actually feel like you're empowered to do something.

The channeling and funneling of empathy may be one of the more important functions of socialization. The power of this type of socialization is demonstrated by the fact that very few children go vegetarian when they have childhood meat resistance experiences, which by all accounts are not uncommon (Amato and Partridge, 1989).³⁸ Resistance to meat is just one way that responsiveness to animal suffering expresses itself as part of the Victimization-Animal Schema. The other two aspects are rescuing animals and experiencing emotions of guilt or sadness over animals being harmed.

Rescuing Animals

Sometimes responsiveness to animal suffering is manifest through an impulse to rescue animals or protect them from harm, as in the case of Hannah, who was known as the “animal lover” on her block as a child. She describes three separate instances from her childhood where she attempted to rescue animals from what she saw as a bad situation. Interestingly, later in her life, after completing a Master of Fine Arts in painting, she became a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator and was again rescuing animals. Today, she is the national director of a prominent nonprofit animal rights organization

HANNAH: ... the school would always have the mice that they were going to kill at the end of the year and I'd always take them home...I'd hide them under my bed... And the earliest I can remember is we used to go to the circus and they would sell chameleons... they had little collars on attached to a leash and then they were all pinned to a board and they would sell them to people to pin on their shirts and I remember being so horrified and my activism at that time was saving up my allowance and buying as many of them as I could so that they could come home and live a normal life rather than being pinned to somebody's shirt. So that was like early on.... I also was the one that everybody brought the baby birds to in the neighborhood and tried to save, you know, when they would fall out of the nest. I was known kind of in that block as a quote animal lover. And in my

³⁸ *Giant* (1956), starring Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean, contains a scene that cinematically illustrates this not-uncommon phenomenon. The family is gathered around the Thanksgiving table and the children ask about the turkey. They are very upset and do not want to eat the animal; they leave the room crying. The mother (Elizabeth Taylor) consoles them and encourages them to come back to the table and eat their meat, which they do.

teenage years my brother's friends shot a bottle rocket with a toad in it and when I found out what they did I broke the rocket in half and pretty much beat up the neighborhood boys over that one [laughing].

Nelson also had a rescue impulse, revealed as a ten year old when he stood up to his friends to defend a group of toads that they were smashing with rocks. After this incident, he claims to have become something of an “outcast” among his friends.

NELSON: ...when I was little we had this stream that we played by with the other kids. And there were toads in there, lots and lots, thousands, and I got in trouble with the other kids one time because they were all smashing the toads with rocks and I kind of just flipped and I threw a big rock in the water and got them all wet and then I ran away and teased them... And so they started throwing rocks at me... It kind of made me the outcast... I mean I didn't make the whole connection with what I was eating, but I did feel that connection that you shouldn't just kill them for nothing...that was probably the first time that I stood up for the animals in some way...

The excerpt below is, like Arielle's anecdote above, another childhood recollection featuring fish. In the wake of the commercial success of the 2003 film, *Finding Nemo*, it would perhaps be less surprising to observe an increased outpouring of sympathy from children for fish. But in general, fish are not objects of sympathy, nor are they even considered to be animals in some cases, to the point that many people who call themselves “vegetarians” continue to eat fish. The following activist also mentions elsewhere that her dad's hunting had bothered her as a child. Although her dad never took her hunting, only her brothers, he did take her fishing. She can't remember how old she was when she tried unsuccessfully to rescue the fish in the incident recounted below, just that she was “really little.”

NATASHA: ... He took me fishing when I was little... and most of the time we wouldn't catch anything but this one time we caught a whole bunch of fish and I was like, okay, we got them now we're going to put them back in, and he said, no, we're going to take them home and eat them. And so he took them back to our house and we had this big, it was much bigger than a barrel but it was kind of that style, like a bucket of rain water and really tall and wide and he put all the fish in there to keep them alive until dinnertime and I went and got a bucket and caught one of the fish in the bucket and I was going to take her back to the pond but it

was too far so I got like halfway there and I put the bucket down in the woods and I was like, oh I'll go take her later. And it was so bad because of course she died in the bucket and I found her there. But then I went back to the house and my dad was all upset, your mom said these fish are too little and bony and we have to take them back...so he got them all to take them back and I was like, oh god, my fish! And I went and got her and she was dead [laughing].

The following recollection by Arielle is noteworthy not only because it indicates a rather strong rescue impulse, but also because it involves insects, a type of animal that garners even less sympathy than fish do in our culture, not to mention mammals or birds. In the vignette below, Arielle describes her attempts to save helpless bugs that she perceived were in life-threatening situations. These incidents surprise her today because she, like most of the rest of us, is not particularly fond of insects.

ARIELLE: ... I also remember walking to the bus stop and pill bugs being on the ground like upside down and having to stop and turn every pill bug over. I don't know if they have them out here but they have pill bugs in California... so they get turned over and I guess they can't get up because I would see them struggling so I would have to turn every one over and I would miss the bus and stuff for school because I was so like obsessed with turning over the pill bugs. Oh wait, no, I remember the first one! When I went to the snow, the first family vacation and there were these lady bugs on a tree, covering a tree but a lot of them had fallen off into the snow and I had to pick them all up put them back on the tree because I thought they were all freezing in the snow. It's so weird. I had this like weird bug thing and I don't even like bugs... and I also I had to spend hours netting the bugs out of the pool too... I remember thinking, oh god it's never going to end. There's so many bugs in here. I can't possibly get them all out [laughing]. I would just take the bugs out and dump them in the flowerbed. But I know it's wacky. It's not like I like bugs at all today. I think they're kind of gross. And I used to take bees and stuff and one of them stung me and I was like swimming in the pool and saved it and it stung me and my dad like said, come here little bee and made the bee crawl into a little ball, like a plastic ball, and then he smashed it and...it was totally shocking. It was like betrayal, I mean, I had no idea. At first I was crying cause I was stung, and then I really wailed. So I think those are the early bug memories.

Although the beginning perfectly encapsulates the impulse to save animals who are perceived to be in dangerous or life-threatening situations, the last part of her story, where she mentions her feelings of shock and sadness after her dad killed the bee, leads into the next section, which will

discuss the third component in this aspect of the predisposing schema: feelings of guilt and sadness over an animal being harmed.

Feelings of Guilt and Sadness

This category contains incidents that are perhaps less specific than those in the other two categories; however, sensitivity to animal suffering revealed itself in ways other than resistance to meat and impulses to rescue animals from harmful situations. Sometimes loosely related events evoked feelings of sadness or guilt, which seems to indicate the presence of the “responsiveness to animal suffering” component of the predisposing schema. For Ferdinand, his misgivings about hurting animals, partially evidenced in his refusal to dissect in sixth grade, are tied to his affinity for animals, a schematic characteristic discussed in more detail in the next section.

FERDINAND: ...I think in the 6th grade I knew that I was going to be a vegetarian. I just loved animals. I hated the unit in my Spanish class on bullfighting. I refused to dissect in the classroom at the time. I was still so young that I wasn't empowered enough to totally not even attend that class but I wouldn't touch the animal... But it wasn't until in 6th grade, I wrote this poetry book for English class and it was all about cows and my favorite poem was a haiku entitled, Cruelty. And it says, Cows are very neat. They have horns and ears and feet. Chop, chop. Now they're meat.

Sherlock, a vegan campaign coordinator with PETA, and Shamus, a lawyer who does pro bono work for the animal rights movement, both had negative BB gun experiences when they were boys that involved shooting animals and then feeling guilty afterward over their actions.

SHERLOCK: ... When I was growing up, for Christmas, I must have been nine years old or something like that, and I got a BB gun, a nice big old BB gun with pump action with a scope on it. And my father gave it to me. And my mother was like, we shouldn't get our son a gun.

NICOLE: Were you asking for it?

SHERLOCK: No, my dad just gave it to me, because my dad grew up on a farm and had guns... And yeah, so I got a gun and I was so excited. And my mother, Sherlock, don't you *dare* shoot at anything alive. If I see you kill a robin, you're in for it.

NICOLE: What did your dad say?

SHERLOCK: He didn't say anything. He said, yeah, just shoot at cans.

SHERLOCK: So I got the BB gun and I got bored with shooting at cans and there was a chipmunk. We had a huge back yard with the river behind it, just gorgeous. And a big woodpile and there was a little chipmunk sitting on the woodpile and it was eating an acorn. And so I had my BB gun and I lined it up in the scopes, in the crosshairs, and for some reason I pulled the trigger, you know. And I didn't pump it up hard enough to kill the chipmunk, but I shot him and the BB hit him right in between the eyes... and it just hit him [laughing] and he dropped the acorn and like rubbed his nose like this [demonstrates] and ran away.

NICOLE: Was your intent to kill him?

SHERLOCK: No! I didn't know what I was going to do. I just unthinkingly did it and I felt so guilty, I felt so awful, because ... if I killed it, maybe I wouldn't have felt anything because it was dead, but when I shot it I saw it react and rub its nose and run away.

Shamus had a similar negative emotional experience, except in his case he actually killed the animal in question.

SHAMUS: ... before that was the incident when I got my BB gun, which I had wanted for a long time, and my brother would go out and shoot birds and whatever, my middle brother. And I really wanted a BB gun, and I saved up and finally got my BB gun and went out with my brother and the first bird I shot at I hit. I ran over and it really struck me. And I looked down and there was a bird and the bird was dead on the ground and I felt really bad and...it made me really sad, and I didn't want to shoot any more birds. And I never shot that BB gun again [NICOLE: You didn't?] No [laughing], that was it. [NICOLE: Did you talk to your brother about this?] I remember we ran over and he said, oh, he's dead. And I said, oh, don't say that, or something like that. I was upset about it. And then he went to go shoot more birds and I just didn't want to.

It is not only BB gun incidents that provoke feelings of guilt or sadness; real hunting can do the same thing. Stan grew up in a hunting family, and his family operated a farm with a slaughterhouse on the premises. Growing up, he helped with the butchering process. This never bothered him as a child and he never questioned eating meat until he was much older; he did not go vegetarian until he was 28 years old. However, he did experience a negative emotional reaction the first time he shot and killed a deer. Although this incident obviously had an impact on him, and he easily recalls it almost twenty years later, he continued to hunt afterwards. It is probable that competing socialization influences, especially expectations conveyed through male

role models regarding masculinity and hunting, were stronger and pushed his easy responsiveness to animal suffering into a latency period. He had stopped hunting by the time he was in college and, interestingly enough, ended up marrying a vegetarian, which undoubtedly helped to bring his latent concern with animal suffering to the surface.

STAN: I remember the first deer that I killed. I shot a doe when I was twelve years old... I get pretty emotional if I talk about it... my father wanted me to get a deer. And one came out and I shot it and it just dropped and it was this really horrible experience. I was shaking after I did it ...and my father and his friends came. I was basically applauded and congratulated and the feelings I had, I guess they passed or were hidden I guess maybe...then I shot other, hunted rabbits and birds and all those things.

Also interesting is the fact that it was the resurfacing of a heretofore-repressed childhood memory in adulthood that caused him to ultimately decide to go vegetarian. Although he had been dabbling with vegetarianism (for health reasons) for some time, when this memory resurfaced, the guilt and sadness associated with it were overwhelming. Making a commitment to vegetarianism (he had been eating fish until this point) seemed for him to be a way of managing these negative emotions.

STAN: ... so then one night Mae and I were up at my boss' summer house in West Virginia and we were talking about animals and we started talking about animal rights... we're talking about animals and we're drinking beer and I told the story to her about, which I really kind of blocked out...but um when I was kid, I was about 12 or 13, we were walking a long ways, several miles, to a friend's house my brother and I cross the field and we caught, we found a woodchuck that was away from its hole and – 13 year old boys – and we killed the woodchuck with sticks.

NICOLE: Really?

STAN: It was awful and I was like sitting there in West Virginia telling Mae this story and I just started crying... I had totally blocked it out and the reason I think was because we saw a woodchuck, a woodchuck came up in the conversation and we started talking about animals and I said I'm not going to eat fish anymore. I just said that. I'm not going to eat any animals anymore...I said I owe it to the woodchuck.

Natasha was bothered not by her own hunting (mainly because her dad never took her hunting; she is the one, however, who tried unsuccessfully to rescue the fish after they went fishing

together), but remembers being bothered by her dad's hunting and the sight of dead animals when he would bring them home.

NATASHA: ... my parents knew, I think, that it bothered me and I had like really mixed emotions about my dad's hunting, like he'd bring home these dead animals and I remember in particular he brought home a deer, just brought it right into the kitchen, and put the deer on the floor, and the body wasn't even stiff yet, and I was really horrified at that...

Amber's early memory involves neither hunting nor BB guns but an insect, similar to Arielle's stories above except that Amber did not try to rescue this bug. However, she did feel guilty and "horrible" after she goaded her father to kill it. She remembers this incident vividly and says that it was the first time she remembers feeling compassion.

AMBER: So I was six years old, I was in my room with one of my friends and there was this ant on the ground and we were like, oh no! It's an ant! Oh! We were really scared and we called my dad and we were like, Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! And so he was like, how do you want me to kill it? And we were like, Stomp on it! Stomp on it! And so he comes in with his big boot and he stomps on it and he's like, now what do you want me to do? He was just trying to humor us or whatever. And we were like, throw it in the fireplace! Throw it in the fireplace! So he takes a little shovel and takes the ant and throws it in the fireplace, like this little ant. And we're like, yeah! And then I remember after my friend left I just started bawling because I felt so horrible...I mean it was just an ant but I felt *so* bad. And I felt so mean... It hit me afterwards. Like, why did I need to do that? And I remember that so vividly because I just spent the rest of the day moping...

In addition to sensitivity to perceived animal suffering, many of the respondents also recalled feeling an affinity with animals. More often than not, this affinity was global rather than local and was expressed as a general love for all animals, rather than as a strong bond with a particular, cherished companion animal.

2. PRONOUNCED AFFINITY FOR, OR FASCINATION WITH, ANIMALS

The second aspect of the predisposing schema, a pronounced fondness for animals, may explain how the sensitivity to animal suffering, which was present in the childhood selves of many of the activists whom I interviewed, seems to move seamlessly into an impulse to alleviate

the perceived suffering. A majority of my respondents (19) reported being very fond of animals as children. While, again, it is not unusual for children to be fascinated with animals, these interview accounts highlight a fondness for animals which, when coupled with a sensitivity to suffering, may interact to create fertile ground for re-socialization and identity transformation. Sometimes the person feels a connection to animals, or is just “good with” them.

SERENA: I’ve always felt like, you know there are those people who are just sort of awkward with animals, or don’t really know how to relate or touch them or kind of back off from them. But I’ve always been the type of person to just, I don’t know, I’m drawn to animals and they seem to be aware of that, that there’s something in me that’s gentle and compassionate. Um I say that only because I’ve had a lot of experiences with animals where people have said oh, don’t, you know she bites, or this or that warning me from an animal and I’ve just never had any problems like that. It’s just always been a real connection.

Evan has always been “fascinated” with animals, even though he never had a pet growing up.

EVAN: ...I always wanted pets, I was always pushing for them but it wouldn’t work in my family. Everyone was too busy...so I didn’t grow up around animals although from as long as I can remember I always liked animals and also had a certain – reverence? I don’t know, I’m not sure what the word is, but I guess respect. I respect animals in a sense...so I grew up, I think, respecting animals, liking animals a lot. Um, really fascinated with animals I think as a little kid...I still have lots of stuffed animals and I always had lots of stuffed animals.

NICOLE: You still do?

EVAN: Yeah...I still have a bunch. I still keep a bunch in my bed, actually for a 22 year-old that’s pretty weird, at least a 22 year-old male, but I don’t really give a shit...

And Katie not only had a strong attraction to animals but also wanted to *be* one. Her early habit of pretending she was a horse is interesting in light of her later meat resistance, which, because of her supportive parents (who are now vegetarians themselves), resulted in her being completely vegetarian by the time she was 12 years old. The catalyst for her meat epiphany experience was a situation of cognitive empathy, where she imagined the similarities between a chicken’s leg bone and the bones in her own body. Perhaps there is a connection between these two instances of species boundary blurring and taking the role of the animal-other,

as she at one time pretends she is an animal, and at another time imagines the ways in which the animal she is eating is similar to herself.

KATIE: I grew up loving animals, I mean just really having a strong attraction to them. I can remember when I lived on this farm in Kentucky going out to the pasture and they had these tables set up in the pasture with big salt licks on them and I remember climbing up and like sitting there licking the salt licks and stuff ...and then I always wanted to be around them and I remember like trying to get close to these calves who were pretty much petrified of me and they were trying to get away but I wanted to be close to them. And I remember just loving this little pony that was there... So I definitely had an affinity and my mom used to say, and I don't know if this is myth or truth, but that I used to gallop on my hands and knees before I walked or something. Because I did this thing for years – this probably sounds really weird – I used to pretend like I was a horse. I did this for many years, like too many years [laughing]. It would be real weird because I was like ten years old like on my hands and knees and I did a really good horse impression. I would just gallop back and forth on the carpet, back and forth. Set up pillows, jump them, do all kinds of horsy stuff and I like ruined the carpet in the house eventually because it was just being pounded ...I would just do it incessantly. I used to have calluses on my knees and stuff.

3. GENERAL CONCERN WITH SUFFERING, VICTIMIZATION, AND INJUSTICE

Sometimes the victimization side of the Victimization-Animal Schema is more pronounced than the sensitivity to animals, and the predisposition will manifest itself primarily with a concern for victimization in general, sometimes expressed as an interest in human rights or the exploitation of people, in addition to animals. Or, the concern with animals will come later, as an outgrowth of an earlier concern for human-oriented causes. This is sometimes referred to as “the extension thesis,” whereby compassion for one group stimulates compassion for another group (Finsen and Finsen 1995).

When Jill went to law school at age 22, she knew she wanted to specialize in a social issue; she just wasn't sure which one. She eventually became interested in animal rights as a corollary to her concern for environmental issues. However, she was also strongly drawn to victimization issues that affected people, such as domestic violence and abused children.

JILL: I was stuck between domestic violence, women and children, and the environment. So I was always in the socially conscious realm...I just hadn't narrowed it down...and so then...I came across The Fund for Animals and they had an internship and so that just started me thinking... I had never thought about relating animals to the environment...so I stayed on there working on the migratory bird treaty act and then it was that New Year's Eve, my New Year's resolution, and I went vegetarian.

Although Stan was not actively involved with other social causes before becoming involved with vegetarianism and animal rights, he appears to have had a personal affinity for issues of human victimization and oppression, as evidenced by the fact that books like Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (particularly Tom Joad's character) resonated a great deal with Stan when he read them. He even talks about these books having had an inspirational effect on him with regard to going beyond feeling sympathy for animals and intellectual affinity for the ideas of animal liberation to becoming active for animals, although they are about human exploitation.

STAN: I guess after reading Peter Singer's book and... I would say I took it with maybe being related to a couple other of my favorite books, *Grapes of Wrath* probably and *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison... those are two of my favorite books. I love those books. Those books really changed my life. We grew up with an extremely racist, prejudiced, anti-Semitic, sexist father. So those books, I really learned a lot from them. And so of course the jump from racism to speciesism after reading Singer's book is pretty simple. And so I read Peter Singer's book within the context of really Ellison's and Steinbeck's novels...then I guess I wanted to go beyond that. I was inspired, I guess, by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Tom Joad, who was probably the first activist I ever read about though he didn't call himself an activist in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and so I wanted to be like Tom Joad...

Hannah, like Jill above, was first interested in domestic violence and juvenile delinquency issues before turning her attention to animals. However, she also had the animal-oriented aspects of the schemas in place as a child, as was revealed in her stories about rescuing neighborhood squirrels and classroom mice, as well as her early resistance to meat. But she also had a concern for human victimization, and this concern led her to work with battered women

before becoming involved with wildlife rehabilitation and, later, animal rights. Although she shifts back and forth between human and animal causes, her concern stems from the same sources: sensitivity to suffering and victimization, a concern with justice, and a desire to help “the underdog.”

HANNAH: I’ve always been empathic towards animals. I’ve always had a strong sense of justice though. You know, like it didn’t matter who the underdog was. I always had that...I actually moved to this area to be an artist but before that when I got my degree in psychology I worked with battered women and I did an internship and then stayed on there and actually that’s what I thought I was going to be devoting my life to. That or work with like juvenile delinquents because again I was very cause oriented and you know there’s a victim there.

NICOLE: ...why did you choose animal rights as your primary focus...?

HANNAH: ...because they are the ultimate victim. When I worked with battered women it was the same issue: victimization.... I’m always sympathetic for the underdog but the animal was such the ultimate victim, and, you know, such the underdog, and there’s so many of them and they are so innocent and so undeserving of everything we do to them...

Another activist, Sophia, describes her sensitivity to suffering and affinity for helpless beings (including human babies) as something that “runs in her family.” Growing up, Sophia remembers her mother stopping to assist stray pets and other wayward animals:

SOPHIA: ...she would always stop, I remember being in a car with her and picking up stray animals, dogs, and bringing them to their rightful places. I remember her stopping and moving turtles across the road.

Unlike many others in my sample, who appear to have been alone in their families in feeling concern for animal suffering or victimization in general, it is not difficult to see the familial influence with regard to Sophia’s Victimization-Animal Schema. Even her sister, although not as into animals as Sophia, had a propensity to help the helpless. Sophia describes this as a “rescue complex,” which she herself shared.

SOPHIA: ... my sister and I both had a kind of a rescue complex our whole lives. And we both loved any kind of helpless, innocent being and we both were very into working with children and babies... and both pretty young started doing volunteer work with disadvantaged children and such so it is all tied together

definitely. My sister ended up fostering and adopting a child who had been born drug-addicted and the whole thing, so it's definitely, that kind of empathy was in the family.

She believes a heightened sense of empathy coupled with an abhorrence of suffering is something that sets animal activists apart from everyone else. The schema being expressed here encompasses all helpless beings, humans as well as animals. Although she feels extreme empathy for animals now, as a child she also empathized with kids at school who were being picked on, to the point of being upset at home over it. Her mom cautioned her about being "too sensitive" and feeling things too deeply and told her she needed to learn to close her eyes sometimes, for her own emotional health. However, Sophia points out that feeling things so deeply also translates into a strong motivator for activism. I include a lengthy quote here because I think Sophia is a particularly good example of the predisposing victimization schema at work, and its influence from childhood to adulthood. This predisposing schema seems to have had a very strong effect on the adult whom the child became; after founding and working at various animal shelters during and after college, and interning at PETA, today she is the proprietor of one of the first all-vegan retail stores, a business that she started herself (with the help of her parents).

SOPHIA: ...I have a special affinity basically for any being that is innocent and helpless. That's the same thing whether you're talking about a human baby or an animal. They have not done anything to bring on their own suffering...I think that's an uncanny ability that some people have to draw the line at their own species and to say, I'm against all suffering but I don't consider that suffering because it's not anything I can really relate to. [Animal activists] are able to widen...who falls into the group of 'like me.'

I mean that's empathy... and that's the difference between us and quote normal people is that we have that capacity to be able to put ourselves in somebody else's situation and really feel what that would feel like. And to not only be able to do that with humans but be able to do that with any sentient being. And that's what makes the difference between us and other people because once you do that you cannot eat them or cause suffering because you can feel exactly what it would feel like to be them, and that is horrifying and it makes it very

difficult. It makes going through life very difficult. It's very painful. But it opens your eyes to a lot of things.

And in fact as a kid I used to kind of be like that, I used to be like that with other people...real sensitive. And I would be upset at night, my mom would come in to tuck me in and I would tell her something that happened, they made fun of so and so kid or something and it had hurt me, and I felt bad for them and I would worry. She would say, I remember her saying to me, Sophia you cannot go through life like this. Sometimes you have to learn to close your eyes. She'd say that to me. Sometimes you have to learn to turn the other way and close your eyes. You can't. It will kill you. And I just never, I was like missing that barrier or something [laughing], you know? And yes, it makes it very difficult but it also I think lets you bear witness to a lot of things that need to be fixed in this world. And it motivates you to fix them because...you can't just ignore it when you're feeling it that strongly.

Boundary Blurring and the Predisposing Schema

The high degree of empathy demonstrated in many activists' recollections is likely to be at least partially responsible for their moral identification with creatures other than members of their own species. Of course, there is a continuum of acceptable objects of empathy in our culture, and it is related to the similarity principle discussed below. It goes something like (in decreasing order): humans, pets, wildlife, farm animals, and vermin. Arluke and Sanders' "sociozoologic scale," which refers to the hierarchy that society imposes on the animal kingdom in terms of social worth, which depends mainly upon their perceived nearness to human beings, describes this continuum (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Arluke and Sanders emphasize the ways in which people use cultural conceptions of animals to reinforce unequal treatment of humans (by "animalizing" minority groups, for instance) rather the ways in which these social categorizations justify unequal treatment of animals themselves. They write:

For example, societies rank everything on a ladder of worth, including people and animals, and systems of social control perpetuate these rankings. Such vertical social orders make inequality of privilege seem "natural," as not everyone or everything will be regarded equally. Those who land at the bottom, because they are in some inferior

category, can justifiably be exploited and oppressed. Our ability to rank-order animals – and the inconsistencies that follow – may be a useful form of thinking for systems of social control that seek to justify inconsistent treatment of humans. Once in culture’s hands, animals may offer one such social control device. They can become useful vehicles by which humans express their image of society’s ladder or serve as means of enforcing these expectations. Of course, that animal symbols can work this way presumes that members of contemporary societies classify animals not only on biological grounds but on moral and social ones as well (p. 168).

Continuing, they briefly touch upon the implications of this ordered way of thinking for animals themselves, rather than merely as “symbols” whose primary function is as instruments of social control within human societies. While the power of animal symbols for human societies throughout history cannot be denied, the animals themselves are also profoundly affected by this hierarchical thinking. This hierarchy is cultural and not biological, and hence more resistant to change:

A hierarchical model of animals has governed Western thought since Aristotle’s notion that nature was ordered on a vertical scale that extended from lifeless things to man ... Scholars have thoroughly criticized this way of classifying animals ... arguing that the chain of being and the theological doctrine behind it wrongly allowed people to consider themselves inherently superior to animals and justified their exploitation of them. Others have criticized more contemporary ways that people classify living beings. Despite Darwin, Stephen Jay Gould (1991) contends, a common misconception is that evolution is a linear progression of life into a final, perfect form with humans arising from apes. This distorted notion of evolution, reminiscent of the earlier chain of being, incorrectly ranks animals on a phylogenetic scale where humans, with their unique traits, are at the pinnacle, while “primitive” organisms or creatures that least resemble humans physically are relegated to the bottom. Gould notes that even when evolution is more accurately portrayed as a branched process, humans are still depicted as superior because those animals at the bottom are considered to be inferior.

Although thinkers like Lynda Birke and Gould are correct to fault the chain of being on logical, moral, and scientific grounds, in some fashion it still lingers on in contemporary thinking. Attempts to eliminate contemporary versions of the chain are likely to fail so long as its critics focus on the scientific nature of classification rather than on the sociological basis for how people in contemporary societies order living beings. The desire continues to put animals on some sort of ladder, not because people are ignorant about science – although they certainly may be – but because some dominant ideas linger over many centuries. The history of ideas has demonstrated that certain notions become so pervasive and central to the thought of a culture that over time people uncritically

apply these ideas to new situations ([Douglas 1971] Arluke and Sanders, 1996, pp. 168-9).

Thus, despite mounting scientific evidence to the contrary, erroneous and anthropocentric ways of thinking about animals linger and cannot fully be understood without thinking about them sociologically. This a good starting point, but Arluke and Sanders still return to a human-centered point of view, and never fully examine the impact of these cultural ways of ordering and thinking about animals on humans' relations with animals and their effect on the lives of animals themselves. They stay within conventional anthropological frames for regarding animals, that is, in terms of their usefulness to humans:

Whether pet, demon, tool, or vermin, the sociozoologic scale is a type of story that humans – with the help of animals – tell themselves and each other about the meaning of “place” in modern societies. As stories often do, they explain and rationalize certain relationships that are expected of people – where they belong in or out of society and how they are expected to behave ... That social constructions of animals are highly flexible and rich symbols – as pointed out years ago by anthropologists who knew that animals are “good to think” – is no doubt why animals are such useful instruments through which humans can express their conflicted feelings toward fellow humans (p.186).

Their book, however, ends on a positive note:

In our own research findings, there are seeds of moral progress if that is defined as awareness of contradiction ... Situations in both primate labs forced people to become aware of inconsistencies. Although the sites had opposing perspectives toward animals, there were small pockets of resistance to the predominant view of primates espoused at each lab. Occasionally, the difference erupted into clashes over the appropriate treatment of animals, thrusting contradiction into everyone's awareness ... For those seeking a redressing to society's inconsistencies, there may also be reason for optimism. As we discovered in Chapter 1, the meanings of animals are not fixed because they are social constructions. How we think about animals, as well as ourselves, is bound to change as society itself changes. Some would find, for example, that the sociozoologic scale as we have known it is already crumbling, giving way to a less hierarchical view of human and animal kind. Betty Jean Craige [1992] for one, contends that in recent years there has been a radical transformation of Western culture to a more inclusive, less hierarchical social order. Such change offers hope that our inconsistent treatment of animals may also be resolved (p. 191).

The appearance of character types with a pronounced aversion to routine practices that have become institutionalized and taken-for-granted as “normal” may indicate social change on the horizon. The contradictions of which Arluke and Sanders write may be perceived by certain individuals before the rest of society as a whole. Indeed, some have argued that there are certain character types who are more sensitive than others and therefore are more prone to detect and respond to minute or below-surface level changes happening in the larger culture.^{39, 40} These sensitive types may be more likely to develop feelings of alienation from the dominant culture, and these feelings, if the conditions are right, may in turn be channeled into social activism or lifestyle change. This “sensitive nature” is part of what I have discussed in this chapter as a predisposing condition, the Victimization- Animal Schema.

³⁹ This boundary between animals and humans, which has been used historically to justify humankind’s treatment of animals (and is legitimated both by science and religion), is increasingly coming under scrutiny from many different directions, especially in light of scientific advances that continually demonstrate that animals are not as different from “us” – physiologically, cognitively, or emotionally – as previously thought. These scientific advances have led to changes in philosophical and ethical theory, which in turn have begun to challenge humankind’s position of innate superiority, and by extension called into question the things that are done to animals in the name of this superiority. Superiority depends on the construction and maintenance of clear boundaries between the species, irrespective of cognitive abilities or sentience.

⁴⁰ There are numerous examples of recent research on the cognitive, communicative, and emotional capabilities of animals, including Donald R. Griffin’s *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Marc Hauser’s *Wild Minds: What Animals Really Think* (New York: Owl Books, 2001); Frans de Waal’s *Good-Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy’s *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Delacourt Press, 1995); and Marc Bekoff’s *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

This intuitive⁴¹ (as opposed to socially sanctioned) refusal to delineate moral boundaries according to species (non-recognition of what Arluke and Sanders call the “sociozoologic scale”) and insistence (albeit unconscious at first, i.e. motivated by emotion rather than analytic reasoning) in allocating empathy on the basis of a subject’s ability to feel pain rather than on any other factor (such as intelligence or species membership) is a result of boundary blurring. Not recognizing the legitimacy of these cultural boundaries suggests a resistance to socialization (discussed more fully in the next chapter), since the hierarchical scale is a sociological and not biological phenomenon.

Conclusion: Empathy, Socialization, and the Similarity Principle

Neither sensitivity nor empathy for animals in childhood is a rare phenomenon. Children are encouraged to love and identify with animals through just about every outpost of children’s culture including toys, games, stories, and movies, and even through the presence of actual animals in the form of pets.⁴² The saturation of children’s culture with animals is well

⁴¹ While some believe that intuition is a legitimate and valuable source of moral thinking (Fox 1999, Sapontzis 1987), others see intuition as necessarily on shaky ground (Singer 1975; Frey 1983 paraphrased in Finsen and Finsen 1994), because intuitions, like other of our thoughts, values and beliefs, are a product of socialization, and as such are not immune to the influence of the dominant culture, and are therefore likely to express prejudice.

⁴² Approximately 60 percent of households have at least one dog or cat (American Veterinary Association 2002, quoted in Irvine 2004) and, more significantly for the discussion at hand, pets live in at least 75 percent of all American households with children (Melson 2001).

documented (Melson 2001, Myers 1998).⁴³ But through normal socialization, children learn to place boundaries between themselves and other animals, as well as between different species of animals, in terms of norms, emotions, and moral treatment (acceptable [and legal] treatment for a cow in our culture, for example, is not acceptable [nor legal] treatment of a dog, and so on). Part of the social experience of growing up is acquiring an “adult” attitude toward animals, which includes adopting a utilitarian orientation toward them (Johnson 1996). Emotions such as empathy are channeled “appropriately” toward our own species and species deemed more “like us” in some way (i.e. dogs, who in many cases share our homes, and chimpanzees, who share much of our DNA), but also, in some cases, certain categories of people (such as our own race, ethnicity, or religion for example).

There are practical reasons for social forces to channel empathy and not allow it to run amok. It is in the service of psychic self-preservation, perhaps, that we tend to feel more sympathy if an earthquake were to kill scores of people in San Francisco than in Turkey, for

⁴³ Gail Melson, Professor of Child Development and Family Studies, writes in the introduction to her book about animals and children, *Why the Wild Things Are* (2001):

Soon I realized it was not just real animals that figured so ubiquitously in children’s lives. Animal characters fill children’s stories and screens, both television and computer. Big Bird, Barney, Ninja Turtles, Carebears, and stuffed animals of every sort populate the toy shelf and decorate the playroom. Their images saturate the huge market of children’s gear, from training mugs, to backpacks, lunchboxes, and funmeals. Animals real, fanciful, and long gone from the earth become a child’s “significant other” for a time. Here is a dinosaur-besotted kid with Paleolithic expertise worthy of a Ph.D. There is a Curious George-fixated child, surrounded by mischievous-monkey paraphernalia. Everywhere, it seems, are Sendak wild beasts and Seuss lorax. Animals crowd the symbolic lives of children, but thin out from their imaginations as they mature into teenagers. This affinity of children for animal characters, from Mickey Mouse to Babar the Elephant, seemed as self-evident as children’s love of ice cream. The relationship between children and animals was one I had ignored in my teaching, writing, and research even as I explored the significant human ties – parents, relatives, teachers, and peers – that shape children’s lives. I began to ask myself incredulously, how *could* I have missed it? ...Animals were so *there* as part of the woof and web of childhood, including my own, that I had never noticed them. Neither had most other scholars, I discovered... (pp. 3-4).

example, or when an airplane carrying Americans, rather than passengers from a distant country, crashes. To feel sorrow for everyone who suffers a tragedy would most certainly result in emotional exhaustion. Therefore, as with selective perception, which blocks out extraneous visual stimuli and the constant din of noises that might otherwise drive us insane, selective empathy functions to keep us from becoming bogged down in the unfortunate circumstances of others.⁴⁴

Since empathy involves mentally putting ourselves in the place of another, the fact that we tend to feel more sympathy for those perceived to be more “like us” is not surprising and is supported by numerous psychological studies, which refer to this phenomenon as “the similarity principle” (Plous 1993). Hence, people with backgrounds (or physical appearances) similar to our own can be expected to elicit more empathy than those who seem different, as will,

⁴⁴ Sophia discussed this tendency in our interview:

SOPHIA: It’s an ability to separate yourself ... I think it’s really a survival instinct. I think it’s kind of developed because it is debilitating if you see and feel everything all the time.

NICOLE: Right, it makes it hard to go through life like you were saying

SOPHIA: Yeah. You can’t do anything. And I think it’s something that has evolutionarily developed to make you able to survive because even I still have it to some extent. We all do if you think about it. It’s the same kind of thing that happens when if you hear about a war or starvation or even a plane crash in a far off place...when they come on and they say, oh 200 people were killed on a plane today in Nigeria you listen for the, and if they say America, if they say Colorado [gasps], but then if it’s Nigeria it’s like, oh okay it’s just Nigeria [laughing] you know? Which is horrible! But it’s like a human instinct to kind of try to separate yourself because you can’t survive. So I think for some of us that’s just less developed than others and that’s what allows us to have that strong sense of empathy. And it’s hard for me to think of it as less developed because I really think of it as more evolved, but

NICOLE: No, it’s interesting you can look at it from either direction

SOPHIA: Exactly. Because it is, it can be debilitating.

NICOLE: Definitely has advantages and disadvantages.

SOPHIA: Exactly, but I would never trade it in a million years because it’s opened my eyes to so many things.

expanding outward now, members of our own species, and expanding even further outward, those species perceived to be more like us.

Those species perceived to be most like us have been called “border species,” indicating their apparent closeness to human beings (Sanders 1996). Two examples of such “border species,” which hover around the human boundary in American culture, are great apes (bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans) and dogs. Each is granted greater moral consideration than other species because of their perceived proximity to humans, great apes because of their biological proximity and dogs because of their social proximity and status as honorary family members in many American households. But it is well known that, in general, less sympathy is aroused for animals perceived to be less similar to humans. The similarity principle is expressed in the tendency for people to feel more sympathy for mammals than for fish and birds, for instance. The potential transferability of the similarity principle, which has traditionally been applied to human-human relations, is also born out by numerous studies (Rajecki, Rasmussen, and Craft 1993; Plous 1993), which suggest it may also be applied to human-animal relations.

The similarity principle is sensible from an evolutionary perspective. Animals of all species are usually hard-wired to protect their progeny, and they sometimes even help non-related members of their own species. Cross-species empathy, however, while instances of it may exist (as in the well documented cases of cetaceans helping drowning human swimmers to reach the surface), seems to be rare (De Waal 1996). To empathize with everything and everyone would be detrimental to survival, a point articulated well by science fiction writer Philip K. Dick (1968) in his classic novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* In discussing the salient difference between androids and humans (the former do not experience empathy), he

muses about the social nature of empathy and its tendency to blur boundaries, and concludes that predators and solitary animals would have no use for this facility:

He had wondered, as had most people at one time or another, precisely why an android bounced helplessly about when confronted by an empathy-measuring test. Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnids. For one thing, the empathic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct: a solitary organism, such as a spider, would have no use for it; in fact it would tend to abort a spider's ability to survive. It would make him conscious of the desire to live on the part of his prey. Hence all predators, even highly developed mammals such as cats, would starve.

Empathy, he once had decided, must be limited to herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet. Because ultimately, the empathic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated...Oddly, it resembled a sort of biological insurance, but double-edged. As long as some creature experienced joy, then the condition for all other creatures included a fragment of joy. However, if any living being suffered, then for all the rest the shadow could not be entirely cast off. A herd animal such as man would acquire a higher survival factor through this; an owl or a cobra would be destroyed (pgs. 30-31).

In his book discussing biology, morality, and ethical behavior in species other than humans, zoologist and primatologist Frans De Waal (1998) devotes an entire chapter to the question of whether sympathy (of which empathy is one component) exists in nonhuman animals. In attempting to illuminate this subject, he distinguishes between "nurturance," or caring for one's offspring, and "succorant behavior." Succorant behavior is defined as "helping, caregiving, or providing relief to distressed or endangered individuals other than progeny. Thus, the dog staying protectively close to a crying child shows succorance, whereas the same dog responding to the yelps of her puppies shows nurturance" (p. 41). De Waal lists examples of primates, cetaceans, dogs, and elephants providing care and assistance to individuals other than their progeny. Of cetaceans, he writes:

Reports of leviathan care and assistance go back to the ancient Greeks. Dolphins are said to save companions by biting through harpoon lines or by hauling them out of nets in which they have gotten entangled. Whales may interpose themselves between a hunter's boat and an injured conspecific or capsize the boat.

In fact, their tendency to come to the defense of victims is so predictable that whalers take advantage of it. Once a pod of sperm whales is sighted, the gunner need only strike one among them. When other pod members encircle the ship, splashing water with their flukes, or surround the injured whale in a flowerlike formation known as the marguerite, the gunner has no trouble picking them off one by one. Such “sympathy entrapment” would be effective with few other animals (p. 41).

If the gunners felt as much empathy with the whales, their hunting enterprise would surely suffer. Cetaceans, primates, and elephants provide most of the examples used by De Waal as he attempts to answer his own question; should “succorant behavior” really be defined as sympathy as we understand it in human terms? In setting out to answer this question, he raises some interesting points about sympathy, which are relevant to the discussion here. First, while sympathy and empathy are connected, they are not the same thing. Although sympathy depends upon empathy, empathy does not necessarily result in kindness or altruistic behavior. He writes:

In reviewing the succorant behavior of animals we will pay special attention to characteristics it might share with human sympathy, the most important being empathy – that is, the ability to be vicariously affected by someone else’s feelings and situation. Psychologists and philosophers consider this capacity so central that “empathy” has gradually replaced “sympathy,” “compassion,” “sorrow,” and “pity” in much of their writings.

This blurring is unfortunate, for it ignores the distinction between the ability to recognize someone else’s pain and the impulse to do something about it. Administering electrical shocks to someone else’s genitals or pouring bleach in open wounds, as done by the torturers of our fine race, involves the very same ability of knowing what makes others suffer, yet it is quite the opposite of sympathy. What sets sympathy apart from cruelty, sadism, or plain indifference is that sensitivity to the other’s situation goes together with *concern* about him or her. As neatly summed up by psychologist Lauren Wispe: “The object of empathy is understanding. The object of sympathy is the other person’s well-being”(p. 41 [emphasis in original]).

He argues that animal succorance (as opposed to nurturance) is the functional equivalent of human sympathy, but then further differentiates between “learned adjustment” and “cognitive empathy.” De Waal hypothesizes that *learned adjustment* is more common in nonhuman animals, including primates, while *cognitive empathy* is more common in humans. Of learned

adjustment, he explains that monkeys take special care around handicapped or impaired individuals for as long as the predicament might last. They also learn to take the needs and abilities of the young or weak into account:

I always admire the complete control of adult males at play; with formidable canines, they gnaw and wrestle with juveniles without hurting them in the least. During play with older and stronger partners, on the other hand, monkeys pull no punches; juveniles will jump on an adult male's back and hit him in the face with an energy that would be fatal if it happened the other way around. Primates play one way with the strong, another way with the weak.

But is this an example of sympathy or empathy at work? Not according to De Waal. Even if the end result, the behavior, looks about the same, there is a difference between learning and understanding:

Play inhibitions most likely are a product of conditioning. From an early age, monkeys learn that the fun will not last if they are too rough with a younger playmate; the youngster will scream in protest, try to pull away, or worse, the play will be broken up heavy-handedly by a protective mother. These negative consequences shape the behavior of older individuals. The same process of learned adjustment may explain why handicapped members of monkey societies are treated differently. Healthy members do not necessarily know what is wrong, but gradually become familiar with the limitations of their less fortunate mates.

Learned adjustment is best contrasted with *cognitive empathy*, that is, the ability to picture oneself in the position of another individual.⁴⁵ This is an extension of sensitivity to expressions of emotion but goes quite a bit further...

Cognitive empathy may not be widespread in the animal kingdom. It occurs in people and perhaps out closest relatives, the apes, but may be absent in other animals... (p. 48)

⁴⁵ De Waal provides the following example to illustrate the difference between learned adjustment and cognitive empathy:

To explain how it works, imagine that a friend has lost both arms in a car accident. Just from seeing his condition, or hearing about it, we will grasp the reduction in physical ability he has undergone. We can imagine what it is like to have no arms, and our capacity for empathy allows us to extrapolate this knowledge to the other's situation. Our friend's dog, by contrast, will need time to learn that there is no point in bringing her master a stick to fetch, or that the familiar pat on the back is being replaced by a foot rub. Dogs are smart enough to get used to such changes, but their accommodation is based on learning rather than understanding. The result may be somewhat the same. But in the first case, differential treatment of the disabled is based on an understanding of their limitations; in the second, on familiarity with their behavior. Needless to say, the dog's learned adjustment is a slower process than cognitive empathy (p. 48).

The capacity for cognitive empathy, though shaped and molded by socialization, is hard-wired into human beings. While “hard-wired” is not a phrase often used by social constructionists, the centrality of empathy was imported into sociological social psychology by the students of G.H. Mead over 60 years ago (Mead 1962 [1934]). As Mead pointed out, the development of the self is impossible in the absence of social interaction, and successful social interaction depends upon taking the role of the other. Mead believed that humans were unique in their capacity for role-taking and in their ability to imaginatively assume the perspective of another person, or in the case of the generalized other, a whole community of “others.” This ability to take the role of the other relies upon a highly developed sense of empathy, in that each social actor must mentally assume the position of another in order to imagine what they are thinking and feeling so as to anticipate their response and so on, as the “conversation of gestures” which is human social interaction progresses smoothly.

However, the feeling of empathy itself also depends upon the ability to take the role of the other, which in turn is predicated upon self-awareness, or a sense of the self as distinct from others. “Without self-awareness, we would be incapable of cognitive empathy, as this requires a distinction between self and other and the realization that others have selves like us (De Waal, 1996, p. 67).” Self-awareness and empathy are inextricably linked, and De Waal argues that they exist on a continuum of sophistication:

... In this broader view, some species may reach greater heights of self-knowledge than others, but surely there can be no species without any such knowledge at all.

Similarly, it is hard to imagine empathy as an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Many forms of empathy exist intermediate between the extremes of mere agitation at the distress of others and a full understanding of their predicament (p. 69).

Role-taking, too, exists on a continuum of sophistication, perhaps originating, in its most rudimentary form, as “emotional contagion.”⁴⁶ From emotional contagion in its simple form to role-taking at its most complex, the ability to be affected by the situations of others exists on a continuum of increasing complexity and understanding, dependent upon the existence of an autonomous self. In turn, the autonomous self is strengthened through the exercise of empathy and taking the role of the other.

It is not hard to see why monkeys would want to avoid harm to themselves, but why would harm to another bother them? Probably they see certain others as extensions of themselves, and the distress of those resonates within them. Known as emotional contagion, this mechanism initially operates indiscriminately, yet becomes more selective with age...

Full-blown role-taking involves quite a bit more, however. The other is recognized not just as an extension of the self, but as a separate entity. Cognitive empathy is the ability to put oneself in the “shoes” of this other entity without losing the distinction between self and other. The American psychologist Martin Hoffman believes that this remarkable capacity grows out of emotional contagion. Being vicariously affected by others may make the child curious about their internal state, and stimulate him to search for cues about the others’ feelings. Out of this challenge grows an increased awareness of the self in relation to others (pp. 70-71).

The precise relationship between empathy and activism cannot, of course, be determined. Empathy is a personality attribute like others that is socially shaped and distributed across the range of human temperaments, with some people having more of this quality and some less. Generally speaking, empathy has advantages, especially for social species, most importantly aiding in survival, cooperation, communication, and, at least for human beings, in strengthening the self. But in all cases, empathy is channeled and bounded. As suggested by Philip K. Dick above, although empathy has advantages, especially for herd animals, a surfeit of empathy can mean destruction, both on a species and individual level. Therefore, although empathy with

⁴⁶ Emotional contagion is “the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1993, p. 96, quoted in De Waal, 1996, p.230n33).

animal-others may be relatively common in children,⁴⁷ it is not surprising that social forces work to erect boundaries around this emotion. So while it may not be rare for children to identify with animals to the point of not wanting to eat them, for example, what is rare is for the feelings to resurface and be acted upon later, if not followed through upon at the time of emergence due to the constraints of the child's structural position of dependence and lack of moral and practical autonomy.

A signature feature of the expression of this empathy is its boundary-blurring nature. Often the perception of the species-boundary is thin or non-existent, in that the child does not recognize or acknowledge the culturally created separations between categories that justify differential treatment of creatures that children may consider to be their peers, confederates, or potential friends rather than resources, objects, or commodities, as they will later come to be defined through normal socialization.

In order for these feelings to resurface and be given meaning later on, situational factors are decisive. It is one thing to be predisposed and yet another thing for this predisposition to manifest itself in the radical lifestyle transformation that typically accompanies the eschewing of meat and, later, all animal products. While the predisposition may be strong in childhood, the weight of socialization works to dilute the schema. In the absence of meaningful situational factors, the decisive turning points may never occur. It is these situational contingencies that directly provoke the turning point and transformation of identity. The schema makes the situational factors meaningful.

⁴⁷ Very young children, whose egos have not yet fully formed, do not readily distinguish themselves from the surrounding environment. Since they have not yet developed a sense of themselves as separate entities, they do not as easily recognize boundaries between themselves and others. Therefore, from a developmental perspective, it makes sense that children identify more strongly than adults not only with animals, but also with other people and features of the external environment, which later will become more distinct as the sense of self is strengthened (Piaget 1965 [1932]).

CHAPTER 5

TURNING POINTS: THE TRANSITION FROM MEAT EATER TO VEGAN

Introduction

Although 28 out of 30 of respondents decisively displayed one or more aspects of the predisposing victimization-animal schema discussed in the previous chapter, for many this predisposition was not, in and of itself, enough to create a turning point, either at the time, due to the intrinsic powerlessness of childhood, or even later in life because, as mentioned, the cumulative weight of socialization tends to dilute the predisposition; so, by the time many of my respondents were in a structural position that allowed them more freedom to act on their earlier impulses to abstain from eating meat, they had internalized meat eating as necessary, normal, and natural.

There are exceptions, for example, Katie, whose strong predisposition manifested itself as a meat epiphany at age six; she knew she wanted to be vegetarian at age ten and was completely vegetarian by age 12. The vegetarian turning point for her was a direct result of her predisposition. It is notable that she appears to have had the most supportive parents in my sample, especially if supportiveness can be measured, in part, not only by the parents permitting the child to become a vegetarian, but also by the parents themselves becoming vegetarians not long after the child, and as a result of the child's influence.

However, because the re-socialization process that accompanies becoming an animal rights activist typically involves at least two distinct stages (going vegetarian and going vegan)

the process will consist of two separate turning points. So even Katie, who had a vegetarian turning point at a very young age, did not go vegan at this time. Her transition to veganism ten years later at age 22 constituted another distinct turning point, although quite clearly related to the first. Although there is no discernible “point” for her vegetarian transformation, which took place during a two-year period between the ages of 10 and 12, one can be identified for her going vegan. Unlike her conversion to vegetarianism, which seemed to happen more gradually and with fewer characteristics of sudden onset, she was able to say (paraphrasing), this is the moment that I went vegan, as a result of this event (although there were other cumulative factors in her biography that contributed to the resonance of the final turning “point”).

The absence of a concrete turning point for those who go vegetarian at such a young age is understandable when we conceive of turning points as identity transformations (Strauss 1969). How could a turning point experienced by a ten year old be comparable to that experienced by an adult whose identity is obviously more developed (and hence the change will need to be reconciled in a more meaningful way)? Of course, this is a continuum, and while the identity of a 16 year old may be less developed (or at least less solidified) than that of an older person, they still will have 16 years of meat eating to reckon with, not to mention the potentially discouraging reactions of parents and other agents of socialization who will, ipso facto, have an interest in maintaining dominant cultural meanings, if only because they themselves have internalized them.

So this is not to suggest that turning points are only significant if they occur after a certain age, but rather to suggest that the transformation experience will be different depending upon life stage (child, adolescent, or adult), and that when we are dealing with a turning point at

ten years old, when the individual is still a child, we have to speak of “identity transformations” cautiously.

Turning Points

Unlike Katie, most of my respondents did not drift into vegetarianism or veganism as a result of the predisposing schema alone; although, as discussed earlier, much of the delay in the eventual transformation process seems to be attributable to stagnation resulting from the lack of practical autonomy possessed by the child, who is usually unable to exercise even a modicum of control over such routine daily decisions as diet. Typically, and excepting the occasional tantrum, outburst, or refusal to eat this or that (usually unfamiliar) food, the child eats what is put before him or her. To the extent that children are able to incorporate vegetarianism into their young lives, it is because the parents have permitted it. In the absence of extremely supportive, permissive, or flexible parents, like Katie’s, even those who display a strong predisposition need some other event (or accumulation of events) to induce something as dramatic as a turning point later in life. Although everyone’s transition was unique and idiosyncratic, there were certain patterns and even typical turning point paths, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Since the vegetarian and vegan turning points were separate incidents for everyone in my sample (the shortest time period between the two turning points was one month), I will deal with the transition to vegetarianism first (Table 3, Table 4). Most of the respondents in my sample did not experience vegetarian turning points as young as Katie. However, the overall distribution of ages at which activists in my sample went vegetarian was skewed younger than the age distribution for adopting veganism (Table 5, Table 6). For comparison purposes, I will present the age distribution tables together. Although a mean may not be very meaningful when dealing

with a sample of 30, these averages nevertheless illustrate the general trend, which is that vegetarianism was adopted on average at a younger age than veganism, which is not surprising since vegetarianism logically precedes veganism in that the latter encompasses the former.

Among my respondents, there was an average of three years difference between these two mean ages, with 19 years old being the average age for going vegetarian and 22 years old being the average age for going vegan.

Table 3. Age at Which Respondent Went Vegetarian

Went vegetarian (age)	Respondents (n=30)
10 – 13	6
14 – 17	9
18 – 21	8
22 – 25	2
26 – 29	4
Over 30	1

Table 4. School Level (Vegetarian)

Went vegetarian (school level)	Respondents (n = 30)
Pre- High School	6
High School	9
College	8
Post- College	7

Table 5. Age at Which Respondent Went Vegan

Went vegan (age)	Respondents (n = 30)
10 – 13	1
14 – 17	4
18 – 21	13
22 – 25	5
26 – 29	2
30 – 33	2
34 – 36	1
37 – 39	1
40 – 43	1

Table 6. School Level (Vegan)

Went vegan (school level)	Respondents (n = 30)
Pre- High School	1
High School	4
College	13
Post- College	12

In addition to age, also relevant to the discussion is the length of the period between the transitions, or the amount of time that elapsed between the vegetarian and vegan turning points (Table 5). The average transition time between going vegetarian and eventually going vegan was between two to five years, although, as can be seen in the chart, some people progressed from turning point to turning point much more quickly than the average, while others had a longer than average period between transitions. Parker, who went vegetarian at age 13 and vegan just one month later, had the shortest transition time. Arielle, who went vegetarian at age 12 and vegan at age 27 (15 years later), had the longest transition time.

Table 7. Transition Time Between Turning Points

Time between vegetarian and vegan	Respondents (n=30)
Less than 6 months	2
6 months – one year	7
2 – 5 years	16
6 – 10 years	4
More than 10 years	1

This raises an obvious point, which is that some people make these transitions faster than others. For some, the turning point is like a bolt out of the blue – riveting, a moment of epiphany that is acted upon almost immediately. For others, the turning point is the result of a series of events or mini-turning points, each one moving the person closer to the ultimate turning point, which is defined as the time they “officially” go vegetarian or vegan. For some people, this is the end point of a gradual process of eliminating animal products until they decide to go completely vegetarian or vegan, thus voluntarily acquiring the label and identity of

“vegetarian”⁴⁸ or “vegan.” For others, it is the culmination of a gradual process of thinking about the issue and gathering information through reading, research, and conversations. In these cases the turning point process begins with some event, but the lifestyle change is not made until a later date. So the beginning of the turning point kicks into gear a transitory period characterized by questioning, reflecting, seeking more facts, and receptivity to the issue. The end of the turning point is when the person makes the final decision to become a vegetarian or vegan. In both of the cases described above (gradually eliminating animal products until the transformation is complete, or entering a transitional period of receptivity to the issue, in which action is not taken until the end of this period of questioning), the turning point is better conceptualized as a gradual process that can take place over some time.

For this second type of turning point, Strauss’ nomenclature does not quite capture the identity transformation accurately, for it is, in fact, not a “point.” People do not (usually) change that quickly, especially when it comes to un-doing years of socialization and internalization. The food habits of a culture are not a trivial matter. Not only do we through normal socialization come to accept meat eating as natural and necessary, it also comes to have deep-rooted positive associations, such as with family, holidays, emotional security, home and hearth, tradition, economic prosperity, social status, and even masculinity (Adams 1991, Fiddes 1991, Twigg 1983). During socialization, the symbolic meanings of meat become internalized along with the

⁴⁸ Here and throughout I am only talking about those who take the “vegetarian” label seriously, that is, in its true definition as a person who does not eat meat, poultry, or fish. Survey data suggest that more people may call themselves “vegetarian” than give answers consistent with the definition. The Vegetarian Resource Group reports that, “Several polls have asked if you consider yourself a vegetarian. In a 1977-1978 United States Department of Agriculture Food Consumption Survey, of 37,135 people surveyed, 1.2% answered yes to ‘Are you a vegetarian?’ However, some of these people also reported eating flesh during the three days on which dietary information was obtained. Answers from later sources have varied from around three to nine percent.” This is interesting in that it suggests a positive association with the word vegetarian; however, for the transformative experiences that I am discussing here, the true definition is important. *Source:* The Vegetarian Resource Group. <http://www.vrg.org/index.htm>.

actual taste for meat. Hence, the “power” of meat is twofold; it retains strong habitual and symbolic dimensions.⁴⁹ As meat eating takes on the character of a habitualized action,⁵⁰ a comfortable familiarity occurs and the matter is no longer, in most cases, questioned or even consciously chosen; the choice has been made to seem inevitable by successful socialization. Overlaying the taken for granted nature of routinized action are the powerful symbolic associations that transcend the realm of mundane habit and take on an exalted, even moral, character. Meat is a symbol of things that are “good” and any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications runs the risk of being condemned (Douglas 1966).

⁴⁹ And has a normative place in our classification system, which once internalized, will be harder to question. Hence, while adults have an advantage over children in that they have personal autonomy over their actions and can engage in self-realizing acts of agency, the obvious disadvantage is it that is more difficult to question one’s culture once meanings have been internalized. This is perhaps part of the reason that we see young people, especially college students, over-represented in the ranks of political activists (in addition, of course, to fewer structural constraints at this stage in one’s life, i.e. work and family responsibilities, which will usually be encountered later in one’s biography and will negatively affect structural availability [McAdam 1988]). Mary Douglas writes:

As time goes on and experiences pile up, we make a greater and greater investment in our system of labels. So a conservative bias is built in. It gives us confidence. At any time we may have to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions. Uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions. By and large anything we take note of is pre-selected and organized in the very act of perceiving. We share with other animals a kind of filtering mechanism which at first only lets in sensations we know how to use. But what about the other ones? What about the possible experiences which do not pass the filter? Is it possible to force attention into less habitual tracks? Can we even examine the filtering mechanism itself (Douglas 1966, p. 37)?

⁵⁰ Berger and Luckmann (1966) write, “All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort... Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future. Habitualization carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed” (p. 53).

And while the actual animals eaten vary from culture to culture, demonstrating the astounding malleability of human tastes and the consequent importance of cultural conditioning in determining our “personal tastes”, the symbolic importance of animal flesh itself, whatever the animal, is more of a cultural constant (Twigg 1983, Fiddes 1991). So, with regard to meat, a person has to be culturally deprogrammed, in a sense, and this de-socialization does not always take place instantaneously, which is why the language of turning “point,” which implies the sudden onset of change, is problematic in the case of vegans. More typically, there is a period of crisis and questioning, ushered in by some external (or internal) event. While the turning point may happen simultaneous with the turning-point-inducing event, it is more likely to open the door a little bit, so that the person becomes receptive and after a period of questioning, or of experiencing other pivotal events, makes the change that constitutes the actual turning point itself. But in most cases, people do not change as quickly as Strauss’ (1959) concept of turning point may suggest.

The length of the turning point period varied from person to person and, in most cases, is difficult to calculate precisely; sometimes it is difficult to untangle predisposition from a discrete turning point or shocking, transformative event. Sometimes people seem to just drift into vegetarianism (i.e. people like Katie, who from a young age just felt that it was cruel to eat animals and so stopped doing so, presumably as soon as she was old enough to make the decision [ten years old]). For others who may be less strongly predisposed, or who have less supportive parents, or whose socialization process is more “complete,” however, the process usually requires some kind of moral shock (Jasper and Poulsen 1995) or other catalyzing experience. In these cases, sometimes one factor is enough; in other cases, the turning point is

the result of a series of events or mini-turning points that sets the person on the path toward identity transformation in the form of adoption of a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle.

For veganism, there is often even more socialization to be un-done because there is less support for veganism in the dominant culture than there is for vegetarianism. Also, the connection between meat products and live animals is much more obvious to a child, and even to adults. Products such as cheese, milk, eggs, and other animal by-products are less easily associated with the living animal, and their origins (and more importantly, the connections between the meat and dairy/ egg industries and the ultimate fate of the animals who produce these products) are less intuitively demonstrable and often must be “learned” in a way the first connection does not require. Despite the machinations of a culture that tries to obscure the connection between meat and living animals through dissociation, this connection is to some degree self-evident. Hence experiences like Katie’s early childhood conversion to vegetarianism are rare in cases of conversion to veganism.

Types of Turning Points

The types of turning points experienced by my respondents were categorized in three ways: **Abrupt** (less than 6 months); **Moderate** (6 months – 1 year); and **Substantial** (over 2 years).⁵¹ The “moderate” and “substantial” turning points includes those who made a gradual transition by choice through cutting out products one by one until eventually the person was completely vegetarian or vegan. There can be a series of mini-turning points during this time that move the person further along. The moderate and substantial turning points also include

⁵¹ In the table below, I folded another category, “forced delay,” into the more general categories “middle” and “long,” because the numbers were so small in the former category (three total; two for vegetarianism and one for veganism). The “forced delays” consisted of delayed action due to structural difficulties, such as age or parental restrictions, living in a dorm or being at boarding school and being unable to obtain vegan food, etc.

those who thought about vegetarianism or veganism for some time before making the transition. They did not gradually eliminate products, but rather thought about the issue, mulled it over, perhaps sought more information, and then made the transformation at once. The “abrupt” category consists of those who went vegetarian or vegan either immediately or very soon after the turning point experience. The distribution of types of turning points is presented below in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 8. Length of Turning Point: Vegetarianism

TURNING POINT (VEGETARIANISM)	ABRUPT (UNDER 6 MONTHS)	MODERATE (6 MONTHS – 2 YEARS)	SUBSTANTIAL (OVER 2 YEARS)	TOTAL
MEN	9	4	3	16
WOMEN	4	7	3	14
TOTAL	13	11	6	30

Table 9. Length of Turning Point: Veganism

TURNING POINT (VEGANISM)	ABRUPT (UNDER 6 MONTHS)	MIDDLE (6 MONTHS – 2 YEARS)	LONG (OVER 2 YEARS)	TOTAL
MEN	3	6	7	16
WOMEN	3	5	6	14
TOTAL	6	11	13	30

The central argument being made here is that turning points are not necessarily characterized by abrupt change. In the case of vegetarianism and veganism, and perhaps other forms of “conversion” and personal change that ipso facto require an identity transformation, the process of re-socialization is key. Depending upon the amount and type of socialization that needs to be undone, this process is unlikely to happen instantaneously. In the case of vegetarians and vegans, who typically do not move into closed communes after severing all ties to “non-believers” and their former lives, the twin problems of “deprogramming” and re-socialization are perhaps more difficult, or at least will involve different dynamics than for people who enter into a situation of exclusive, intensive interaction with like-minded others, or others in the same

position. Whether participation is voluntary (as in monasteries and the military) or compulsory (as in mental hospitals and prisons), the importance of intensive interaction is the same. Re-socialization that takes place in total institutions (Goffman 1961) is so effective for precisely the reasons that do not apply to vegetarians and vegans. Therefore, when considering individuals who undergo a radical identity shift, yet still live among the denizens of mainstream culture with most former associations intact, understanding re-socialization becomes even more of a challenge. This is not to say that making new associations is unimportant; new associations affect both the initial change and also help sustain it once it has been implemented. Relationships that exist prior to the turning point must also be renegotiated in the face of the transforming life experience. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

To the extent that former lives and relationships are not completely rejected, a circumstance that effectively places actors betwixt and between their old beliefs and the new ones toward which they are leaning, the possibility is left open for a longer turning point type experience. Since re-socialization is so important, and will take longer when happening in “open” circumstances (i.e. not a commune) where a person is subject to multiple influences, including the influence of the dominant culture in addition to the fledgling new beliefs, the turning point as “light bulb” experience can be expected to be relatively rare. Even in cases where respondents actually used the metaphor of a “light bulb going on” to describe their turning point, there was typically something else that ushered in the period of questioning and receptivity in the first place, which then created the conditions for the light bulb experience. For instance, if a light bulb went on in someone’s head while attending a lecture on veganism, as was the case with more than one of my respondents, there was a reason they attended that meeting in the first place; people do not accidentally find themselves at lectures on veganism. One could say that

they put themselves in the road and waited to get hit. Hence, although the reaction is instant, certain prior conditions were already in place, something that sparked a curiosity or receptivity that cracked the door open a little before the lightning struck.

While common, not everyone has an “extended” turning point, however. For some, there is either no delay or a minimal delay between the experience that induces the turning point and the turning point itself (again, defined as the precise moment at which a change is made). Among my sample, the more common pattern overall was the gradual turning point; out of 60 total turning points (30 for vegetarianism and 30 for veganism), there were 41 moderate and substantial turning points (6 months to several years) compared to 19 abrupt transitions (under 6 months). However, among those whose turning point was abrupt, this pattern was twice as common for the transition to vegetarianism than it was for the transition to veganism (Tables 6, 7). For vegetarians, the split between gradual (collapsing the categories “moderate” and “substantial”) and abrupt turning points was relatively even (13 gradual versus 17 abrupt), but for vegans the gradual transition was the more common of the two (24 gradual versus 6 abrupt).

More specifically, with regard to becoming a vegetarian, 13 respondents had an abrupt turning point, 11 had a moderate-length turning point, and 6 experienced a substantial turning point. Interestingly, with regard to becoming a vegan, the number of respondents who experienced abrupt and substantial turning points was reversed, with the number of middle turning points remaining the same; in other words, with respect to veganism, 6 had an abrupt turning point, 11 had a moderate-length turning point, and 13 had a substantial turning point. While the more common trend was for the turning point to veganism to be longer (43% had substantial turning points to veganism compared with only 20% who had a substantial turning point to vegetarianism), there were people for whom this was not the case. There were some for

whom both turning points were relatively quick, and some for whom both changes took a rather long time. There were others who made a quick shift to vegetarianism and then took a longer time to become vegan, and those who had a longer transition to vegetarianism but then made a quick shift to veganism.

For those whose turning points to vegetarianism were longer than their turning points to veganism, the salient fact seemed to be that by already having adopted a vegetarian diet for ethical reasons they were predisposed toward veganism and that once the argument was presented, they “shifted” faster than they did to vegetarianism because the floodgates had already been opened, to paraphrase one of my respondents. Many pointed out that veganism is simply the logical extension of vegetarianism and some said that since going vegetarian they “always knew” that they would eventually go vegan. For these people, the more difficult step may have been to go vegetarian; once that threshold was crossed, some said that they knew it was just a matter of time before they went vegan.

For others, however, in what seems to be the more typical pattern, vegetarianism was more likely to have been a quick transition, with veganism taking a longer time, for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, the idea of vegetarianism is easier to grasp intuitively than veganism, and hence lends itself to sudden insights and epiphanies that may occur even in isolation. Also, although true vegetarianism is non-normative and represents a significant departure from the meat-centered diets into which most people are socialized, veganism represents an even more radical departure from the dominant culture and hence it is understandable that the transition to this stage would be more gradual.

Especially over the last ten years, social support for vegetarianism in the culture has grown considerably. This can be seen not only in the increase in the number of vegetarians

(including semi-vegetarians, or “flexitarians,” those who consciously try to eat less meat while not eliminating it altogether from their diets) but also in the number of vegetarian items that can be found in just about any grocery store (and many restaurants) now, including soy milk, tofu, and veggie burgers. While it is true that the number of vegans has also grown, and that it is much easier to shop for vegan items in grocery stores today than it was even a few years ago, veganism is still much less visible in the culture than is vegetarianism; for this reason people might take more time to mull over the decision to go vegan (and need more external support) than to go vegetarian.

Finally, veganism is a lifestyle, not just a dietary choice. For this reason it involves much more planning and is logistically far more difficult than vegetarianism. Veganism means thinking about what clothes, shoes, and handbags to buy (no leather, wool, or fur) and making sure the toiletries, cosmetics and cleaning products that you purchase neither contain animal ingredients nor were tested on animals, just to name two non-food related areas that affect vegans but not vegetarians. Most people whom I interviewed said that veganism was not difficult at all – once you figured out what to eat, where to shop, what meals to cook, what ingredients to look for, etc. However, many also reported having had initial difficulty when they first started out, wanting to be vegan but not knowing quite how to go about doing so. It is certainly the case that once you start paying attention, you will find animal ingredients in just about everything – things you never would have noticed as a vegetarian who was only concerned about avoiding meat products.

The initial feeling of not knowing what to buy or eat as a vegan is not unrelated, of course, to the lack of social support for veganism. Would-be vegans are more likely to benefit from seeking help and assistance from like-minded others (whether in the form of actual people

or informational websites and books) than seems to be the case for would-be vegetarians. Although many of my respondents said they had not heard of the word “vegan” before they came into contact with whatever it was that set them on the path to their turning point (book, friend, pamphlet, lecture, video, etc.), not one person said that they did not know what a “vegetarian” was. Needing assistance from others to navigate the waters of everyday life as a vegan (at least in the beginning) due to the far-reaching effects of veganism into one’s life as opposed to vegetarianism, the influence of which begins and ends with diet (no small thing in itself), affects the likelihood that the transition to veganism will take longer, depending upon the circumstances, especially the level of external social support, whereas in the case of vegetarianism external support seems to be less important.

As mentioned above, people could, and did, have very different turning point trajectories. Unlike Lofland and Stark’s (1965) world-savers, my animal rights activists did not all pass through the same series of successive stages. Given the turning point length differentials and the fact that in the case of vegans two distinct turning points were experienced, at least four broad types of path could be isolated. In calling out these four paths, I have collapsed the middle and long turning points because the distinction between these two, I believe, is less qualitative than the distinction between these two types of more gradual turning points on the one hand and the abrupt turning points on the other.

This is not to say that the experiences in the “abrupt” category were uniform, even though the time frame is smaller (under 6 months). Even within the abrupt turning points, some “turned” in just a few days as opposed to taking a few months; however, again, none of these “instant conversions” occurred in a vacuum. There were typically other influencing conditions in the environment, whether in the form of external factors such as significant others, or internal

factors like an affinity for animals, or another aspect of the predisposing schema discussed in the last chapter, which may have helped to create a climate of receptivity. However, this is not to gloss over the agency exercised by respondents in creating their own turning points, for many people have similar influencing conditions around them at various times in their lives yet do not entertain the thought of going vegetarian or vegan, or even if they do entertain the thought, do not take any steps in this direction. So, I am not suggesting that their turning points amount to mere puppetry and that they are the passive results of external environmental factors being “right.” My point is that even what look like “instant” turning points have a context and a background, and each is unique to each individual. This makes it difficult to identify ideal-typical paths but, again, we can see at least four broad patterns: 1.) Quick transition to vegetarianism with a gradual shift to veganism; 2.) Quick transitions to both vegetarianism and veganism; 3.) Gradual shifts to both vegetarianism and veganism; 4.) Gradual shift to vegetarianism with a quick transition to veganism.

Illustrations of Types of Turning Points

Parker is an example of someone who experienced an abrupt transition to both vegetarianism and veganism. He is interesting in that he was also one of the few who did not display an obvious predisposition, and his parents were very unsupportive. Since his turning points happened at age 13, it would be expected that unsupportive parents and the absence of a strong predisposition might be enough to dissuade his early interest or at least defer it until a later date, as happens so often with younger subjects who, as discussed earlier, have a dearth of control over their own bodies and what kinds of food goes in them. Thirteen, however, is a transitional age, poised as it is on the cusp of adolescence. This is a young age, but also not an

unusual age for young people to begin challenging their parents and authority in general, and to begin asserting some degree of personal autonomy, agency, and will power. In Parker's case, an important situational factor was that he had an older brother, Riley, who was already vegetarian. In fact, his going vegetarian was directly related to Riley's influence. The immediate catalyst for Parker to go vegetarian was a video that Riley showed him, which depicted factory farms and slaughterhouses. Riley had tried to talk to Parker about vegetarianism before this, but as Parker puts it, he was too young to understand what was going on.

PARKER: I guess my older brother had been vegetarian for many years before I was, and he had always tried to talk to me about it but I was really too young to even understand what was going on. I was like 10 yrs old... So finally when I was 13 he really was able to get through to me, and he had ordered some photos and videos from PETA about factory farming and slaughterhouses and he showed them to me and I realized right then and there that was it, I wasn't going to eat meat anymore... I instantly became vegetarian. I knew that I couldn't support that.

Parker's brother Riley was only a vegetarian, which was acceptable to the brothers' parents. Parker, however, quickly surpassed his brother and went vegan not long after he went vegetarian.

PARKER: ...so I went to PETA again, you know called them up and asked them to send me information on dairy, and lo and behold they had these photographs of these cows with massive udders and other things and right then and there I went vegan. And that was pretty much the end of it, just the one-month difference between vegetarian and veganism.

It is with Parker's decision to go vegan that the problems with his parents began. In the month between going vegetarian and going vegan Parker turned 14, but his parents still felt that he was young enough that they could forbid him to be vegan. They punished him in various ways when he refused to eat animal products:

PARKER: My parents didn't know how to handle it. They were used to it with my brother, but being vegan they really thought I was going to be a social outcast and so they tried everything in the book to convince me not to do it, tried all sorts of punishments and brought me to several different nutritionists ...my parents

said look, we'll compromise, you can be a vegetarian... but you have to eat dairy and eggs and I said, absolutely not, I'm not going to eat any animal products... and so we went back and forth and it's a long story but there were various punishments and restrictions on my liberty and what I could and couldn't do ... it started out mild and as it progressed it got worse. They said until you eat eggs or milk then you can't do this, and it got pretty bad after a couple of months. It started out you can't play video games and you can't watch TV, you can't talk on the phone, you can't leave the house except to go to school, you can't have friends over. Eventually it got to the point where I couldn't do anything except be in my room and go to school, that was pretty much it... And I was just so mad that I said, okay I'll eat eggs and what I did was they would cook it for me, and this only happened I think two times, but they would cook it for me and I wouldn't eat it and I remember sitting there crying, thinking what am I going to do? And I thought they would just put it there and not watch me eat it... so I said you know give me a moment and when they would turn around I would feed it to my dog. And that happened for two days and then they said look, we know you're not eating it and so, you know, finally they just gave in. There was nothing else they could do short of really physically beating the hell out of me ...so after that they were just like, screw it. And after that it really had a serious impact on my relationship. I mean seven years later it's still a very strange relationship and it definitely stems from that.

Parker is a good example of the abrupt-abrupt transition. Not only did he go vegetarian immediately after seeing a video, which provided a moral shock, but he also needed very little convincing to then proceed to go vegan once he sought and received more information on the issue. His case shows that abrupt turning points for younger people are not impossible in the face of parental resistance; of course, had he been younger the case may have been different. But his stubbornness in the face of having all of his privileges taken away by his parents suggests a strong will to stick with his convictions. Not long after going vegan, Parker started an animal rights club at his high school, which has blossomed into the largest grassroots animal rights organization in Washington, DC. He convinced his brother Riley to go vegan three years later.

Violet is also an example of someone who had an abrupt turning point to both vegetarianism and veganism. Unlike Parker, she demonstrated a strong predisposition in that she loved animals as a child. Like Parker, however, her turning point happened during junior high

school, when she was 14 years old. Violet, who is diabetic, read about animal experimentation for a class project and was horrified and felt guilty after reading about all of the animals who had died for her medication. Shortly after this shocking episode, she sent away to PETA for more information and learned about animal slaughter, after which she went vegetarian.

VIOLET: ...and so I started doing research and I found out all these animals that had died in diabetic research... I'll never forget the exact moment I was sitting in the library and just was like, oh my god! I felt so bad. I had almost died when I'd become diagnosed and I don't know; I just felt very guilty about all the animals that had died... it sickened me and...so I went home right away and – I had gotten phone numbers and stuff for PETA – called them up. So they sent me information. So that's when it started. I became a vegetarian a month or two after that... I had gotten literature from PETA and I think I was reading about the slaughter of chickens or something... and I was just sickened and I was like what am I doing??

Although Violet did not become a vegan until 5 years later when she was 19 years old, this was a matter of “technicalities” because of her diabetes. Basically she had to wait until she was in a position to cook for herself; so she went vegan as soon as she moved off campus and had her own kitchen.

Violet: I didn't go vegan until when I moved into this house because it would be the first time I was actually cooking for myself. Cause I'm so wary of eating school food and not having enough to eat, because I'm diabetic too. I have to make sure I have stuff to eat all the time...and I was living in the dorm rooms. I didn't have a kitchen so I couldn't cook for myself. So when I moved into this place I became vegan. So that's been since May.

NICOLE: And so you knew what veganism was before that

VIOLET: Yeah I always, I knew that I wanted to do it. It was just a matter of technicalities.

Although Violet's transition to veganism technically fits into the middle turning point category, this is a perfect example of a “forced delay,” where she probably would have gone vegan sooner if the conditions had allowed for it. It is not uncommon for young people to, out of necessity or difficulty finding food, need to wait until they are in a position to cook for themselves to go vegan, neither relying on parents nor school food, which may make veganism virtually

impossible. Violet's parents were much more supportive of her decision than were Parker's, but they were initially worried about her health because of the diabetes, and whether she would have enough food to eat, but she says now they realize that it is healthier dietary choice. Her mother has since become a vegetarian; her father still eats meat but is supportive.

Fred also is an example of someone who had a quick transition to both vegetarianism and veganism with, like Parker, very little time between the two turning points. Fred went vegetarian in middle school at age 14 and then went vegan three or four months later. His main influence was that his best friend after moving to a new city was a vegetarian. He also says that most of his friends were getting into various forms of activism at the same time and that he was into the hardcore/ straightedge subculture, many of whose participants are vegetarian or vegan. His initial reasons for going vegetarian centered on human rights and environmental reasons, but animal rights eventually became his primary concern. After going vegetarian and before going vegan, he read animal rights books and literature, which resonated with him. He said it was easier to read about the issue once he was already vegetarian because he did not have guilt to reconcile. For him each step was "cold turkey" not gradual.⁵²

Fred's mother, an ex-hippie type with leftist leanings (although Fred does not fit the hippie stereotype, covered as he is in colorful tattoos and being immersed in a punk rock subculture) was supportive of the lifestyle change, but his father was insulted, according to Fred, because "he's a very moral animal himself." Although he no longer engages in this type of activity, when Fred first became involved with animal rights he was caught smashing windows (this act of vandalism was connected with animal rights), which caused problems for years.

FRED: My mother definitely supported the lifestyle change. My father never did. He thought it was insulting because he's a very moral animal himself, not about animal rights, but he kind saw it going to its natural conclusion that if I think meat

⁵² See appendix.

is murder then I think he's a murderer. And he asked me that point blank, and I told him point blank; I said yes. And that caused a lot of problems with us. But I was caught smashing windows. That caused problems with my mother and father and various stepparents. That they saw as a real affront to the ordered society that they're so much a part of. They were frightened for me and of me... That caused problems for years.

NICOLE: And your friends were supportive?

FRED: Definitely. Most of my friends were getting into activism at the same time. We were all a part of the hardcore scene. That community also helped me to get into animal rights quite a bit, along with this friend of mine.

Although Parker, Violet, and Fred had different catalyzing events, they all experienced abrupt turning points to both vegetarianism and veganism (with the exception of Violet's delay going vegan due to "technicalities"), Trinity represents the other end of the spectrum, someone who was strongly predisposed as a child and even into adulthood (her fascination with animals did not end with childhood, but continued through college as she pursued a career working with animals); yet she did not go vegetarian, let alone vegan, until she was much older. Trinity went vegetarian at 29 years old and vegan at 32, despite forcefully declaring at the tender age of six that she did not want to eat animals. However, after meeting huge resistance from her mother, she says she "gave up." By the time she was in a position to decide for herself, she said that it was so thoroughly ingrained in her that eating meat was what she was "supposed to do" that she just never thought about it anymore. She is an example of someone who had a gradual transition to both vegetarianism and veganism. After going vegan, she and her husband founded a farm animal sanctuary in the rural mid-Atlantic region, which they now operate full-time.

In each case, Trinity made the transition with her husband, Dan, who, from his retelling of the story, was very resistant, not necessarily to the idea of vegetarianism itself but to adopting the vegetarian label and identity. Since their stories are so intertwined, it makes sense to discuss them together. Their story also demonstrates the potential importance of having a partner (whether friend or significant other) with whom to make the transition. In Trinity's case, even in

the absence of her partner, it seems likely that she would have eventually gone vegetarian and vegan, as she was without a doubt the more influential partner and had also demonstrated a strong predisposition. In Dan's case, it seems probable that he would *not* have ended up vegetarian had he not been married to Trinity (although, this is only speculation [mine and his]) and exposed continually to her influence and relentless presentation of information regarding farmed animals and the meat industry.

Despite her childhood resistance to meat, when Trinity was in college (in the late 1970s) she said vegetarianism did not cross her mind and that she did not know any other vegetarians. She loved horses, and since she was a kid her dream was to live in the country with horses. When the time came to pick a major, she chose Animal Science so that she could work with animals, specifically horses. She found that she enjoyed working with the other animals, too, but she quickly became disillusioned. Her fascination with animals is evident in this description, as is her frustration at not being able to find a career working with animals where she did not also feel that she was harming them, although at this time she was not a vegetarian.

TRINITY: ... all the horse classes were listed under Animal Science so that's what I chose. And then I started taking all these classes that I was working with all these other animals and I thought, oh my god – they're so cool. You know, the cows, the pigs, the goats, and everything that I worked with... you know, I just thought they were really interesting. I thought I wanted to live on a farm and have these animals around me but I was trying to find a career where I could work with them that wouldn't be hurting them, and everything I looked into somehow involved killing animals. Even some people said, well you could raise sheep for wool, but then when I took my Animal Production class and they talked about how there was no way to make enough money off of just the wool, you'd have to breed the ewes and you'd have to kill the babies and sell them for lamb meat, and so it was always a business no matter what field it was, no matter what type of animal, there were never any animals that you got to keep for the rest of their life.

NICOLE: And you knew that you didn't want to

TRINITY: And I knew I didn't want to kill them. Even though I was eating them, I wasn't connecting that I was part of the problem here [laughing]...I wasn't thinking about that at all because no one had ever pointed that out to me. So it wasn't until like 1981 when I wasn't living here, I just graduated from college and

PETA sent me something in the mail, they started sending stuff to me. Somehow I got on their mailing list.

The PETA literature that she initially received resonated with Trinity because she had worked in a laboratory that tested on animals just after she graduated from college. Again, she was trying to find a job working with animals, but she was horrified at what she saw in the cosmetics testing lab where she worked as a technician. She did not last very long at this, her first post-college job. But this experience made her want to support PETA because they were investigating the issue of animal experimentation; since she had seen it firsthand, she was glad that there was a group beginning to do something about it (PETA had just formed at this time). Already we can see the beginning of the gradual accumulation of experiences that constitute the longer turning points.

TRINITY: [PETA was] brand-new and their focus at that point was lab animals. Well, my first job out of college I worked at a research lab because I didn't know what it was. I answered an ad in the paper that said biological technician. And they wanted someone with an animal science degree and I thought, oh I have an animal science degree, look at this job, I'll be getting to do all this cool stuff. Well, of course it was not even, I mean it was like the worst. It was cosmetic testing on animals... I participated in that. I went there and the first thing they said, you know they sat me down and said, don't even think for one minute that you can report anything that goes on to any authorities because there's nothing that you can do to help these animals. They're not protected by law, because this is legal research and these animals are exempt from anti-cruelty laws... so I mean I was really taken aback by that and I thought, oh dear god, what am I going to be doing here?

Trinity recounted some of the tests that she had to perform on animals as part of her job and how difficult it was for her to witness what was being done.⁵³ She recalled the various ways she tried to avoid ingesting the animals with poison and putting toxic chemicals on their skin. She began pouring chemicals down the drain and secretly not "dosing" the animals. Of course, she did not stay very long at this job. Also of interest is the fact that she felt alienated from her

⁵³ See appendix.

co-workers, who, oddly, seemed perfectly normal and similar to herself except for the fact that they did not seem bothered by what they were doing. They told her she would “get used to it” but she knew she did not want to get used to it. She quit after three weeks.

TRINITY: ...I knew from the very beginning there was no way I could stay here. There's no way I could do it. And the people who worked there were not evil people. They were people my own age and young and friendly and you know, wanted to do stuff together after work, and I didn't understand them. I said, how can you do this? How come this doesn't bother you? And they said, oh you get used to it. And I said no, I never want to get used to this. I can't. I knew that there was no way. So somebody told me you should try to stick out any job for six months, otherwise it looks really bad on your record. And I just said I can't, I can't, I can't. So I worked there for maybe 3 weeks and I mean I watched them do some really horrible things and some of the things you just, you know, I don't really want to talk about all the stuff I saw there but it is really, really bad. And so I finally quit.

In the long run, this experience put her into contact with PETA in that she started donating to them to help their campaign against animal experimentation. Once she was on their mailing list, she also started receiving information about factory farming, a subject about which, even though she majored in animal science, she says she was very naive. This information started the ball rolling toward vegetarianism. Although her experience working in the lab was very negative, she attributes her contact with PETA as a positive outcome.

TRINITY: The only good thing that I can possibly say came of that is ... when I did get something from PETA that was about laboratory testing I said, oh my god, I have to support this group...so I saw that this group was against animal testing and I was like, sign me up, I want to be with these people. Thank god there's somebody out there doing this. So I started donating money to them and then I started getting their other stuff, and little by little they started writing other things, like about farm animals. Then I saw about farm animals, like how they're raised; I mean you learn about how to raise animals in animal science but you don't, the slaughterhouse is never mentioned, how they're killed... in fact at school in the dairy they had all these little calves in veal crates. And I asked why the calves were in these crates, why would they take them away from their mothers and why were they in these crates? Even though I'd taken dairy management, we never talked about veal. Never. And they said, you don't want to know. That was their answer to me. They didn't talk about it, even to students. So I honestly was very naïve even after getting a degree in the subject. It was crazy. But the PETA

literature showed pictures...but actually a number of years had passed at this point.

After quitting her job at the laboratory, Trinity tried once more to find a career that would allow her to work with animals without harming them. She was very excited when she got a job at the National Zoo in Washington, DC. However, again, she was soon to be disappointed because of the mistreatment of animals that she saw there. During this time she and her husband moved into a house that was situated on a cattle farm, which turned out to be a pivotal event, and she was still receiving PETA literature in the mail. All of these experiences culminated in her decision to go vegetarian, which she began to do gradually.

TRINITY: I ended up working at the zoo because I thought the zoo would be a benign thing because it wasn't killing animals. That was the one job working with animals where they weren't killed... It's crazy but it's true, all the animal fields are about killing or hurting animals. Except for vets. I worked as a vet tech for a short time and the vet I worked for was a really horrible vet so I was really unhappy with that and that's when I started working at the zoo.⁵⁴ And then Dan and I got married in '87 we moved here [rental house on a cattle farm]. It was a beef cattle farm when we first moved here. And that I think is what, between getting the PETA stuff, I mean I made friends with all the cows and fed them and thought it was really cool. We were living here where there was a bunch of cows until I watched them getting trucked off to slaughter. That one day is probably the one thing that most changed my life because it was like the first time I really made the connection that I was a part of the problem, that I could do something different, that I needed to do something different. And right after that I got something from PETA and it had a picture of three cows laying down in a field, and it reminded me so much of three of the cows that were here, and at the bottom it said, 'Are you really that hungry?' and I was like, oh my god – no, I'm not. I don't have to eat this stuff. And I didn't become vegetarian right away. I did it slowly, did like one day a week, and then two days a week, and then finally I said okay, [Dan], I just don't want to eat meat anymore and he said, at first he didn't want to do it, I don't know what he told you [laughing], but he was like so bad. He was like, okay I don't care about at home, but if I'm out I'm going to eat meat. And I said okay, whatever you want to do. And I was really pissed though [laughing] and so

NICOLE: You knew this is what you wanted to do

TRINITY: Yeah, by that point I was like, c'mon. I can't keep pretending anymore that it's not wrong. I know it's wrong and I have to just make the effort and I didn't know, I thought it was going to be really hard, but it ended up not

⁵⁴ See appendix.

being hard especially because I had practiced, I had got a lot of vegetarian cook books, I figured out recipes. But I finally convinced [Dan] on his birthday when he was eating BBQ ribs and I reminded him about what it was and he got so mad at me. And then he didn't eat anymore [laughing]. But at first he was furious. Then after that we were vegetarian.

Dan and Trinity's stories are very much intertwined. While Trinity's turning point was the result of an accumulation of events, including the animal-related jobs that she had held, animal rights literature she was reading, and certain things she was witnessing on the farm where they lived, Dan's turning point was mostly the result of Trinity's influence. Even though he was sympathetic to the idea of animal rights, he did not want to get involved; he accounts for his reticence by framing it as a protective psychological mechanism and the result of his desire to not be labeled as "different." In his own words:

DAN: ... and it really took literally a big blow over the head from my wife to make me see what was going on and the only reason that ever happened, and it didn't happen for years, is because she started donating to PETA and she thought PETA was a wonderful organization. They were doing a lot to help farm animals and she was seeing all these things happen in front of her eyes at the farms we lived on and she was very upset about it, and I just didn't want to look, I didn't want to get involved. I just said the less I know the else I have to do anything ... and I kind of wished that she didn't get so upset about those things, too, but you know for my own mental state I'd say, just my own piece of mind, if I didn't get involved then I didn't have to get upset. And so when she started getting all the literature from PETA she'd try and get me to read it. She'd always leave it on the table and she would always talk about, you know, we really should become vegetarians. Don't you want to be vegetarian? I'd say, absolutely not. No, no I'm not going to be some weirdo and I was very, very concerned at the time of being accepted... I didn't want to be different and so the idea of becoming a vegetarian again made me different from everybody else...so vegetarianism really was not something I was interested in doing.

Although Dan did not want to hear about it, his wife tried everything she could to get him to consider vegetarianism. The information that Trinity was reading to Dan was incongruous with their definition of the farm animals they had met on the farm, whom they had come to see as individuals and even considered "friends."

DAN: ... here we are living on this farm and it was a beef cattle farm and the cows here were actually wonderful and we named them all... We'd go out and we'd feed them apples and go out and pet them and scratch them and put fly spray on them. We treated them like they were our friends.

Since Dan was initially so adamant about not getting involved with animal rights and not wanting to be different, how did he ever come to go vegetarian and then vegan? He attributes these decisions to his wife's continuing influence as well as both of their experiences on the farm on which they lived, as well as making the connection between the chickens they kept as pets and the chickens they were eating. They gradually waded into vegetarianism as a result of these multiple influences, Dan more gradually than Trinity. Although Trinity was moving along faster than Dan toward vegetarianism, their work schedules and the fact that Dan ended up doing most of the cooking for the both of them created conditions in which he was virtually vegetarian. However, he still had not sworn off meat completely, nor had he accepted the label of "vegetarian." Yet, despite his hesitation, Dan, too, was moving inexorably in the direction of not wanting to eat meat, primarily because of what he was seeing on the farm.

DAN: ... and [Trinity] convinced me that really the absolute right thing to do was to go vegetarian.

NICOLE: She had already decided?

DAN: She had already decided she was going to become vegetarian and I was still against it. I said, look, I'm not going to be a vegetarian. I'll eat the food, I don't have any problem with eating vegetarian food, but once we go outside these doors I'll eat whatever I want... we never really argued about it... we kind of started gradually... we started one day a week. We started what we called 'salad night' because we didn't know any vegetarian food. We didn't know how to cook anything and [Trinity] started buying cookbooks one at a time and we started trying stuff and we went from one day to two days to five days; the next thing you know it was every day... I think it was another three months before I became totally vegetarian... we became vegetarians in December and it was basically because of what was happening here on this farm and watching the cows, our friends, get beaten and shocked and hurt to force them onto a truck to bring them to the stockyard. And we realized that when we bought beef we were possibly eating our friends and that was just such a real visual thing in my mind, in both

our minds, and it became very difficult to overlook that. Plus we had chickens as pets still and that was another one... because not only are we possibly eating our friends the cows, but we're looking at these chickens and then you go to the store and there's these packages of chickens and it finally made a connection. It had taken years to make that connection but finally that connection was made and it made it very difficult for me to continue to eat it...

Even though Dan was moving, albeit slowly, toward vegetarianism as a result of his wife's very strong influence and the connections they were making between the farmed animals they saw everyday and the ones they were eating, it wasn't a completely gradual drift; he does remember the last time that he ate meat. It was the infamous BBQ ribs birthday dinner incident mentioned by Trinity above that marked the end of Dan's turning point; after this dinner, he never ate meat again and was "officially" vegetarian.

DAN: ... and the last time I ever ate meat was in March. Basically we'd been vegetarians more or less, at least she had, but I had been more or less, since December... March is my birthday and we were going out to dinner and I got to pick the place and I'm going to go to a place where I can get ribs. So she's being pretty good about it. She's saying, you sure you want ribs? Really should think twice about what you're getting. I'm going to get ribs; that's it. I like ribs and I'm going to have them. She's like okay, it's your birthday; you can get what you want. And so she lets me order them; doesn't say anymore about it. Then dinner comes she orders her vegetarian item and I got my platter of ribs and just as I'm getting ready to take one bite she says, hold it. Before you take a bite, I just want you to think about what you're eating. And I said I know what I'm eating – it's ribs! And she goes, it's a baby cow. Those are ribs from a baby cow. I said, shut up. She said, okay, okay, I just want you to think about that. And so I took a bite and I'm chewing it and she goes, **BABY COW**. I said **SHUT UP**. I said, this is my birthday! She said, I'm not saying you can't eat it, but you have to think about what you're eating; just think about it. I said, I don't want to think about it! She goes, you have to. And I didn't eat anymore; that was it. I couldn't eat the food on my plate. I pushed it away. I told them not to package it up; they could keep it. And I've never eaten meat since that day. It was just – it was too much I guess at that point.⁵⁵

They both went vegan three years later and, not long after that, started the farm animal sanctuary that they run today. Going vegan was a gradual process for them as well, and the result of multiple incidents.

⁵⁵ See appendix for more information about Dan's turning point (from his interview).

TRINITY: We were both vegetarian for three years and during those three years I kept saying, oh I could never be vegan because that's too extreme...I was like...those vegans, they're weird. And I said, oh well I'm not an extremist...because I was thinking it was just like vegans didn't want to eat dairy or milk or eggs just because it came from an animal... I didn't know about the cruelty issue... But then finally, I don't know if it was Farm Sanctuary or PETA or both but somebody wrote an article about dairy and eggs and, oh we went and visited Farm Sanctuary in like '93, '92 and they had just opened up this bed and breakfast and they had all kinds of literature about veganism and I picked up all their little flyers and came back and read them all then got something else from PETA and then that was right around the time they started putting Bovine Growth Hormone in milk. So I was buying this supposedly, not cruelty free milk, but milk from some sort of dairy were supposedly the cows were better off. And then I was getting stuff from Fresh Fields and then Fresh Fields had a sign there that said 'we can't guarantee you that BGH isn't in any of the dairy products' because they weren't allowed to label it. There was a big hoopla about it when it first came out. And I said, you know what? I don't need to eat this crap. I'm going to have hormones on top of animal suffering? I'm just going to give it up.

Dan, again, was more concerned with the reactions of others; this time, however, he was more worried about how his family would react than his friends or coworkers. Both his and Trinity's family had reacted negatively when they announced they were going vegetarian. Despite his initial concerns about being labeled "different," Dan eventually became proud of being vegan.

DAN: I really didn't want to give up milk – another step in being a little strange. It didn't have as much to do with being accepted by my friends; it had more to do with getting together with family. Vegetarianism was not very difficult because it was not that hard for my family to adjust to cooking for us, but when it came to being vegan it was, ha, that was something that proved difficult. And so I hated to announce to my family that I was vegan, and now you finally adjusted to the vegetarian issue, now we've got to totally change everything, turn everything upside down...And it proved very simple for us to do for ourselves. There were so many alternatives out there...

NICOLE: Were your friends and family... generally supportive of your decisions...

DAN: I never really had many friends, so that wasn't an issue...co-workers made fun of me but by the time they did, I didn't care anymore...and to be honest with you, they started making fun of me and eventually they respected me...and I began to be proud of the fact that I was vegan and I stood up for what I believed in and if people made fun of me, I just told them why. And ...a lot of people didn't want to hear it but it was very important that they did. I am doing this for a reason, and this is why.

Trinity and Dan experienced long turning points for vegetarianism and veganism. Even though Trinity, especially, seemed to be very predisposed and was motivated to research the issues and read whatever information she could about animal rights, there was nothing “abrupt” about her transition. Her turning points were the end results of an accumulation of events and experiences that were basically variations on a theme. While Dan was coming to his own realizations, it is very clear that in his case that he would probably not have changed had it not been for the relentless influence of his wife.

Although there is typically less of an imbalance in terms of influence in the relationship, like Trinity and Dan, many people reported having made the transition to vegetarianism or veganism with someone else. In the case of veganism, it was common for people to have been strongly influenced to make the transition once they found themselves in a situation where they were socially surrounded by vegans, such as moving into a house with vegan roommates or taking a job with an animal rights organization, or becoming associated with a subculture that has a lot of vegans in it (such as some activist and youth subcultures like hardcore straightedge). In these cases, the person may have been thinking about going vegan or even begun trying to eliminate animal products from their diet, but it is the sudden impact of the social influence that causes them to turn the corner and make the commitment to become a full time vegan. Although the gradual turning point may have started earlier, the social influence is the catalyst for the actual turning point.

It is difficult to isolate the exact influence of changing social networks on a person’s transition. For some people, this was obviously the decisive factor in making the final change, although they may have been thinking about it already for some time. For others, meeting other vegans seemed to have been just one of any number of influencing factors that contributed to the

turning point. It seemed in many cases that meeting other vegans made the person more receptive to later pivotal experiences involving moral shocks, but of course “receptivity” cannot be measured precisely.

An example of this latter set of circumstances is Brad, who had a vegan girlfriend in college with whom he had numerous conversations about veganism and her reasons for being vegan. At this time, he also knew other vegans through his involvement with an environmental group on campus. Neither knowing other vegans nor even having a vegan significant other caused him to go vegan right away (he dated his girlfriend for about a year before he went vegan). These relationships in themselves may have proven to be the decisive factor in a later turning point, but as it actually happened, it was a lecture that he attended on veganism that was the crucial determining moment for him to actually make the change, although he had been thinking about it for some time.

This lecture seems to have been the culminating event in a series of events leading him from vegetarianism to veganism. So while one could reasonably ascertain that the relationships were important factors, the pivotal event to cause immediate change was this talk. In it, there was a discussion of the disposal of baby male chicks in the egg industry who are the offspring of egg-laying hens and hence of no economic use. Standard methods of disposal are rather grisly and include grinding up the chicks while still alive or suffocating them in bags. Although Brad was familiar with the standard methods and practices of factory farming, the description of the fate of the male baby chicks affected him deeply and triggered a very emotional reaction. He left the presentation crying and decided to go vegan immediately. I think it would not be unreasonable to attribute his relationships with other vegans, especially his girlfriend, with “softening the ground,” so to speak; nevertheless if a turning point is defined as the event that

immediately precedes and presumably causes the change, in Brad's case it was the lecture on factory farming and not his social relationships.

For others, the effect of relationships is much more direct or immediate and social influence is perceived as having been the deciding factor. As I have already mentioned, social relationships appear to be especially significant in the transition to veganism. Indicative of the import of supportive social surroundings to the vegan transition is Arielle's story. Her pattern is of the "quick shift to vegetarianism and gradual transition to veganism" variety. She had the longest period of time between transitions to vegetarianism and veganism of anyone in my sample, and her experience demonstrates that there can be very different circumstances surrounding the vegetarian versus vegan turning points.

Arielle, who showed a strong predisposition as a child, went vegetarian at the age of 12, after being given a hen as a pet for Easter and thereafter not wanting to eat chicken. Like Parker, she met quite a lot of resistance from her mother (her parents were divorced). Although her mother did not forbid her from doing it, Arielle describes her vegetarianism as a "constant source of conflict" and remembers multiple meals having meat on her plate and shoving it into her napkin and bringing it upstairs to her cat. The parental resistance in her case appears to have been episodic. For instance, she describes a major fight she and her mother had one Thanksgiving when she was 16 years old. Arielle refused to eat the turkey, and her mother told her that she had to leave the house, which she did.

Around the time that she was 12 and deciding to go vegetarian, Arielle met another girl who also wanted to go vegetarian (Katie, who is also in my sample). She believes that this probably "galvanized" her further to stick with her convictions. Although she accords her new friendship some importance in helping her stick with her convictions, she had already pretty

much made this decision to go vegetarian on her own. The social context, however, was much more important in her decision to go vegan.

Arielle was vegetarian for 15 years before she went vegan, and her transition to veganism was very gradual. She cut out leather for the most part at some point during college, but it wasn't until she moved across the country to take a job with an animal welfare organization that she began to seriously think about going vegan. Her best friend, Katie, the one whom she met when she was 12 years old, also lived in this city and was, by this time, vegan. She attributes the influence of her best friend, as well as the fact that she was getting involved with animal rights and meeting other vegans, to her going vegan.

Although Arielle had been thinking about veganism and making an attempt to avoid leather products, moving to the new city “really cemented” it for her. Not only was she working with vegans but also was living in a house with vegan roommates and she frankly attributes her decision to go vegan to this implicit social pressure. She said it was “hard to give up dairy until there were so many people around.” Cheese was difficult for her because it is not “disgusting” to her like meat is, demonstrating the point made above, i.e. that meat is intuitively easier to connect with an animal (and with animal suffering) than are other animal products like dairy and eggs. Arielle says that if she had not moved to a new place where she was socially surrounded by vegans, then she would otherwise still be eating cheese because there would be nobody around to not condone it; therefore it would be easier to continue eating it. With so many vegans around, Arielle says: “I couldn't just rationalize it and guilt overcame me a lot, so I have to say guilt propelled me.” She believes that getting more involved with the animal rights movement has made her convictions stronger now, and she feels like she is less likely to “cheat” now. She

also said it would have helped to have vegan friends in college and that she would have gone “vegan faster if there were people like me.”

Lara, too, only went vegan after moving to a new city and taking a job with an animal rights organization. She had already been vegetarian for over ten years and was sympathetic to veganism but it wasn't until she found herself working with other vegans that she began to feel it was necessary, or that she was capable of making the commitment without “cheating.” She says that going vegan was not as dramatic for her as going vegetarian, a seemingly recurring theme in my interviews; however, she intimated that she probably would not have gone completely vegan if she did not find herself in a social situation where she was surrounded by so many other vegans on daily basis.

LARA: It wasn't as dramatic a change for me as the vegetarianism was. Although abstaining from cheese is so hard sometimes. But other than that I just did because once I learned how the dairy and egg industry you know functions I just couldn't justify it anymore than I could the meat... you couldn't do one and justify the other because animals suffer like meat animals do, the dairy and egg animals suffer too

NICOLE: And do you think you didn't know that until, like once you realized that it was like

LARA: Well, I think I did know about it but I just didn't give it up. I wasn't ready to make that extra step for a couple of years...actually for quite a few years because I went vegetarian in '88 and I went vegan just a couple years ago. And it's not like I didn't buy, I bought soy milk, I've always bought soy milk, soy cheeses, but if I was somewhere out and someone had cheese there I would eat it kind of thing, or if somebody had hard boiled eggs, it's not like I bought them

NICOLE: So it was more gradual, your going vegan

LARA: Yeah, for the vegan part... It was really gradual like that, just kind of weaning off... because I was working in an all vegan office and I have so many more options than I did back in Erie to support my veganism and frankly a good crowd of people, peers, that were totally supportive and already into it and that really helps too... and I really enjoy the camaraderie and advice and the information exchange and going and doing different activities. You don't feel like you're an alien or isolated because you've got so many other people in that support group so to speak. And it's a real education and the word 'vegan' doesn't seem like taboo anymore. It's just another part of my everyday vocabulary.

Katie, Arielle's best friend, is also an example of the relatively stronger influence of new social relationships on the decision to go vegan versus the decision to go vegetarian. Hers was an abrupt transition to vegetarianism with a longer transition to veganism. As discussed earlier, Katie went vegetarian at age 12 because she liked animals and "just realized it was really cruel to eat them." She did not go vegan until she was 22 years old and, like Arielle, her turning point coincided with her becoming active in the animal rights movement. Although the "obvious" wrongness of eating meat occurred to her in relative isolation as a child, veganism did not cross her mind as being important until she met other vegans.

Katie attributes her "realizing that veganism is a really critical thing to do" to beginning to work in the movement and "seeing ALL the literature" and meeting other activists. She realized then that she really needed to be vegan but she "toyed with it" and "slipped up" during this time. Although being surrounded by other vegans was instrumental in kicking off her turning point, the catalyzing moment and point of no return happened at an animal rights conference. At the conference, she saw some slaughterhouse photos on display and one in particular caught her attention – it was a photo of a calf's head. As she viewed this photo she realized that veal was a direct product of the dairy industry. At this moment she "got it" and went vegan. Katie did not "slip up" after this incident and her turning point therefore ended with this event.

Amber is another example of a person who had an abrupt turning point to vegetarianism coupled with a more gradual transition to veganism. For Amber, social relationships were influential in her decision to go vegetarian as well as vegan, but she affords them more importance in her ultimate decision to go vegan. Amber went vegetarian during her sophomore year in high school when she was 15 years old, after reading some PETA literature that she

picked up on a class trip to New York City. She made the transition to vegetarianism in a quick three months after picking up these brochures. She already had some friends who were vegetarians, and during this time she also talked to them about their reasons for being vegetarian. She wanted to know more about it, and so she read books and other materials around this time, which reinforced her thoughts about vegetarianism. She also started an animal rights club at her school at this time.

Her main motivation for going vegetarian was the literature she read. However, she also attributes the fact that she had “cool, older friends” who were vegetarian, and the fact that she felt guilty not being vegetarian around them, to contributing to her decision. According to Amber, this “was a big factor – just having role models and stuff like that that were vegetarian.” She was also into the underground music scene, which also helped her because “a lot of those kids were socially aware and activists.” Therefore, social relationships were not unimportant in her transition to vegetarianism. However, they were of utmost importance in her decision to go vegan.

For Amber, going vegan was a more gradual process than going vegetarian. Although she knew veganism was “the next logical step,” she did not take this step all at once. Instead, she started to gradually eliminate animal products until she made a “college resolution” to go vegan when she went away to school. When she got to college she met a lot of vegans and activists and she cites the peer pressure and social support of being surrounded by other vegans as essential to her going (and staying) vegan in college. She says that at first she planned to be vegan only at college, but not at home; however, she quickly realized that this type of action would be “hypocritical,” and she attributes this realization to meeting other vegans and animal rights activists at college. So, although she had decided that she wanted to be vegan and had begun to

slowly eliminate animal products from her life, it seems that she would not have decided to become a “full time” vegan in the absence of the support (flip side being “pressure”) that she received in college from other vegan animal rights activists. Regarding her veganism, her family was reasonably supportive, although at first they were worried about her health. Now, however, her mom is “very supportive,” and her dad is “indifferent”.

Luke and Noah provide additional examples of people who shifted much less quickly to veganism than they did to vegetarianism, and for whom meeting other vegans was essential in a way that meeting other vegetarians was not. Luke went vegetarian his freshman year in high school at age 14 after he chose animal experimentation as a topic for a persuasive essay to fulfill a class assignment. While researching this paper, he read PETA literature, animal rights magazines, and the book *Animal Liberation*. He was really into this topic and his paper ended up being much longer than it had to be. Luke says he went vegetarian pretty quickly once he started questioning things. He made a New Year’s resolution to go vegetarian, after which he had a 6-8 month transition to not eating fish. Regarding other vegetarian influences, his twin brother went vegetarian at the same time as Luke, and he also had a vegetarian cousin, Jane, who was five years older than him and whom he looked up to.

Luke became active with the animal rights movement during his senior year in high school and went vegan when he started college at age 18, although he had been thinking about veganism for some time before this. His transition to veganism was much more gradual than to vegetarianism, and meeting other vegans was essential. Luke “always knew” that eating animal products and wearing leather was wrong, but there was nobody there to suggest veganism to him so he never really thought about it. To the extent that he did think about it, he thought that he could “never be vegan;” veganism just seemed “so impossible.” However, the summer of his

senior year before he started college he decided he would go vegan. He had been thinking about it for some time, but college just seemed like a convenient time to do it. He did not feel a sense of urgency; he just knew he'd "eventually" go vegan. According to Luke, what really made him decide to go vegan was meeting other vegans during his senior year in high school when he began to get active with a local animal rights group. Luke thought, "they are pretty much just like me and vegan too, so it shouldn't be very difficult." Meeting other vegans showed him that veganism was possible; this gave him the nudge he needed to make the step he had already wanted to make.

Like Luke, Noah thought that veganism was desirable but impossible until he met enough other vegans to convince him otherwise. Noah, who liked animals a lot as a kid, went vegetarian at age 11 (the youngest anyone went vegetarian in my sample). This youthful turning point began after he saw coverage of a fur protest on the local news. The story showed footage of a beaver caught in an underwater trap and drowning; the image stuck with him. Not long after, he decided to do a school paper on environmental issues and animal rights with a friend. While walking through the mall on Earth Day, he noticed some animal rights activists had set up a table and he picked up all the literature they had. He read it in the van on the way home and recalls "feeling sick." At this point, he and the friend decided to be vegetarian; they thought it was cool, although they didn't know any other vegetarians. Noah was very outspoken in school about his new beliefs. Not only did he believe he "had the moral high ground," but he also enjoyed being different (in stark contrast to someone like Dan, who dreaded being labeled "different"). Noah became active in school around this time, circulating a petition to stop fur trapping, for instance. He also sent away for as much information as he could from many animal rights groups. He went to the library to search for books on animal rights because he "wanted to learn more."

Despite this quick shift to vegetarianism and his obvious proclivity for being different, it took Noah about four more years to go vegan. His vegan turning point began when, at 13 years old, he attended a national animal rights conference (his very supportive parents drove him to the conference, which was in another state, and stayed in a hotel while he went to the workshops). At this conference he met his first vegans and attended his first protest. Before this conference he knew about veganism, but thought it was “impossible.”

NOAH: [Veganism] was kind of something I thought was like impossible to do, like there's no way. Vegetarianism I can stomach. Maybe when I'm like older and I have my own house I'll be able to be a vegan, you know? That's what I thought. I thought it was going to be this huge impossible thing to do. But that was the first time that I actually went to a protest was at the '97 conference...so the conference was really great. I met people and other activists but they were all from other parts of the country so I went back home and I was like this sucks. I'm back where I started, you know? I don't know any people in Ohio and it doesn't really help me to know there's people in Washington, DC and Norfolk, Virginia...

The second stage in this longer turning point was when, at 15 years old, he attended a conference in his home state, at which he started meeting local people and began to get active locally. He went vegan at this conference and started his own animal rights group, Compassion for Animals, during the same year. His family was supportive as mentioned, and his mom was health conscious and would sometimes cook vegetarian meals before he went vegetarian.

NOAH: But I guess the next turning point was in '99 there was an Ohio animal rights conference so I was like wow... so I met all the other key activists there and [Mandy] as well and we... decided to start this group and I guess everything's kind of history from there

NICOLE: Were you vegan at this point?

NOAH: Yeah I became vegan at the Ohio animal rights conference...

NICOLE: And had you been thinking about it?

NOAH: Yeah, when I was a vegetarian I didn't drink milk by itself or I didn't eat eggs by themselves but if it was in stuff you know, I guess I could kind of say that I was half vegan. I wasn't like all the way there I guess you would say.

So, again, we see a much more gradual transition to veganism. Before he made the decision to become a true vegan, Noah says he was “half vegan.” It seems to have taken his getting more

involved with animal rights as well as meeting other vegans to push him to make the commitment to a vegan lifestyle, perhaps, as he suggests, by demonstrating that it was possible.

Sometimes the turn to veganism does not depend upon social support and meeting others so much as working out one's own moral position and researching veganism on one's own (or with another person), and sometimes it is just a matter of taking longer to figure out what to eat. So even when someone knows they want to go vegan, they may take longer to do so than with vegetarianism.

Sherlock went vegetarian at age 14 and became a vegan during his sophomore year in college. The turning point for his going vegetarian was when he read *Animal Liberation* when he was 14 years old. The chapters comparing animal rights to human rights made "complete sense" to him and then when he got to the chapter on factory farming he was "repulsed." He stopped reading the book at that point because he was convinced and went vegetarian. Sherlock relapsed once after four months, but says that he "felt so guilty and that was it;" he never relapsed again.

Sherlock did not experience a dramatic turning point when he went vegan like he did when he went vegetarian; the transition was much more gradual. According to Sherlock, he just did not know much about veganism and thought he needed eggs and dairy to be healthy. Although he was never outspoken about it like Noah, once he started college and was living in a fraternity, he says he started getting more into it and thinking more about his moral position through the many conversations he had with other people where he needed to justify his beliefs when they asked questions about why he was vegetarian, and he also started getting involved with the animal rights group on campus. Sherlock began thinking about his moral position even more after his freshman year in college and realized that veganism was a natural extension of

vegetarianism. Obviously this turning point was more gradual than his going vegetarian at 14 years old immediately after reading *Animal Liberation*.

Shamus went vegetarian briefly in 8th grade, but he didn't have any food so it didn't last long. However, it remained in the back of his mind that he wanted to go vegetarian someday.

The next decisive incident happened during his senior year in college when he was 21 years old.

SHAMUS: ...and then the second defining moment was at the University of Virginia. It was towards the end of my senior year in March of 1990 and I was heading to the cafeteria. I was wearing a leather jacket. I was about to go eat a hamburger. And I passed by a library display that had graphic depictions of animals being slaughtered and being vivisected and it had a list of some famous vegetarians and I just stopped and stared at the display. And I never ate meat again. That was it... I decided I just couldn't cause that kind of pain anymore.

Between the time in the 8th grade when he tried unsuccessfully to go vegetarian and the above college incident, he remembers having had vague feelings of discomfort at various times, for instance when he bought his leather jacket, he thought about the fact that it had come from a cow, but he had always pushed thoughts like this aside. Now, he found that he could no longer do this. His personal disassociation mechanism had broken down.

SHAMUS: Yeah, after that it was hard to push it in the back of my mind and as you know, as everybody knows, you eat a hamburger and it's reasonably easy to deny what you're eating. It looks the same as a tofu burger might look on your bun. But seeing those pictures for the first time, I just couldn't disassociate it anymore. I couldn't eat meat without realizing what it was, and really thinking about it.

Two years passed before he went vegan at age 23 when he was in law school; around this time he also co-founded an animal rights group for law students on campus. Again, going vegan was a much more gradual process than the epiphany and intense shock he experienced after walking by the library display in college. After going vegetarian, he became a member of some pro-animal groups (The Humane Society of the United States, PETA, etc.) and read about dairy and eggs for the first time. It hadn't occurred to him before that these animals were treated

badly, and he says that he was “in denial” for a while. He and his fiancé eventually decided to go vegan (he had already persuaded her to go vegetarian) but they had no idea what they were doing.

SHAMUS: I went vegan in January of ‘92, almost two years later. And that was in response to PETA literature... they kept sending me stuff. I kept trying to deny ... and it talked about dairy and eggs... It didn’t occur to me that they were being treated poorly or that there was any ethical problem with the fact that they’re being confined and you’re exploiting them... So I continued to get some PETA literature and I was in denial for a while. You know it was a pretty big step going vegetarian and I had no idea how to go vegan and it seemed like an overwhelming step. I remember getting free-range eggs and I think we were getting organic milk or something, I don’t know, and I started trying to cut down... And I guess my fiancé and I bounced around the idea of going vegan but we didn’t really seriously talk about it... and at one point, it was probably January of 92, I said you know, we really should go vegan, and she said, yeah, yeah you’re right. And I just took off and ran with that [laughing]! I said, oh okay! I was like, we’re vegan now! I remember going to the grocery store that first time and it’s like, you know, our cart is empty, other than spaghetti and spaghetti sauce. We didn’t know anything. We didn’t know where to go... I didn’t know what to do. I suppose we did go out and get a vegan cookbook. And we tried to, there was an organic grocer that had some vegan stuff although, that was only eight years ago but there’s been a big difference since then in the availability of pre-made vegan food. And you know we did the best we could, but there was not a whole lot of variety in what we were eating for the first several months until we got into a whole new routine and I started eating different types of sandwiches for lunch and stuff.

Sam is an example of someone who had a long transition to both vegetarianism and veganism. Like Sherlock, he started going vegetarian at 14 years old after he read *Animal Liberation*. He wanted to go vegetarian then, but he says it was hard because of pressure from his Italian family to eat meat, so he did it slowly, gradually eliminating one type of meat at a time. First he cut out red meat, then pork, then fish, and after a year he was completely vegetarian. In terms of social influences, Sam hung out with skateboarding alternative kids, some of whom were vegetarian. He had conversations with some of these friends about vegetarianism before he read *Animal Liberation* and so, unlike some of my respondents, he was

not completely new to the subject when he came across this book. His reaction to the book was that it “seemed really logical” and the arguments just “made sense” to him; he too was struck by the comparisons to human rights.

SAM: Well, I guess the first time I thought about animal rights was when I was a freshman in high school and I sort of learned about it through just sort of the crowd who were friends I had. Since I was really young I always skateboarded and as I got older and got into the hardcore straightedge scene, I don't remember like a specific moment in time when I thought about animal rights for the first time I just sort of remember meeting people who were vegetarians for the first time and they were telling me about why they were vegetarian and it got me thinking about it and I remember immediately thinking how much sense it made to me, you know, it's just really logical it's just made so much sense to me. So I read *Animal Liberation*, this is when I was 14 years old I think, and so shortly after I read that I gradually began the progression towards vegetarianism. It was sort of a slow process... even after I read the book it was still kind of like slow for me just cause there was a lot of family pressures for me not to you know, because my family was just so like a typical Italian family, there was meatballs, like every meal had meat in it.

Four years passed before he went vegan “full time” during his sophomore year in college.

Although he had vegetarian friends in high school, he did not know any vegans. He didn't start seriously thinking about the moral status of animals until his senior year of high school and first year in college. During this time he read John Robbins' *Diet for a New America*, and after reading this book, Sam made the commitment to go vegan. He tried to go vegan during freshman year of college but didn't know what he was doing and lost a lot of weight, so he reverted back to vegetarianism for a while.

SAM: I didn't have any vegan friends, it was just sort of, they were all vegetarians... so even though I think it might have been in the back of my mind, like eggs and dairy are still animal products, it seemed like a good compromise with my family and there wasn't the social groups who were also vegans to push me a little further and so it was just kind of like I fell into the vegetarian thing I guess, and I was comfortable with that through high-school until I graduated. I don't think I really started questioning seriously the ethics, when I first realized then I went vegetarian, but I didn't seriously start questioning the ethics or the moral status of animals and our treatment of them until my first year in college, the end of my senior year and first year in college, and that's when I made a commitment to go vegan

NICOLE: Was that just from thinking about it more or

SAM: Well I read *Diet for a New America* and...that was for some reason the book that convinced me to go vegan. So I guess after I read that book I made the decision I wanted to go vegan, but then I went to this college and my freshman year at college I tried to go vegan and I just didn't have any clue what I was doing so I just wound up eating really badly and I lost like 15 pounds so I reverted back to vegetarianism for a little bit.

The next decisive moment was when he made a new friend during sophomore year that, like Sam, was also into straightedge, hardcore, and skateboarding, and they went vegan together.

According to Sam, it was much easier to go vegan when he had someone else with whom to “figure things out.”

SAM: But then the second year there was this new straightedge kid that came to school, and he was really cool, and he and I started, we went vegan together and so it was cool, it was much easier to do it for me when I had somebody to figure things out with, like figure out what to eat and stuff and, and it's so hard for me to think about it now, because it seems like such second nature to me now, you know, but when I was first doing it I didn't know what to eat, I didn't know what to make, or anything and it was really easy when I met my friend [Jake]. He came to [the college] the second year I was there... and so when I finally had somebody who was interested in doing it, we kind of like figured things out together, so it was cool. So after I met him then I guess, beginning sophomore year in college, I started being vegan fulltime.

Sam also had access to the Internet for the first time in college, which he used to read more about animal rights. The more he read, the stronger his convictions became. He also started getting active in college and he and his new friend Jake tried to start up a campus animal rights group, although he says they were pretty much the only members because it was hard to drum up interest.

Bess, too, who went vegetarian at age 19 and vegan at age 21, experienced rather lengthy turning points, both of which seemed to be the result of multiple influences. She was predisposed in that she loved animals, especially horses. She also tells the story about how she supposedly sat in front of the oven crying while watching the turkey cook on Thanksgiving when she was three years old. Of course, she was too young to remember this and is herself doubtful

that it even happened, but her mom insists it is true. She says that she thought about vegetarianism when she was a kid but that she learned to avoid thinking about it because it made her upset. So she appears to have been strongly predisposed, although the event that seems to have kicked off her actual turning point, defined as the time when she actively began thinking about vegetarianism and talking to others about it, was when one of her best friends went vegetarian. She had many conversations with him, read material on animal rights, and thought about it over the next two years, but it wasn't until she saw an animal rights video in the street one day that she actually went vegetarian. This experience galvanized her to stop eating meat and decisively ended her two-year period of questioning. Hers is a good example of a long turning point, although if one focused only upon the last event immediately preceding her going vegetarian, it would seem almost instantaneous.

BESS: I started thinking about being vegetarian before I can even remember, like when I was little I thought about it and I was like, I'm eating animals; that's mean... but I never did it because you know society brainwashes you and everything. So I thought it was kind of mean but I wouldn't really let myself think about it because I couldn't think about it or I'd cry. But I guess about two years ago one of my best friends went vegetarian. He's still trying to go vegan, having a lot of trouble with it, but so I first heard the word vegan from him... And he introduced me, told me books to read and just word of mouth told me about how dairy farms are and how miserable all that stuff is and so that's when I started looking into it thinking about it... and then that summer I really was like alright, was talking with all my friends about should I go vegetarian? Do you think the food chain is wrong? But then I started learning about how not only do we eat animals, and regardless of whether that's okay or not, is how they're treated, definitely that I think is really bad and so I was walking through Georgetown one day I guess it was in September or something whenever COK [Compassion Over Killing] had gotten the van⁵⁶ because that's what I saw and I was with one of my friends who is vegetarian and we were...on our way with a bunch of other people to a BBQ restaurant and we see the COK van and we stop and we watch it for a little while and I was like horrified.

⁵⁶ "The van" in question is the Fauna-vision van, which belongs to the animal rights group Compassion Over Killing, and which has video screens on the side the outside that continuously run footage of slaughterhouses, factory farms, and fur trapping. Members of COK drive the van around crowded areas of Washington, DC on weekend nights and hand out literature while the videos are playing.

NICOLE: Did you take the literature?

BESS: Yeah we took the *Why Vegan?* and I had never seen that before and so I was like sitting at the BBQ restaurant looking at the menu, looking at the ‘Why Vegan?’ and I ordered a pork sandwich, which is what I had always gotten at BBQ places and then I didn’t eat it because I was like, I can’t do this. I was looking at the picture of the downed cow on the ‘Why Vegan.’ I definitely couldn’t do it...and so I didn’t eat meat again after that.

NICOLE: Did you talk with your friends about it?

BESS: Yeah...and they were just like you know whatever, it’s the food chain... lots of animals eat other meat, blah blah...I was with maybe four people and one girl was like, you just can’t think about it. You can’t think about it – just eat it. You can’t think about what it is. And that’s how I always was. I just couldn’t think about it.

NICOLE: But then at that point?

BESS: I just couldn’t stop. It was terrible. I couldn’t even look at it. And I felt really bad for the waitress. She was like, oh was it bad? I was like, no – I just can’t.

Shortly thereafter, Bess read *The Vegan Sourcebook*, which is basically a comprehensive how-to (and why to) book on veganism, full of facts about modern methods of animal agriculture and factory farming, nutritional information, philosophical arguments and ethical considerations, and vegan recipes. After reading this book, Bess knew she had to go vegan.

BESS: ... and so then sometime, I think it was late October, I bought and read the *Vegan Sourcebook* and spent the whole time I was reading it crying [laughing]. I’m so emotional and so that’s when I was like, I have to go vegan. And I got really excited about it and learned everything I could about it.

NICOLE: What was making you cry? Was it the way the animals were treated?

BESS: Yeah, reading about factory farming especially was the biggest thing and battery cages and with the chickens and just thinking about how terrible it is that people just don’t know...

She continued to research the issue some more and came to the conclusion that she had no choice but to go vegan. She tried at this point to go vegan, and was successful for a while, but she found it difficult and started to relapse and began “cheating.” At the time of our interview, she was interning at an animal rights organization, and around the time when she began her internship there she went vegan again and this time is finding it much easier. She says that being at the organization surrounded by other vegans is really helpful. With this new social support, it

is becoming increasingly clear to her that being vegan is “the only way to be,” plus it is easier to have the knowledge of other vegans to draw upon.

BESS: ... the first week that I decided to go vegan it was all I thought about and I was just like, I have to do this. I can't not do this. So then I had to deal with explaining to my friends when I was at a restaurant or whatever with them. And it was really hard and dealing with finding out, because you know the first time you try to go to the grocery store it's just like, I can't eat anything.... And I had to learn what things I could make for myself... And then through winter break and December and everything I stayed vegan and it was all good... and then because my two best girlfriends that I had always roomed with were both abroad and then one of them came back second semester last year, and she is like an Italian food and pizza fanatic, and she came back and she was ordering pizza, ordering pizza, oh, let's go to this restaurant, let's do this, eat ice cream with me, and so I ate pizza with her and I started like totally cheating all the time and I was freaking out about it and it really made me feel really guilty and so like in May or something right after I got the internship here I got back and was like, okay, I'm going to do this again and so I went vegan again and I haven't cheated since then and hopefully I'll be able to keep at it better this time. The more I'm here, the more I see, plus at school I didn't know anybody else who was vegan. Nobody even knew what it was. There was no support. But here it's like now I've got a million people who are. And it's really just more and more clear that that's the only way to be.... and plus there's lots of people who know a lot more about what things you can eat or what it means on the ingredients label and where you can find this and that and the other thing. So that's really helpful, having other people who have been doing it for longer.

The potential influence of being around other vegans when one is trying to go vegan oneself is abundantly obvious in Bess' story above. Of course, being around vegans would not turn a meat-eater into a vegan, but for people like Bess, who have already been slowly making a transition, or have even tried to go vegan but have backslid, the social support provided by new relationships with likeminded others is paramount.

Social influence comprises two primary types. First, social support can be in the form of one strong-willed significant other, as in the case of Trinity and Dan, as well as Jack, discussed below, or secondly, as in the case of Bess, Noah, and Arielle above, it can be the result of moving into a new social context entirely – new job, new friends, etc – in which social networks

become more densely populated with likeminded others. This shift of social context is usually the result of becoming involved with the animal rights movement in some capacity.

Another difference is in which seems to be an easier transition, vegetarianism or veganism. For all of the people discussed above, the transition to veganism was much more difficult, or at least more gradual, than was the transition to vegetarianism. This is not always the case, however. Some find going vegetarian to be the more “noteworthy” transition, after which veganism just naturally follows with little difficulty. Jack and Sophia represent this type of “gradual shift to vegetarianism with abrupt shift to veganism” type of turning point.

Jack tried to go vegetarian after meeting and becoming friends with Gary, a vegetarian, during his sophomore year in high school. He described meeting Gary as a “turning point” that opened him up to a whole new world of possibilities. But he was afraid to face his parents, who operated a chicken farm, with his decision, so Jack went back and forth and had trouble sticking with it. He was vegetarian on and off during high school and the beginning of college.

Although he was not able to stick with vegetarianism very well at the time, Jack’s first turning point was when he met and became friends with Gary in high school. His second turning point came when he started college and joined the environmental group on campus. He became good friends with the founder of the group, who was a vegetarian. Around this time, he also started dating Darla, a vegan activist whom he met in the group, and he also began getting involved with animal rights. Jack went vegetarian again. Although he had never thought about veganism before, when he met Darla he “started seeing things in a totally different way” and he went vegan about six months after going vegetarian the second time.

JACK: ...I’d never even thought of veganism before and when I met her I saw things on a totally different level and I started seeing things in a totally different way. And so at that point, that’s when I started changing my lifestyle and

eventually, after about six months, I decided to be totally vegan and I have been ever since.

The influence of new social relationships in Jack's case is obvious. Even though he was predisposed, at each step it took developing a significant relationship with another likeminded person to stimulate change, perhaps because he needed a new relationship to offset the obviously strong counter-influence of his parents. It was hard for him to do it alone. With Jack's story, we see the potential power of meeting and forming a relationship with even just one other person (consistent with Asch's findings about a "minority of one" being much more difficult than a "minority of two"); it does not have to involve entering an entirely new social world or subculture. And the fact that he found it so much more difficult to stick with vegetarianism in high school but was able to in college also shows that proximity can make transitions such as these more difficult. Once he was away from home it became easier to become his own person; for Jack, that person was someone who does not eat meat.

Sophia was very predisposed; yet it took her a long time to go vegetarian, which she did not do until college. In her case, a vegetarian friend was also very influential; however, her turning point was the result of multiple influences, not the least of which was that she was predisposed from a young age to be attuned to suffering. She was one of the very sensitive children in my sample, who used to come home and cry because someone (not her) was picked on in school and she felt sorry for him or her. Her mom told her she would have to learn to close her eyes or life would be too painful for her because of the degree to which she emphasized with everyone else's pain and suffering. Although she was very close to her dog growing up, this predisposition did not manifest itself in a resistance to meat, and she did not think about vegetarianism until she met Mary, a vegetarian, her first day in college and began having

conversations with her about it. Sophia realized that she wanted to go vegetarian, but she did not go vegetarian right away.

The second defining event after meeting Mary was when she started up a dog shelter for strays near her college with the help of her parents, Mary, and some other friends. She started up a new shelter after volunteering at the existing shelter and finding it woefully inadequate. The immediate event that caused her to start volunteering at the dog shelter was the death of her beloved childhood dog. She felt so sad about her dog's death that she started volunteering at the shelter as a way to make herself feel better and she ended up getting heavily involved in canine rescue work. After about a month at the new shelter, she made a mental connection between cows and dogs, which prompted her to go vegetarian.

SOPHIA: After about a month or two of doing this I started thinking, uh-oh – because I'd kind of put the vegetarian thing on hold while I was involved in all this and I thought, I love these dogs. They're beings in their own right with feelings and thoughts and you step on their foot they cry, just like we do. They feel pain. They feel fear. They think. And what's the difference between a dog and a cow? I realized that and within a few days I said, that's it. I'm not doing this anymore. So I went vegetarian, not vegan; I was vegetarian all my years of college.

She also read *Diet for a New America* at this time, which “made a huge impact.” Her vegan turning point began her junior year when she took an animal rights class from a campus activist who was also senior at the time. At this point, she realized that being vegetarian was not enough. Her vegetarian friend, Mary, went vegan at this time and Sophia went vegan not long afterwards. For Sophia, going vegan was a very positive experience and she started reading and learning all that she could about animal rights and began getting more involved:

SOPHIA: ...I decided that I wanted to work for an animal rights group. Once I went vegan the floodgates opened. It was like, okay I can really look at this stuff. I can really learn about all this stuff because I'm not contributing to it, and I'm not going to contribute to it, and so I don't have to feel that barrier of, god, do I want to know this?

Her actual turning point to veganism seemed to be less gradual than her turning point to vegetarianism, if only because vegetarianism seemed a lifetime coming for her and veganism just sort of flowed from her vegetarianism. She cites consistency, as did most of my respondents, as the main reason underlying her decision to go vegan. Viewed in this way, veganism, though overall it seems to be more difficult, may be an easier step for a person who has had a strong conversion to vegetarianism and already begun to turn toward an animal rights point of view.

Sophia's vegan turning point, although it started with the animal rights class that she took, ended with a showdown in the ice cream aisle of her grocery store. She did not immediately go vegan as soon as she began thinking about it. Her friend Mary went vegan first, and Sophia thought about it for a while before she made the actual decision to change her life in such a manner. The decision to walk away from the ice cream was the ultimate deciding moment.

SOPHIA: ...and then much more so had a big enlightenment my junior year when there was another person who was very involved... in [name of college] animal rights with [Mary] and she actually taught... an animal rights class...I took the class and I learned so much from her. We did every week a different topic and we went through everything. We went through hunting, we went through rodeos and circuses, every single topic there is... she had all kinds of literature from PETA and everything and taught us all the stuff that was going on behind the scenes and I was absolutely horrified and disgusted and starting thinking, oh my god – I need to change a lot of other things, too. It's not as easy as just being a vegetarian. I'm still hurting other living beings. I'm still causing suffering. That is not acceptable to me, and at that point [Mary] was just going vegan. She went vegan end of junior year.

NICOLE: And did you know about veganism?

SOPHIA: I did not know about it before that. Actually what happened was in the class they had brought in, the guest speaker was a 'vegan,' woo, you know. And she was an expert; she was a vegan [laughing]. She told us what she ate and she was like, it's not that hard ...I eat this for breakfast, this for lunch, blah, blah, blah and I was fascinated by it, but I still felt like, oh I can't do that. So [Mary] was vegan our entire senior year but she was always one step ahead of me so I didn't feel like that was any problem. I felt like I would eventually. I felt like I wasn't

quite ready but I was going to do it and I had one of those moments where just boom, um just everything turns and it was right at the end of my senior year and I had just... learned about it not that long ago, about the dairy and stuff... and so I had been for like a week avoiding milk but still not being real careful and eating things that had it in it or whatever, but not drinking it straight, and I'd been a big milk drinker so that was kind of weird for me. And then but the biggest thing for me was ice cream and of course now there's a billion kinds of ice creams... back then there wasn't so much, there was Rice Dream, which is kind of nasty and one or two others...so anyway I went to the supermarket after that week and I remember I was shopping and I stood in front of the ice cream case and I stood and I stared at it and I remember exactly what was going through my head and I was thinking... I'm either going to buy it now and I'm not going to think about it, or I'm going to take the plunge and if I walk out of here without this ice cream, I'm a vegan. And that's it. And I just stood there and stood there and stared, can I do this? Can I do this? And I turned and walked away. And I remember it so clearly. I remember that two days later I had that shirt from PETA with the cow on it, the beautiful cow face, and it has the quote on it that says, 'Now I can look at you in peace; I don't eat you anymore' – it's Franz Kafka or something. And I wore that shirt for the first time and I was so...proud. I felt like, yes! I have done this. I feel clean. I feel, you know...like I had cast off all this horror and suffering that I had been contributing to and now I can actually love animals and respect animals and feel like I have a right to do so... I felt the contradiction just laying so heavily on me before that, and I felt so good. I was just like bouncing around... I felt really good.

NICOLE: So it wasn't hard at all?

SOPHIA: No. I mean, you know, I missed certain things but I felt so good that it was totally worth it. I was like yes! I am so happy! I have done what I need to do. And I was just very, very, very proud and very happy and that was it and I never went back.

Conclusion

The overarching theme of this chapter has been that turning points are not always “points;” they are more complex than that. The amount of socialization that has to be undone in the case of vegetarianism and especially veganism is significant; hence the turning point may take years to run its course. Most people cannot turn off socialization at the flick of a switch. Here, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of alternation is relevant, which I will take up at the beginning of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Becoming a vegan animal rights activist entails a degree of disengagement from the mainstream culture, or at least certain facets of it. This process is almost always problematic. Turning points such as those discussed in the last chapter move a person progressively out of the web of the dominant culture, just as they inexorably move a person toward the animal rights movement. This drift out of the dominant culture is characterized by a degree of estrangement from specific others, as well as the generalized other which includes social norms regarding the human-animal relationship. It manifests itself through interaction with significant others, interaction in public settings, and a heightened awareness of the extent to which animal exploitation exists in the normal, day-to-day operations and institutions of society. This progressive sense of estrangement facilitates the strengthening of an activist identity, which in turn begins to take on some of the qualities of a master status (discussed in the next chapter).

It is not only external relationships (i.e. extra-movement social ties that were in place before the turning point) that are affected when an individual institutes pro-animal rights lifestyle changes; a new vegan activist will also typically forge new attachments with likeminded others. Thus new bonds are established and internal relationships with people inside the movement are formed; or there may be an intensification of pre-existing internal social ties if some were already in place. In other words, if the new activist already knew one or more likeminded others

before his or her turning point, these relationships may take on a new significance or greater importance after the turning point experience.

How does the new activist deal with the people that find her conversion incomprehensible? Conversely, how does she deal with her own feelings that the rest of the world has become strange? These questions are directed at the external social relationships that were already in place at the time of conversion; a related question is what kinds of new friendships are established and what role do they play in conversion and recruitment?

Conversion usually entails the establishment of bonds with others who have been converted while at the same time there is a severing, or at least a drastic revision, of old contacts. Going vegan brings with it more social baggage than does just going vegetarian. While going vegetarian may cause strain in existing relationships, veganism brings with it a moral philosophy and new lifestyle, not just a diet, and so the impact on existing relationships will potentially be stronger. The transition from vegan to activist implies an even deeper level of commitment, as the person now possesses not only an internal drive toward personal change, but also an outward orientation to change the world as well, to make it align with the new beliefs that the activist has internalized during the conversion or re-socialization process. Therefore the process of making new friends and discarding old ones will be more pronounced with the shift to veganism and activism than with vegetarianism.

Conversion to a deviant or alternative perspective has been theorized as following from friendship bonds and social ties (Lofland and Stark 1965, Berger and Luckmann 1966). This perspective maintains that social interaction is the key to conversion; conversion is a result, at least in part, of the desire to please one's friends. Accordingly, for full conversion to take place, the potential convert must cut off existing attachments and institute a clean break with old ties

that exist outside the new reference group. Animal rights activism differs from this model, however. For vegan animal rights activists, personal relationships are driven by commitments that are already in place. In the case of animal rights activism, existing social ties are not typically broken or completely severed; rather, there is a renegotiation of external relationships with those outside the movement. A consideration of the experiences of animal rights activists suggests that existing models of conversion, socialization, and identity transformation may be too dramatic – a theme which was also explored in the last chapter with regard to the gradual nature of many turning points and the variety of conversion experiences undergone by activists at each stage of re-socialization from vegetarian to vegan to activist.

A classic statement on conversion is Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of alternation, which they theorize has more in common with primary socialization than with secondary socialization.

Alternation requires processes of re-socialization. These processes resemble primary socialization, because they ... must replicate to a considerable degree the strongly affective identification with the socializing personnel that was characteristic of childhood. They are different from primary socialization because they do not start *ex nihilo*, and as a result must cope with a problem of dismantling, disintegrating the preceding nomic structure of subjective reality. How can this be done (p. 157)?

The latter is definitely true of animal rights activists (especially adults), in that they must dismantle previously held subjective interpretations of the world. The former proposition, however, is more problematic. As we have seen, many vegetarians and vegans make their conversion trips alone, so to speak, and do not require an overwhelming emotional identification with new socializing personnel, the intensity of which is comparable to that which was experienced during the period of primary socialization. Far from the acquisition of new attachments being a necessary prerequisite for conversion, in the case of vegans, new attachments are often not formed until *after* conversion is complete. Hence, statements such as

the following regarding the “recipe” for successful alternation do not fit the animal rights case very well.

The most important social condition is the availability of an effective plausibility structure, that is, a social base serving as the “laboratory” of transformation. This plausibility structure will be mediated to the individual by means of significant others, with whom he must establish strongly affective identification. No radical transformation of subjective reality (including, of course, identity) is possible without such identification, which inevitably replicates childhood experiences of emotional dependency on significant others. These significant others are the guides into the new reality (p. 157).

The imagery is powerful and perhaps applies very well to the dynamics of cults and total institutions, in which the individual actually does experience a radical break with his or her former life. To the extent that old ties are severed, a void is created that must be filled; re-socialization steps in here. And if, as Berger and Luckmann pose, re-socialization is to be successful, then a strong identification with new socializing personnel must occur in a replication of primary socialization. This lends the experience and emotional intensity and psychic weight not experienced in secondary socialization, which is more akin to learning new rules and requirements of specific positions. Norms learned during processes of secondary socialization are more easily discarded and do not fundamentally transform a person’s identity.

In contrast, alternation is a near-total transformation of self, the historical prototype of which is religious conversion, according to Berger and Luckmann. It is dependent upon “an intense concentration of all significant interaction within the group...and particularly upon the personnel assigned the task of re-socialization” (pp. 157-8). Animal rights activists do not fit this conversion profile, as many of them are driven to seek out the new group (in this case, the social movement) only after they have converted and are already vegan. While sometimes conversion or deepening commitment may be happening simultaneous with the formation of new social attachments, rarely does full alternation happen inside the movement, or new “plausibility

structure,” as Berger and Luckmann’s conception would suggest. Animal rights activists straddle both worlds and their conversion usually occurs before the formation of new social ties, not after.

... The plausibility structure must become the individual’s world, displacing all other worlds, especially the world the individual “inhabited” before his alternation. This requires segregation of the individual from the “inhabitants” of other worlds, especially his “cohabitants” in the world he has left behind. Ideally this will be physical segregation. If that is not possible for whatever reasons, the segregation is posited by definition; that is, by a definition of those others that nihilates them. The alternating individual disaffiliates himself from his previous world and the plausibility structure that sustained it, bodily if possible, mentally if not. In either case, he is no longer “yoked together with ‘unbelievers,’” and thus is protected from their reality-disrupting influence (pp.158).

Especially dangerous, according to Berger and Luckmann, are those “non-believers” who formerly were biographically significant. Although once past the early stages of alternation, the convert may once again resume relations with outsiders, those who were significant pose a special threat to the new reality, and the old reality invoked by significant others may be a temptation; hence they are to be avoided most of all.

As already noted, conversion to a vegan animal rights perspective and lifestyle does not typically involve physical segregation from “non-believers” and usually takes place in the presence of biographically significant others who are “co-habitants” in the meat-eating world that he or she is trying to leave behind. Animal rights activists do not normally disaffiliate themselves from their previous world; instead they remain “in but not in.” They try to figure out a way to make peace with the world in which they live and their new vegan self, while at the same time negotiating their current social relationships even as they may be forming new attachments with likeminded others. As they move from just being vegan to becoming active for animals, the question of how to go about attempting to change the existing world to more closely

approximate the utopian vision of animal liberation also arises. Through all of this, the dominant culture recedes, but does not disappear from view.

Berger and Luckmann state that there are, in practice, many intermediate types between re-socialization in the form of alternation and secondary socialization, which continues to build on primary internalizations instead of departing from them. These intermediate types are characterized by "... partial transformations of subjective reality or of designated sectors of it" (p. 161). The idea of partial transformation seems a promising concept to apply to vegan activists, whose conversion lacks some of the more radical qualities of alternation yet is much more intense than secondary socialization; however, Berger and Luckmann further elaborate the concept of "partial transformations" by stating that they are:

... common in contemporary society in connection with the individual's social mobility and occupational training. Here the transformation of subjective reality can be considerable, as the individual is made into an acceptable upper-middle-class type or an acceptable physician... But these transformations typically fall far short of re-socialization. They build on the basis of primary internalizations and generally avoid abrupt discontinuities within the subjective biography of the individual. As a result, they face the problem of maintaining consistency between the earlier and later elements of subjective reality. This problem...becomes more acute the closer secondary socialization gets to re-socialization without actually becoming it (p. 161-2).

Conversion to an animal rights perspective is far more radical than the partial transformations associated with social mobility and occupational training that Berger and Luckmann use as examples; yet the changes that accompany becoming a vegan and an activist fall short of the near-total transformation that accompanies alternation, which necessitates physical segregation, the severing of attachments from the former life, and complete re-socialization. Animal rights activism may be understood as a partial transformation, but one which comes closer to re-socialization, without actually becoming it, than to secondary socialization. So, there is a difference between "full re-socialization," secondary socialization,

and partial transformations, the latter of which fall somewhere on a continuum between the former two.

The procedures used to maintain consistency between the past (pre-conversion) and the present (post-conversion) are less radical in cases of partial transformations because “in such cases there is usually a continuing association with persons and groups who were significant before. They continue to be around... and must themselves be convinced that such transformations as have taken place are plausible” (p. 162). Veganism and activism can be understood as cases of partial transformation that fall closer to the re-socialization than to the secondary socialization side of the continuum. Although the identity transformation and lifestyle changes that accompany conversion to an animal rights perspective are indeed considerable, the individual in most cases does maintain at least some degree of association with the people who populated his or her former pre-conversion life. And these associations must be dealt with.

When someone is shocked into action about something that everyone around them seems to take for granted as “normal” (such as eating meat, for instance), there is bound to be an effect on already existing relationships. Others do not perceive that which suddenly seems “obvious” to the person who experiences the epiphany; this disjuncture requires the person who has had a catalyzing experience to perform some identity repair work. If the feelings of discomfort are not repressed but rather sought to be reconciled, the person may seek more information, change their eating habits, or take other action. To the degree that other people, especially significant others, are not also experiencing this change of consciousness, strain may creep (or come less subtly) into the relationship.

This estrangement effect especially applies in the absence of social networks. If one is already indirectly connected to, if not embedded in, a movement (or movement-friendly)

subculture, for instance through voluntary associations, feelings of estrangement will likely be less acute. However, even when embedded in an animal-friendly social network, most activists move back and forth between the dominant culture and movement culture, so some amount of negotiation must still occur. Activists resolve this in different ways. Some activists voluntarily cut associations with relatives or former friends, while others continue to see them but feel uncomfortable. Still others find they are able to “turn it off” (their new consciousness and identity) in certain situations, and some are lucky enough to have very supportive family and friends and so feel much less of an overall sense of tension and strain as they begin to inhabit their new sense of self.

External Relationships

In addition to the more diffuse influences of the mainstream culture, the attitudes of specific friends, family members and significant others are situational factors that will encourage or discourage the expression and development of the predispositions and turning points discussed in the previous chapters. In Lofland and Stark’s (1965) study, cult members who were in the process of conversion wrote home after they joined the cult and received a variety of reactions from their family members. Since these reactions were overwhelmingly negative, potential converts had to eventually “cut ties” as part of the final stage in their progression to becoming World Savers and fully converted cult members. Although to become an animal rights activist it is not necessary to “cut ties,” younger potential activists especially may have to, at some point, break away from a discouraging family (perhaps to reconcile at a later date) or, alternatively, a supportive family may provide the young activist with a source of nurturance and validation that will encourage conversion at a relatively early age.

At any rate, this situational factor is one with which the predisposed animal rights advocate will have to contend if they hear the “call” at a young age. Particularly noteworthy were the relatively young ages at which many in my sample expressed an interest in going vegetarian or vegan, and in these cases, parental reaction will obviously be salient in a different way than it would be for an older child or a grown person. The reactions of parents are not unimportant in these latter cases, depending, of course, upon the closeness of the relationship to begin with, but in cases where the child is too young to exercise any real agency, parental resistance is not just an annoyance but a very real obstacle standing between a would-be vegetarian or vegan and his or her new identity.

Although it is difficult if not impossible to predict what effect supportive or non-supportive parents will have on a younger activist’s development (if any) we can at least say with confidence that the reactions of others in the immediate social environment can serve to either accelerate or decelerate the existing predispositions discussed in Chapter 4. Sherlock was 14 years old when he decided he wanted to be a vegetarian and, despite initial reservations about health and nutrition, his mother was very supportive and cooked separate meatless meals for him, which obviously made it possible for him to follow a vegetarian diet as a pre-adult. He acknowledges that his mom’s supportive response made him “lucky.”

SHERLOCK: She wasn’t happy about it, but I was really, really serious and I was going to do it. And so she gave me some leeway. And my mother was so good. I had such great support. She would cook vegetarian stuff all the time. So ever since I’ve been 14 sitting down to dinner there’s always been something for me to eat... if we were having steak and potatoes, she’d cook a different, nut pilaf rice dish for me... I was so lucky.

As discussed previously, the most supportive parents are those who not only provide meat-free diets for their kids but who eventually become vegetarians themselves. Ferdinand went vegetarian in 9th grade and went vegan and became active in animal rights in 10th grade.

FERDINAND: Yeah, my parents were supportive, and it was nice because after awhile they decided, we're just not going to eat meat; we'll just cook vegetarian. Because it was simpler for [my mom] because she used to make like two sauces, like meat sauce and then a veggie sauce for the spaghetti, and one night she fed me the meat sauce... and then I think I ran into the bathroom and spit it out into the sink and washed my mouth out like 3 or 4 times. And I think it was after that she was like, it's just easier and it's probably better for my dad... They eventually turned vegetarian; it was fun.

Despite the young age at which Katie converted (she was completely vegetarian by age 12), her parents were supportive of her decision and she did not experience any resistance from them whatsoever. They followed in her footsteps and went vegetarian themselves after not very long.

NICOLE: Any resistance?

KATIE: Not at all...of course when you become vegetarian for ethical reasons usually in the beginning you're very zealous about it, you're trying to convince other people, so I did try to persuade them and my dad likes to tell the story of how I'd put a note on the refrigerator calling him a tuna murderer or something like that. And then they became vegetarian, too... not long after me.

Not all parents were as supportive of their children's youthful decision to become vegetarian. Even when outright prohibition is not attempted, the mere threat of disapproval can be sufficient to thwart attempts to make the change. In contrast to Ferdinand and Katie's experiences with their families, Jack, anticipating a negative reaction, intentionally tried to hide his vegetarianism from his parents, whom he felt would not be supportive of this dietary choice. He tried to remain vegetarian during high school even though he was afraid to confront his parents with his decision.

JACK: When I met [Gary] in the 11th grade that was the turning point of my life. I met my first vegetarian, and just suddenly a whole new world was opened up to me and I was just like there are other possibilities, and there's another way to be...I thought there was something right for me but I was afraid to face my parents with it and say, okay, I made a life choice. I am vegetarian, and you can't do anything about it... I just kind of hid it from them and when we'd eat dinner I would just skip the meat and eat whatever else was there and just like not say anything about it and I did that for like two years in high school. So that was my path to becoming vegetarian.

Although he stayed vegetarian for two years during high school, Jack eventually reverted back to eating meat. However, once he left home and went away to college, he became vegetarian again and, in fact, went vegan after six months. Not only was moving away from his parents an important factor in his making this more complete transition, but he also met other vegetarians during this time and even started dating a vegan animal rights activist. So, in college he formed new associations with the strength to balance out the previous importance of his parents' opinions.

Sometimes it is not the imagined disapproval that is problematic for the would-be vegetarian or vegan; in some cases outright prohibition is attempted. This does not necessarily mean that the subject will not stick to his or her convictions even in the face of formidable parental opposition. In fact, there was no discernable pattern of parental disapproval affecting whether a child would stick with vegetarianism or veganism. Not all of the people in my sample who went vegetarian or vegan at a young age had supportive parents; therefore, familial support was not a necessary condition for children and pre-teens to go vegetarian or vegan.⁵⁷ Parker, whose story was discussed at some length in the last chapter, provides an example of a young person refusing to abandon, in this case, veganism, in the face of significant parental opposition. Despite his parents' various punishments and restrictions (to be lifted if and when he abandoned veganism), he refused to eat animal products once he made his decision. So, although his experience with his parents was much different than Katie's and Ferdinand's – and although they were around the same age (between 12 and 14) – the attempts of Parker's parents to bring him back in line with some semblance of mainstream culture (they were willing to let him be

⁵⁷ It is also important to note the possibility of unsupportive parents successfully discouraging their children from becoming vegans. These discouraged vegans would, of course, not be in my sample and their overall numbers can only be guessed.

vegetarian, just not vegan) did not affect the outcome, which was exactly the same in all three cases.

PARKER: So my parents said... that's it, you're not doing it...and so we went back and forth and it's a long story but there were various punishments and restrictions on my liberty... They said, until you eat eggs or milk then you can't do this and it got pretty bad after a couple of months... Eventually it got to the point where I couldn't do anything but be in my room and go to school... It didn't have any effect on my decision to eat eggs or not... finally they just gave in. There was nothing else they could do short of really physically beating the hell out of me... and after that it really had a serious impact on my relationship. I mean seven years later, it's still a very strange relationship and it definitely stems from that.

Arielle, whose turning points were also discussed in the last chapter, encountered resistance from her mother, who wanted her to continue eating meat. Here she describes her mom's reaction to her going vegetarian (around when she was 12 years old):

ARIELLE: My mom was pissed. It was horrible, particularly at Thanksgiving. It was just a huge fight. Once she kicked me out of the house on Thanksgiving because I wouldn't eat the fucking turkey. And I was just walking around and I called up my friend to come and pick me up. I had to walk to the park and go to a payphone... I think I was 16. It was a constant source of conflict... I remember having meat on my plate and shoving it into my napkin and bringing it upstairs to my cat.

Natasha, who was in high school during her transition to vegetarianism, met resistance from her mother as well, who went so far as to try to sabotage her meals. When I asked her if her family and friends were generally supportive of her decision to go vegetarian, she said that they were "very hostile."

NATASHA: My mom just essentially threw a temper tantrum... She said...even though I did a lot of the cooking ...if you don't eat what everybody eats then you're not going to eat here...Then she would try to trick me into eating meat, like mixing it in with stuff and say it wasn't in there...I would eat things and then I would find out later they had had meat in them. Then I would go out and buy my own food, it was like this whole battle between my parents, but I had babysitting money and...also my dad would give me money saying, if you're not going to eat here you need to go eat someplace, so here's some money and then I'd buy food... she's totally over it now but there was the longest time there when she

would do things like I'd bring in a bunch of fresh vegetables and start steaming them and she'd just pour cheese all over the top of them so I couldn't eat them, when I first went vegan.

As discussed in the last chapter, it is not uncommon for the parental resistance encountered by activists to decelerate their conversion process, causing them to have to gradually remove animal products from their diets or to wait until they are older. Noelle wanted to go vegetarian at 14 years old; at this time she began trying to omit meat products but found this a difficult proposition because of her mom.

NOELLE: ...I stopped eating hamburgers first, and then I ate chicken and turkey for a little while because I was still living with my mom and so obviously she still made me eat that stuff. So it was kind of hard...I'd try not to... And eventually after a few months I just completely dropped everything...Even though no one in my family understood it. They were always like, oh, I don't know what you're doing...

Sometimes when the child is very young, parental resistance can successfully squash the impulse toward vegetarianism until much later in life, as with Trinity, whose turning points were discussed at length in the last chapter.

TRINITY: ...I did not want to eat meat when I was growing up. As soon as I found out that animals were meat, I was really upset and I told my mother I didn't want to eat animals and she said –you know, she insisted – that I had to. And that's just the way it was and there was no getting around it. I mean, she was not even for a second going to consider that I wouldn't eat that. So I kind of gave it up. I gave up fighting about it...I didn't think about it again for a long time...

Family members are not the only external relationships that must be negotiated by the new vegetarian or vegan. Friends sometimes react negatively as well, which can result in the cutting of ties.

NOELLE: ...basically that's when I learned who my real friends were, when I went vegan, because a lot of people just decided to totally forget about me. They were like oh, you're strange now; get out of here ...

NICOLE: Did they just kind of drift away gradually...?

NOELLE: Some of them did drift away gradually but I remember one friend in particular who just, he was angry at me for going vegan, he was like, how can you

do this? I don't believe you! And I just yelled right back at him and then we never talked again.

Natasha's friends also reacted in a hostile manner when she went vegetarian:

NATASHA: And my best friends at the time were all – and I sort of knew because I'd said, before I actually went vegetarian, maybe I should go vegetarian, and I always had very bad reactions. So I knew that they were going to be hostile and I actually had a lot of fights with my closest friend at the time over it and then some of my other friends would say, oh it's just a phase, and be really condescending about it like, oh you'll quit that soon enough and so then I really started getting a whole different group of friends [laughs]...and especially when I started college, I had this miserable senior year of high school and then I started college and I met other people who were vegetarian and thinking of going vegetarian...

Natasha supplemented her disappointing external friendships, which did not weather her conversion, by creating new internal relationships; even though her new contacts were not necessarily animal rights activists, they at least shared her interest in vegetarianism rather than being “hostile” towards it. Bess, who was 19 years old at the time of our interview and relatively new to vegetarianism, veganism, and activism also found the reactions of at least some of her friends to be unsettling. While her parents were very supportive, her friends had mixed reactions, although some of the mixed reaction is a resistance to her attempts to get them to read what she had read about animal rights. Situations like this are somewhat different from when the person's vegetarianism or veganism alone provokes a hostile reaction. The aforementioned can accurately be read as active hostility whereas resistance to the new vegetarian/ vegan/ activist's attempts to convert others may be read as simple indifference. In both cases, “support” and “resistance” may be defined somewhat differently.

BESS: My two best girlfriends at school actually have been the least supportive people in all of it, which was a huge surprise to me. I question those friendships a lot and I'm still dealing with that. I just can't believe how unsupportive they are. They're both just like, hmmm. They don't believe me about everything I say. I've tried to get them to read what I read and they don't really want to and it's really weird.

Resistance of significant others can also take the form of “discrediting” or “dismissing.” Typical was the attribution made by significant others that the vegetarianism or veganism was “just a phase,” as voiced by Natasha above with regard to her friends’ dismissal of her new interest in vegetarianism. Discrediting also occurs when animal advocacy is tacked onto other “quirky” issues like general radical politics in the first quote below, or being gay in the second quote, or being a cult member in the third. Simone experienced her turning points (one year apart) to vegetarianism and veganism in her late teens. Although her family initially wrote it off as a phase, Simone thinks they are beginning to understand that she is committed to veganism.

SIMONE: [By] my family and my peer group at the time...I was just sort of perceived as this radical way-off leftist that nobody ever wanted to talk about politics with...[Simone] is just being [Simone]. Don’t pay attention to her, whatever ... My grandmother sort of made a big deal about, you know, what CAN you eat? I made all this food and you won’t eat it. Of course they thought it was a phase. And it’s weird because I only see my family once a year...but every time I go they’re more and more willing to work with me. I think they’re starting to see that it’s not a phase.

Serena was in her mid-twenties when her turning points occurred. She did not have a good relationship with her mother to begin with, so her dismissive reaction to her veganism is perhaps not surprising.

SERENA: Yeah the only real family I had was my mother and there was definitely a lot of resistance. My mother felt like I had chosen a lifestyle – not only being an animal rights activist but being gay and being vegan – that I was sort of choosing these types of interests because I wanted some attention...Why are you making these choices that are so difficult? Why would you want to do this to yourself? That kind of thing... at first she thought I was anorexic and that I was trying to hide my anorexia by saying that I was vegan and an animal rights activist, which was really difficult to go through because it was such a sincere thing... It was really hard with her. And of course I had friends and stuff that I worked with that gave me the usual joking and made fun of me ...

Stan says that in addition to the difficulty of “learning about everything” – the knowledge of the animal industries that has prompted him to go vegan – his family relationships have definitely changed for the worse after he went vegan and became involved with animal rights

STAN: It was difficult learning about everything...reading about all of the details in all the things I read...all the suffering... necessary of course, but difficult. And it's definitely constrained my family relationships... they just think I'm weird. They think I'm in a cult, is what they say [laughs]. That's what my brother said... my father wanted me one time to help carve turkeys, maybe it was a year ago, for some event they were having. I said, you know, I'm vegetarian and I don't really want to do that, dad. And he said, you don't have to eat it; just carve it. I really need your help. And finally I had to tell him, dad, you know, I'm more than just a vegetarian; I'm active and I think that's wrong... We didn't really talk that much after that. That was too much for him...

Sometimes, resistance is temporary, or more mild and centered on health concerns. Sam went vegetarian in high school and vegan in college. He was embedded in a skateboarding, "alternative" subculture, which may help to explain the absence of a negative reaction from his friends. Like Sam, many activists also mentioned being "different" from the rest of their family.

SAM: My friends were totally supportive; my family was not. Well, my mom, I mean she was just really concerned that I wouldn't be healthy and I wouldn't eat right but she never told me, you can't do this. She never forbid me from doing it and I guess when she saw that I was really serious about it...I wasn't trying to piss her off or something like that, then she would cook for me and try to make vegetarian stuff for me.

NICOLE: What about your brothers...do you ever talk to them about it or?

SAM: I talk to them about it but they're just like not into it... I'm really different from the rest of my family.

Luke went vegetarian in high school and became vegan and an activist in college. His mother, aside from concerns about her son getting arrested, is very supportive of his activism, although he is also considered "the crazy one" in his family.

LUKE: ...probably after a few months of me being vegan, she was pretty supportive... My dad ...just thinks it's stupid...he didn't really care one way or another... As far as activism goes my mom has always been very supportive. I think she's probably proud of me for standing up for what I believe in and has always been supportive, even if I get arrested or have to go to jail or something like that. She is upset and she's concerned about me, but she doesn't yell at me or anything like that because she knows that this is what I feel like I have to do. So she's very supportive. And my brother is concerned about me, and so he gets mad if I get arrested and stuff like that. But doing protests and stuff like that at first my mom said, you're going to get shot by the hunters in the woods or, don't go do that. It was always out of concern. It wasn't really for anything else than

that. But now everybody's fine with it and it's kind of oh, [Luke] is the crazy one that gets arrested all the time...

Dan and his wife, Trinity, whose stories were discussed at some length in the last chapter, went vegan together around the age of 30 (they were both in their 40s at the time of the interview). Although they made the transition to vegetarianism and then veganism as adults, they both come from relatively large families and still experience tension at family gatherings. Dan refuses to attend family gatherings if there is meat present, a decision that causes tension. His idea of a compromise – to attend get-togethers after the meal is over – was not received positively.

DAN: ... I told my family that I was not getting together anymore to eat with them, because I wasn't going to eat where there was meat served... as long as it's vegetarian, not necessarily has to be vegan...but if there was any meat at all I was absolutely opposed to it... Family get-togethers I'd come after dinner, once the table was cleared and there was nothing there. I'd show up and that way I could still say that I wasn't avoiding my obligations to my family... So I was happy not being there for dinner. It was a wonderful thing for me... But my mom was absolutely opposed to that. No, it has to be around dinner...and so there was a point of contention there because I refused... But she wasn't happy about it, and she made it clear by not talking to me...

Trinity also experienced negative reactions from her family, especially when she went vegetarian:

TRINITY: ...my family had me in tears the day I announced I was vegetarian... everybody was just so major meat-eaters. And they didn't know any vegetarians. This was like 10 years ago... and they thought I was absolutely insane... Until this day, I have been completely ostracized by my family because of it. It's such a bizarre thing. But I think it happens to other people too – where we don't get invited to family gatherings because people don't want to think about what they're eating and with us there, even if we don't even say anything, even if we just bring our own food, it's like a slap in the face to them... That's what I think, and it's made me just want to blow off my own family, which is really sad because we used to be pretty close. Before I became vegetarian, my sisters were out here all the time. We would do stuff together, we really had a good time and I felt, you know, really friendly with them and this has been a real issue.

Ferdinand, as mentioned earlier, had very supportive parents, but he and his immediate family experienced negative reactions from extended family members, which he mentioned when I asked him if he lost friends or felt estranged from any of his old relationships after going vegan and becoming an activist. While he himself does not feel he has lost friendships, he feels sorry for his mother, who has been ostracized by the rest of the family for cooking vegan food on holidays, partially in support of Ferdinand's veganism.

FERDINAND: I would say as a family, cause now my whole family is vegetarian... my mom is vegetarian, my dad is a vegetarian inside the house, and I have two older brothers and one of them is sort of...vegetarian... But my mom, for Thanksgiving it's always vegan, for holidays it's always vegan and... a lot of our relatives just will not come to our events. You know, for Christmas, if there's no Swedish meatballs...they're just not going to come. And turkey, the same thing. And I think my mom takes that really, that's very hard on her. And it's also, like when there was a wedding for my brother, the rehearsal dinner, yeah, she wanted it to be vegetarian, all of it, and she got so much flack from everybody and, you know it's not her wedding, this and that, and she's like, but I don't want to pay for dead animals, you know and I think that was such a confrontational situation in our family and there's been numerous fights over this. And it's very hard on my mom...

Even when the situation is no longer new, vegetarians often face ridicule, jokes, or negative comments, especially at family gatherings, for example, Moe, who at 37 years old has been vegetarian for ten years:

MOE: I was married when I began and I got a lot of flack. And I still get flack from my parents when I go home. On the holidays every meal was preceded by my father saying, if God didn't want us to eat animals, why did he make them out of meat? So yes, I get a great deal of flack

As intimated in Moe's comment above, spouses and boyfriend/ girlfriend relationships can be a source of tension if both partners are not making the transition together. Jamison's wife was so unsupportive of his decision to go vegetarian that he was hesitant to approach her with his desire to go vegan. At the time of our interview, they were divorced.

JAMISON: ...and I sort of wanted to be a vegan. I was married at the time and my wife had a fit when I went vegetarian, so I knew better than to press the vegan

thing... she was not supportive. Though she ended up tolerating it [vegetarianism], it took her awhile to get to the 'tolerating it' stage, and I don't think I ever got her beyond that.

NICOLE: But you stuck by it.

JAMISON: Yeah. No, I was never going to eat meat anymore.

Lara's slow but steady growing involvement with animal rights also put a strain on her marriage, which has also since dissolved:

LARA: ...And he used to hunt even when we were married and that was not a good thing... It caused a really bad fight one year. And I never thought it would, but I just couldn't see him continuing, and I couldn't tolerate it anymore. I mean, I'm the one that changed; he didn't. So in that sense, I feel bad for him. But I guess I couldn't help it, you know?

Becoming an animal rights activist during marriage often adds stress and strain to the relationship. Of course, there is usually more than the issue of animal rights that comes between the two partners, but it can introduce a new set of problems or at the very least become a negative catalyst. Hannah's father was very supportive of her growing involvement in helping animals (she became a wildlife rehabilitator around the same time that she was getting involved with animal rights activism), but her husband was less so, in part because of he was trying to join the FBI:

HANNAH: ... My dad was incredibly supportive because when we first moved down, I was married during grad school, and when we first moved down we lived with my dad and so the wildlife moved in with us too and he helped me. He'd sit and he'd grumble about it, but then you'd see him in the backyard, like when I would release the animals there were two starlings who imprinted on us and he'd call them or they'd come dive bomb him when he was out gardening and he'd put, you'd see him look around and put worms in their mouth or whatever [laughs]. He loved it. But yeah he was really supportive and he was really proud and...he came to the first demonstration ...when I was chained to the fence and they were like trying to saw us down and he was just really, really, super proud that I was willing to put myself on the line...he was super supportive and really proud. And he's still really proud.

She contrast her father's pride and support with her husband's growing annoyance and even exasperation:

HANNAH: ... There's always a lot of reasons to end a marriage, but that was a real focal point of fighting, and it was a focal point of our growing differences too... His motto was, he who dies with the most toys wins the game... that's his idea of success, and mine was he or she who changes the world and leaves the world a little bit better place than they came in and stops some kind of suffering somewhere is the winner...

NICOLE: Was your husband an artist too?

HANNAH: No he's in the FBI [laughs]. He wasn't then...that caused a lot of fights because he didn't want me to get arrested while he was going through the interview process...the day of his interview I had promised not to get arrested and I was at NIH [National Institute of Health] and I got caught up in the spirit and there I was on the front page being dragged by a cop. He was like... just one time couldn't you love me enough not to get arrested? One day – what would it have mattered? What did it do anyway, you laying on the ground in front of NIH??

NICOLE: You probably disagreed with that

HANNAH: I'm standing up for my values and I would appreciate if you would respect that! My dad respects it, why don't you, the person who's supposed to be closest to me? You should be proud of the fact that I'm willing to stand up for what I believe in! Well, tell me what good laying across a road does??

[laughing]... he was proud until the arrest stuff. He could not fathom that whatsoever. And I think part of why he was led to the FBI was he had this really strong sense of law and order, and so breaking the law to him just was something he couldn't fathom.

Toward the milder end of the spectrum, even if they do not experience outright hostility, at the very least many activists experience some sort of estrangement from, or diminishment of, past close relationships. Jamison, who in his 40s enjoys a rather close relationship with his parents, still finds that his views on animal rights create a “wall” between them. He also mentions the flip side of diminishing former ties – the positive experience of forming new associations with people who are part of the animal rights movement in some form or fashion. The formation of internal ties will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

JAMISON: ... I think the most difficult part has been sort of losing touch with people who are not part of the movement, and the most rewarding has been connecting with those people who are. I mean really for me that's been the hardest part, you know, how my parents will really walk around the issue of animal rights. They don't want to get me started. They don't want to even know about it. And so there's kind of this wall between us...

In addition to the potential negative reactions of significant others, a person may feel a more general sense of estrangement from his or her peer group. Again, having even one other person to make the transition with is helpful, though not necessary (for instance, a twin brother, as in Luke's case below).

LUKE: ...We both just had decided to go vegetarian at the same time, and nobody else in my high school that I knew of was vegetarian or vegan and definitely not animal rights. So it was kind of difficult in high school just because you don't really have a lot of say in what goes on, and you know it's kind of a difficult thing to be kind of an outcast for something like that...

But being integrated into an alternative social world, as noted in Sam's case above, such as those associated with punk rock or skateboarding, can ward off the potential danger of feeling like an outcast, because in this type of subculture being "different" (within the tacit parameters of the social world, of course) is considered to be cool and generally has positive associations. So, having some internal, or internal-peripheral (in the case of social worlds that are not specifically related to the animal rights movement but have ideological overlap around the edges), relationships already in place can offset feeling like an "outcast."

PACEY: ... we were vegan and most of my friends were also friends with [Jake] so when I went vegan they all were very familiar with the territory so I didn't really go through a barrage of, you know, questions and what are you doing, and all that kind of stuff. So it was a pretty easy transition in terms of my friends. I certainly wasn't made to feel weird or you know outcast or anything, so it was pretty simple.

FRED: Friends, yes... Definitely supportive...Most of my friends were getting into activism at the same time. We were all a part of the hardcore scene. That community also helped me to get into animal rights quite a bit, along with this friend of mine.

In considering the ways in which new activists must re-negotiate once familiar social waters and many personal relationships, it is important to recognize that the animal rights movement is considered by many outsiders to be a "non-legitimate" social cause. In addition to the immediate reactions of significant others, family, friends, and peers, which may be positive

or negative, animal rights activists are often ridiculed by strangers for their choice of activism, which is stigmatized as “trivial” and unimportant by outsiders. While all social activists must deal with a certain amount of resistance, indifference, or scorn from the larger society, animal rights activists are continually told that they should be protesting something else – that “something else” usually being anything related to people instead of animals. Children, elevated as more worthy objects of moral concern, are a favorite source for comparison. Whether the issue is starving children or homelessness, animal rights activists are told constantly that they should be pursuing other, more worthy, causes and that they should be expending their energy on other, more important, social problems.

AMBER: ... [animal rights activism] requires a pretty big degree of selflessness, because it's a pretty huge sacrifice... animal products are in everything, every aspect of what you do everyday if you're really vigilant and disciplined... plus you get derided for it a lot. What about the starving kids in Africa?

Shamus is an attorney in his 30's whose primary form of activism, in addition to rescuing and spaying feral cats in the area, consists of providing pro bono legal representation for activists. He believes that animal rights activists are scrutinized by outsiders to a degree that activists working in other social movements are not.

SHAMUS: ... There's a lot of resistance and hostility from the outside that I don't think you see in other movements. I think we're the only social cause that I can think of where people are always asking, well why aren't you doing this; why aren't you doing that? I mean, like say you're trying to help starving children in Harlem – nobody is going to come up to you and say, you know what? There are children in Africa who are more starving and worse off; why aren't you helping them? Or if you pick muscular dystrophy as your pet project, and you spend all your time on that, people come up and say, well you know what? AIDS is much worse than MS; why are you wasting your time on that? Focus on AIDS... and those types of comments are always made by people that aren't doing anything about anything ... I'm sure that you're out there every weekend feeding the homeless. No, you're not [laughs]...

“Animal rights vegan” becomes a master status in part because it is a label that carries cultural baggage with it. Not only does it sometimes override other aspects of a person's social

identity, but also to the extent that outsiders perceive animal rights activists to be a certain type of person, the identity carries a stigma that is sometimes inaccurate and almost always negative. It is not surprising that the activist him or herself also sometimes holds these negative perceptions prior to his or her involvement in the movement and internalization of the activist identity.

DAN: ...my misconceptions about animal rights people was that they were all tie-dye, hippie, ear piercing, nose piercing, tattoo, just unusual, free-loving, you know, almost the old hippie style, but in a New Age way, a Gen X way. And they're not all like that because I'm one [laughs]! I'm not like that. I don't have any tattoos or piercings and people come in all ages and all sizes and I can look at somebody on the street and have no idea whether they're an animal rights person... A common misconception is that people who are into animal rights are different... animal rights people are weird. And so whether they talk to you and you never bring it up and they have no idea, as soon as they find out, you're strange. Everything about you can be totally normal but that one factor is going to label you... and it is going to change everything they think about you, absolutely everything.

A lot of the negativity directed at animal rights activists takes the form of "PETA-baiting:"

TRINITY: ... or they don't even really know what animal rights activists do but they say, you're not one of those PETA people are you? Or one of those animal rights activists? As if it's such an extreme thing that that would make you crazy. If you admit to that, then there must be something wrong with you. They can't agree with you; they can't even really listen to what you're saying if you admit that... a lot of people are really paranoid about the whole word animal rights. It's been painted as a bad word.

SHERLOCK: ... it was brought to my attention when I was going to work for PETA. People were asking me, [Sherlock], dear god, why would you want to go and work for that organization? And they associated animal rights and the animal rights movement, those words, with crazy people throwing blood on fur coats and being extremely in your face and aggressive and destroying property and things like that and that's a small fraction of the movement. And that's an enormous misconception that I had myself. And that's why, when I did go to PETA, I was so impressed, because I thought it was going to be a bunch of hippies running around barefoot... but I got to the office and it's a corporate business almost, and it's a very professional attitude and people are well-spoken and extremely concerned about the movement but they're not crazy and they're, you know, PETA preaches the idea that you have to focus on the message not the messenger and so as an employee it's your responsibility to make yourself as affable and

presentable as possible. And so I was blown away by the professionalism of the organization. And so I suffered from the misconception myself.

Another feature of the stigma associated with the animal rights label is that activists are misanthropic and despise people, while at the same time having an irrational love of animals.

KATIE: ...I think there's that expectation that we're 'anti-people,' of course; that we're misguided bleeding hearts; we're silly and naïve. But the big thing is that if you care about animals and you work towards helping animals – you're not doing anything for people!

Along with misanthropic animal-lovers, the most common negative labels applied to animal rights activists are lunatics, hypocrites, terrorists, and bunny-huggers. Hippies, extremists, and communists were also associated with animal rights activism. Obviously, some of these labels are contradictory, such as the incongruous images of bunny-loving old ladies in tennis shoes and violent terrorists.

HANNAH: ... misconceptions are that we're all city-dwellers who know nothing about animals, that we're all bleeding-heart liberals, that we're all pro-choice... that we're just a bunch of bunny huggers... or that we're terrorists too...

Nevertheless, these are the common images the public associates with animal rights activism, as can be gleaned from spending even a small amount of time at an animal rights demonstration and taking note of the derogatory comments and epithets hurled at activists by angry passersby. I did take note of such slurs as part of my field observations and can corroborate the observations made below, many of which were offered in response to my query about common misconceptions about animal rights activists. Some of the blame for these commonly held stereotypes might be laid at the feet of the media, who tend to cover the most sensational aspects of social movement activity, when they cover it at all.

SOPHIA: ... [animal rights activists] hate people. They love animals and they want animals to vote and drive and just ridiculous shit like that. Or they're a bunch of old ladies who only like dogs and cats and cute furry things, which is also ridiculous. Or they're a bunch of hippie commies. Or it's a stage – they're

kids; they'll grow out of it... We're inconsistent. That's a big one, that we wear leather shoes.'

FRED: Yeah, we're all either PETA and silly, or we're all the Animal Liberation Front and we're terrorists. I'm not with PETA. I'm not with the ALF. I'm a peaceful, nonviolent demonstrator and educator. And this is all I am...but people tend to go for what's sensational.

FERDINAND: ... in general we are perceived as paint-throwers, as people who dress up in costumes, and we are perceived as violent. We just have a lot of negative connotations about animal rights people. We're crazy, we're extremist, we think a cat or a cockroach and a baby are of equal value. It's a very narrow-minded view of us that really allows the status quo to remain as it is... and yes the media covers the sensational, the violent, the conflicts, the craziness... that's what's visible. The good, you know the more, humane education, the nuts and bolts sort of nitty gritty person-to-person contact and education and consciousness-raising doesn't make the headlines. So what people perceive of animal rights people is the visible aspects, and since the media only covers more extreme aspects, that's how we're represented. And I think if you look at TV shows, vegetarians are always portrayed as like Phoebe from *Friends*, a total nutcase... and they're always portrayed as hypocrites and freaks... and for the general public, there's not a big incentive to get involved with animal rights, it's a lot of work, it's a lot of ridicule, it's a lot of grief...

In addition to lunacy, hypocrisy and misanthropy seem to be the most often repeated criticisms made of animal rights activists, which is ironic because ethical vegans pride themselves on their moral consistency, as well as the idea that compassion should not be limited on the basis of species membership alone; they therefore see themselves as having more compassion for humans, not less, than the average person. A popular t-shirt worn by activists expresses the commonality of the "hypocrite" stigma and pokes fun at the most often repeated comments made by outsiders. It reads: "No, I don't eat meat. Yes, I get enough protein. No, my shoes aren't leather. Yes, I have a life."

VIOLET: ...there's always a fear of looking like lunatics. I mean, we kind of are ostracized in that way, crazy, you know? ... People always try to make you the hypocrite. Like you're at a fur protest they're looking to see, oh well you're wearing leather. Even though none of us are... they just think we're lunatics... one thing that pisses me off is they assume that we don't care about humans... and that's just so false. The struggle for human rights and animal rights can go together, and they should... The same people you find at an anti-fur protest you'll

find at an anti-sweatshop protest or something like that. Animal rights people care about living beings. It doesn't matter if they're human or not... I couldn't imagine caring so much about animals and not caring about human beings.

SAM: ... we're just a bunch of terrorists... People who just blow up buildings and throw paint on people wearing fur and that's the most common thing I've heard especially when... we get arrested for fur protests, they always ask us if we threw red paint on people... another common response we always get is that we're hypocrites in some way, that we either wear leather shoes or in some way we're hypocrites. It's like you can't support animal rights and be a hypocrite or something.

Nick makes the interesting point that some of the stereotypes of animal rights activists (for example, the "ditzy airhead" stereotype) are actually gendered, sexist stereotypes that may stem from the fact that the movement is still perceived as being dominated by women.

NICK: ... I think the public believes that animal activists actually hate humanity – misanthropic. I think there is a misperception that we are terrorists... and if we're not terrorists then we're just a bunch of ditzy airheads... I mean how could anybody who's a serious person be concerned about this? And I don't know how much that's a perception based on people's refusal to acknowledge animals as having any kind of moral standing, and I don't know how much it is a perception based on stereotypes of women that are still prevalent in segments of society... and the perception that it is primarily a female dominated movement.

CONCLUSION

In his article, "In Defense of Stress" (*Adbusters* 1998), Dr. Thomas Wear, a Jungian-oriented clinical psychologist, refers to certain exceptionally sensitive people metaphorically as "canaries in the mine." His article begins with the story of a 26-year old medical student who came to see him, complaining of "lethargy, an inability to concentrate, and a preoccupation with what she called 'gloomy thoughts.'" He describes her as a bright, healthy, attractive individual who had functioned normally up until two months prior. When he pressed her about major

changes that may have precipitated her depression, he came up with nothing. However, she was able to recall a specific incident that triggered her depression:

She was having breakfast one morning listening to the radio as an expert was describing the fact that the Georges Banks fishing area off the east coast was nearly depleted. He went on to say that 70 percent of commercial fish species are seriously threatened and that some species were in danger of extinction. She was reminded of the threat of the salmon here in the Pacific Northwest and described this information as resonating with her in a very powerful way, with her thoughts returning to it as she went about her daily routine. She grew up in a small town on the coast of Washington state where her parents and most of the people she knew made their living from fishing. This, and the fact that she had always been considered a sensitive child, no doubt accounted for why this particular newscast affected her so strongly. She described how the thoughts about extinction of some fish species led to thoughts about how the resources of the Earth were being stretched beyond capacity to support the human species. She then began to consider the problem of overpopulation. Images of starving children, teeming slums, and massive migrations began to pour in, and before she quite realized it, the floodgates were opened. Thereafter followed a jumble of thoughts about ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, air and water pollution, deforestation, new lethal viruses possibly being created or released, AIDS, the return of tuberculosis and cholera as threats, unstable and rapidly changing economic conditions, etc. As she ticked off the thoughts that repeatedly captivated her psychic energy, she described feelings of anxiety and dread beginning to mount. She then had what she described as 'the big realization' which was that it wasn't just some exotic animals, fish species, and forest resources (formerly known as trees) that were heading toward extinction, but that humankind was headed for extinction by its own hand. This realization is sometimes described by psychologists as a gestalt experience, which be thought of as the 'aha' feeling we've had when facts, which to that point had not been connected, suddenly connect in a way which brings new patterns and meanings to light. It can also be seen as the opposite of denial, wherein facts which do not have an underlying pattern or relationship to each other are kept discreet, thus allowing that the individual (or culture) to remain undisturbed.

According to Wear, her depression functioned as a defense against heightened anxiety levels that threatened to overwhelm her personality organization. "The perplexing question, of course, was why she was reacting so strongly to these issues:"

After all, even though she described herself as a voracious reader, her medical school classmates were exposed to nearly identical environmental conditions and yet weren't demonstrating clinical depression. Was she truly unique in her reactions or were there others in society who felt the same way for

the same reason? While pondering these questions was interesting to me, it became apparent that regardless of her reasons for her depression, her most pressing need was for relief from her symptoms.

One choice was to use drugs. Another would be to convince her somehow that she was thinking incorrectly, and therefore was badly in need of “cognitive restructuring,” or that her response was outside normal limits. “After all,” he writes, “no one else around her was reacting the way she was, therefore the strength of the emotional reactions she was experiencing was not really about fish stock depletion or humankind’s increasingly perilous situation, but was an unconscious manifestation of some unique psychological factors...” A third possibility was to conceptualize her perceptions, thinking processes, and emotional responses as valid, appropriate and healthy:

This path, however, would involve helping her understand how it is that she is behaving in a mentally healthy way when the people around her are not feeling and reacting the way she is. In other words, to teach her that it is possible that entire cultures can behave in pathological ways which are perceived as normal. It would require teaching her about the mechanisms of denial and how large groups of people can utilize this defense mechanism, thus making anyone who isn’t in denial feel alienated or pathological. It would involve reminding her of Nazi Germany, the McCarthy era in this country, the early anti-war protesters in the Vietnam War era and other instances of societal pathology and relating them to her current situation. It would mean reassuring her that in each example of social pathology mentioned above, that there were individuals, like herself, who responded differently than the average person. It might require putting her in touch with other people or books and publications by people who share her view concerning the state of humankind. It would involve ego-strengthening techniques to help her accept herself as being different than the people around her. It might involve encouraging her to become involved in some activities to help counteract the societal pathology she was witnessing, thus assisting her in feeling less helpless (feelings of helplessness are often an important part of depression). It might involve teaching her some kind of breathing and meditative techniques to help her remain calm and centered in the face of all that she now understood. All of these learnings would, after proper integration, help lift her depression and return her normal ability to function in any way she might choose.

He goes onto say that while option number one, prescribing drugs, would certainly have made her feel better and helped her to re-focus on her studies, it would also have dulled her

sensitivity to real world facts and subtly pathologized her, which he did not want to do. He believed that the second option, emphasizing her cognitive and/ or affective pathology, was misguided and possibly unethical, and would result in “nothing short of soul murder, not to mention rendering the therapist an unwitting accomplice in maintaining the cultural denial and emotional anesthesia that passes as normal in our culture.” Therefore, the only valid treatment choice was strategy number three. But how, he wondered, could he talk with her in a way that would make sense? He finds himself beginning to talk with her about canaries:

You may recall that miners used to use canaries in the coalmines to sense the presence of lethal gases. They were kept in cages and taken into the mine with the miners and watched carefully. If the canary died, the miners were alerted and exited as quickly as possible. Canaries were used because they were expendable and very sensitive to changes in the composition of the air in the mines. I suggested to her that, because of her personality, background, and intelligence, she was especially sensitive to the avalanche of information regarding the plight of the human species, and whether she liked it or not, she was suffering from the “canary syndrome.” As a canary, she had an obligation not only to recover her own high level of functioning, but to warn others of what she knew. She also had the opportunity to encourage their anxiety and stress responses as they begin to share her understanding of humankind. Put briefly, rather than pathologizing and attempting to numb out her newly derived perspective on the human condition, the therapy aimed at integrating her gestalt experience with its increased awareness, fears, sensitivities, etc. with her pre-existing personality. This approach allowed her to outgrow her depressive symptoms as her original personality expanded to encompass the increase in the development of her consciousness. Symbolically this might be seen as empowering her as a bringer of light and thus transforming her from a canary to a raven.

Wear’s concept of “canaries” can be related to the predisposing schemas that were discussed in Chapter 4. While his case study deals with environmental destruction, the general model could also be applied to animal rights. In light of the previous discussion of stigma imposed from without, it would seem that labeling theory does not apply here. In the case of old labeling theory (Lemert 1951, Becker 1963), individuals internalize the negative label imposed on them by society, which then becomes part of their identity. In the case of vegan animal rights

activists, and in the treatment that Wear is prescribing for his patient above, the individual is rejecting – not internalizing – the label imposed by the community.

Unlike Lofland and Stark's (1965) *World-Savers*, or the cases of alternation discussed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), vegans do not give up the world but rather make their peace with it as best they can. In Wear's example, too, the patient is expected to come to grips with her rejection of the world after being told that there are sensitive people in society, and that she is one of them. This takes a potentially stigmatizing condition and normalizes it. Her doctor tells her that she should not be ashamed of her sensitivity; far from being pathological, it is a trait of which she should be proud. A similar rejection of stigma happens with vegan activists.

Although they often deal with resistance from significant others (such as parents, romantic partners, and friends), less significant others (such as peers and co-workers), and, more broadly, the generalized other (Mead 1962 [1934]) in terms of society at large, which contains stereotypes and negative labels of animal rights activists, the vegan activists in my sample were able to reject this stigma and construct an alternate conception of self, one which is at odds with the dominant culture, yet which finds support in the web of the social world of the animal rights movement.

Again, the old conversion literature posits that commitment follows from interaction and wanting to please one's friends; in other words, friendship ties are already in place at the time of conversion and function to solidify new commitments. For animal rights activists, personal relationships are driven by commitments that are already in place. In other words, commitment comes first; only after conversion does the individual seek out new groups and friendship bonds. This leads to the vegan activist's status as being "in but not in" their old social networks. In this regard, there was no pattern. Some activists experienced almost total rejection from people to whom they had been close, and others experienced high levels of support and acceptance. Most

common was for some people to reject and others to accept the change; rarely was rejection or acceptance complete. When a person went vegetarian, vegan or became an activist, some ties were cut, but most were re-negotiated. The fact that rejection and acceptance are never complete leads to marginalization, a position on the outskirts of the dominant culture, overlapping with movement networks.

And here I have only been discussing external relationships – those extra movement ties that were in place before conversion took place. While the dynamics of rejection, acceptance and re-negotiation are being played out between the activist and his or her external relationships, internal relationships (i.e. with others in the movement) are also being formed at the same time. The creation of new, internal relationships helps to form the web of social support that counters the stigma that most vegan activists are able to reject and replace with a positive sense of self. The formation of new attachments is especially crucial during the transition from vegan to activist. It is at this point that the individual switches orientations from inward to outward as their veganism takes on new meaning. What once was a personal choice is now something to be imposed upon the world. The goal becomes social change, not just lifestyle change. This is an important shift and one which, like the transitions before, carries a new identity with it – that of animal rights activist instead of just vegan and animal rights sympathizer. The status “animal rights activist” carries more of a negative stigma than does the status of “vegan,” and it is in this transition that formation of new social bonds may be most important. As the individual increasingly becomes involved with the social side of veganism – i.e. activism – he or she comes to rely more on internal relationships as estrangement from the dominant culture increases. This issue is explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

GIVING ONE'S LIFE TO ANIMAL RIGHTS

Introduction

JACK: ... I don't criticize people for eating meat because I know they have a totally different mentality but...it does bother me. It does hurt my feelings, and it does affect me... I don't want to attack anybody for eating meat but at the same time I don't want to be apologetic for being vegan.

SAM: ...when I first went vegetarian it would bother me when people would joke about eating meat and stuff but after like nine years or whatever, the jokes are just sort of like, alright, yeah. I've heard that. I don't get mad about it; I just use it as an opportunity to talk to them about animal rights, you know, if they bring it up

Activists identified three main sources of estrangement accompanying their conversion to an animal rights perspective and construction of a new identity: 1.) strained personal relationships, especially encompassing the reactions of significant others like family, friends, and romantic partners; 2.) the tendency of their identification as animal activist (or more often, ethical vegan) to become accentuated in many situations (taking on the qualities of a master status), resulting in increased tension and interpersonal conflict; and 3.) a hyper-awareness of the ubiquity of animal abuse.

Although members of oppositional social movements will have to deal with the surrounding culture in the form of counter movements and, in some cases, government repression and infiltration, they also must deal with significant others as they begin to construct an emergent identity, as we have seen. Unless an activist is exclusively embedded in a movement culture, he must negotiate his new activist identity on a terrain that is populated by non-activist friends, family, lovers, co-workers, and others who can be supportive or hostile,

understanding or indifferent. These interactions, even if not outwardly tense, often take on a strange character from the perspective of the activist who is seeing things from the point-of-view of her new identity. As the new activist goes through her own internal process of questioning and the discarding assumptions that she has held for years, she finds herself also having to provide accounts to others, which can add a new and bewildering dimension to what is already, in some cases, a discomforting process.⁵⁸ This process is made easier by the formation of new attachments with like-minded others.

Upon joining the World-Savers, the religious cult studied by Lofland and Stark (1965), converts were expected to sell their material possessions and move into an apartment building with other cult members. Such concentration creates favorable conditions for intensive interaction with other “true believers,” which facilitates increased group solidarity, strengthening of beliefs, and commitment to the cause. Something similar happens when someone who was “just” vegan decides that they need to do more – in other words, that they also need to become an activist. However, when this happens, although they do become involved with social movement organizations, animal rights activists do not sell their goods and move into a commune or enter into a similar situation characterized by intensive interaction with “insiders,” or those already in the movement.

So, how does it happen that a vegan decides to give his or her life to the cause of animal rights? Activists have the same beliefs as ethical vegans, yet they have a different mentality, one that is oriented outward, focused now on changing the world and not only themselves. In addition to the significant lifestyle changes already implemented by the vegan, the activist

⁵⁸The “moral shocks” that many activists experience as a catalyst to begin thinking about animal issues are not pleasant and are delivered in the form of unexpected, unsettling, and offensive information or visual images. The severity of the shock, which often evokes strong negative emotions like outrage and sadness, is a catalyst for people to become proactive.

becomes, in a sense, a different person and inhabits a new world. What does this new world look like? Part of this new life is identification with animals and other activists, and part is constructing an identity that differentiates them from those who are “only” vegan.

Veganism vs. Activism: The Shift from Personal to Social

When I began conducting interviews, I was at first interested in finding out whether animal rights activists also considered ethical vegans to be “activists,” even though they engaged in no other activism beyond being a vegan consumer in an overwhelmingly non-vegan world. I stopped asking this question consistently when it became clear that most activists did not consider veganism alone to be a form of activism. Although some did indeed feel that ethical veganism constituted “activism,” most felt that going vegan was only a step (albeit an important one) toward activism, and that just being vegan was not “enough.” To be an activist, one had to also join in collective efforts aimed at changing the social structure and culture, whether by lobbying to change laws, protesting institutions to change their practices, or by urging others to go vegan through education and outreach efforts.

An awareness on the part of animal rights activists of how few of them there are, relative to the dominant culture, seemed to drive this sentiment that ethical vegans needed to do more, to speak out, to actively try to change more than just themselves if they truly wanted to help animals. This harkens back to the distinction between “passive” and “active” resistance that was outlined in the introductory chapter. Ethical vegans are obviously, as individuals, opposing the dominant ideology through their consumption choices. However, they are not engaged in

collective efforts⁵⁹ to raise awareness or otherwise change the consumption habits of others. Therefore, the traditional definition of “activism” does not apply to them.

However, ethical vegans are an integral part of the movement for animal liberation. Even if they did not consider vegans to be activists per se, many animal rights activists did consider them to be “part” of the movement.

HANNAH: ... I think people who go vegan because they care about animals are part of the movement, even if they don't ever lift a finger to do anything else. The motivation is there... I would consider them a part of the movement.

In that much animal rights activism is aimed at persuading members of the disinterested public to go vegan, ethical vegans can be considered “converts” just like animal rights activists, yet they remain at the lifestyle or individual level. But if enough people went vegan, that is, if a certain critical mass were ever to be reached, the animal rights movement would succeed. In this sense, the movement does not need to recruit *activists* so much as it needs to recruit *vegans*. For the most part, however, since vegans still make up only a small percentage of the population, there is a general perception among people in the movement that vegans should also be pro-active in some way for animals, beyond changing their personal habits, because person-by-person change will simply take too long, and animals are suffering *now*. Under these conditions, speaking out becomes a moral imperative. Indeed, many of the activists with whom I spoke accounted for their participation in the movement as a duty or an obligation; activism was something they were compelled to do, and something over which they had no choice. However, although veganism may not constitute activism in the conventional sense, it can be defined as a form of “lifestyle activism.” For social movements that are aimed at cultural and institutional

⁵⁹ Although it is almost certain that they will sometimes talk to their friends, family or co-workers about their reasons for being vegan.

change, like the animal rights movement, the definition of activism could more fruitfully be expanded to include lifestyle activism.

Though the impact of vegan consumers may be small, it is notoriously difficult to measure the collective impact of efforts at social change engaged in by social movement organizations. Sometimes we can see that a specific law or policy has been changed; more often the impact of protest activity is hard to gauge directly; in fact, the biggest impact of a social movement may be “more cultural than narrowly political and economic” (McAdam 1994, p. 49). Cultural changes induced by social movements are harder to measure than economic or political results, but the greatest impact of movement-based efforts at social change may be the ripple effect they create outward into the culture. Indeed, activists often operate under the assumption of a kind of theory of diminishing returns, where for every one hundred leaflets passed out, the expectation is that only a few people will actually read it and even fewer will act on the information; in other words, a sort of funnel effect occurs.

But if even just one person goes vegan or vegetarian as a result of information received during a protest or other outreach activity, it is seen as a small victory; activists seem to be reasonably happy with this equation. They learn quickly after becoming involved in the animal rights movement that change happens slowly, and that high expectations for swift change, while common among new activists, are a recipe for burnout and frustration. Therefore, the ripple effects created by individual vegans is not unlike the ripple effects cause by organized protest activity, the trickle-down effect that may eventually change the larger culture once a critical mass of sympathy is reached. Ripple effects are hard to measure, even for those who are doing

formal outreach work. Trinity and Dan operate the Elm Creek Animal Sanctuary,⁶⁰ a refuge for farm animals and wildlife, and they give tours to the public.

TRINITY: ... a lot of times you don't know how much of a difference you're making... I had a group come out from the Humane Society in Montgomery county and I thought, okay this will be a really good tour because these people are already into animals... Well they came out and... they acted completely uninterested ...that was one of the WORST tours I ever gave... I never forgot about that tour, but I just shrugged it off and said, what are you going to do...you can't always get through to people. So about three years later I saw this woman again and she was the person who had set up the tour with me on the phone... She goes...you know that every one of those people that came on your tour became a vegetarian after the tour? ...And so you hear stories like that, people come back to you and say, you know, ever since I met Charlie [a cow living at the sanctuary], I don't drink dairy anymore, or I became vegan... people say things like that and make me think, this is so important to do this.

Non-activist vegans talk to people, too, even when not engaging in “formal” activism.

BRAD: ... so I worked at the museum for a long time. And around that time is when I got basically out of the activism stage and more into just doing my science. I was vegan the whole time, and I'd talk to people about veganism, but I wasn't as active. And then basically I got a little more revitalized in activism over the last year and a half.

This quote from Brad demonstrates how the same individual may sometimes move back and forth between different levels of activism, from passive resistance to more formal types of activism and back again. Some activists even think that the animal rights movement cannot “recruit” other activists, in the traditional sense.

SIMONE: ... I don't think that we can recruit. I think all we can do is sort of lay the foundation, set an example, make the relationships and then wait for people to try to transform themselves in their own time. And it happens... You're obviously interviewing a lot of people; my suspicion is you'll find that a lot of them come because they're exposed to it in a non-threatening way and they come to it in their own time. And most people don't come to it by being recruited.

⁶⁰ Elm Creek Animal Sanctuary is a 400-acre non-profit refuge for farm animals and wildlife located about 45 miles outside of Washington, DC. Their mission (from their web site) is to: Offer care, rehabilitation, and permanent sanctuary for neglected, abandoned or unwanted farm animals. Provide protected habitat for wildlife. Furnish information to the public regarding farm animal and wildlife issues. Promote compassion and humane treatment for all animals.

And after a person goes vegan, it is not predetermined that they will take the next step, from the personal to the social realm, and from lifestyle to formal activism. Although it is more likely for a vegan than a vegetarian to become an animal rights activist, not all vegans are activists. Many of my respondents discussed the difference between going vegan or vegetarian and becoming an activist. In this regard, many of them expressed the opinion that going vegan was relatively easy compared to being an activist, which was perceived as being more difficult. The level of energy and time commitment expected of activists can be difficult for some to sustain.

NATASHA: Yeah, I think being vegan is the easy part... once you get in the habit, once you have six or seven dishes that you cook that are vegan that you like, and you know what to buy when you go to the grocery store, then it's easy to keep doing that. The hard thing is giving up your Saturdays and sometimes we don't go [to demonstrations] because we have other things that we need to do. But a lot of activists... I've observed people read something, or for whatever reason they become vegetarian and then they become vegan, sometimes with a long gap, sometimes with almost no time, and they become so outraged at what's going on that they want to go out and protest all the time, and then the energy wears off.

Compared with other social movements, some felt that animal rights was a particularly difficult form of activism to be involved in because of the physical remoteness of the animals.

AMBER: I think if you want to get involved in the animal rights movement it's a lot harder.... going vegetarian or vegan is SO easy. I guess it helps if you have a support group of friends, but even if you don't, the options are there, especially if you live in a city like D.C. ...But fighting for animal rights is, I think it's one of the most difficult struggles. Just because, for one thing, you don't have the animals there by your side fighting along with you, where usually you do if you're in any human rights kind of struggles...And also the animals can't thank you. So you're never being thanked for your actions except by your fellow activists. But it's just not the same. I rarely ever have animal contact, even. We're not even near the beings that we're fighting for and that's what makes it super-hard, too... But you don't even need to be involved in the struggle to have an impact, you know. You can just go vegetarian, or go vegan... that part of it isn't really hard. It's if you want to really dedicate your life to it – I think it's a hard thing to do.

Another theme that came up repeatedly was the transition from thinking of veganism as a *personal choice* to thinking of it as a *social issue*.

ARIELLE: I always say I think being vegetarian or vegan is the most important thing they can do to help animals – I always tell that to my meat-eating friends. I also used to think, oh vegetarianism, that's my personal choice; it's their personal choice if they want to eat meat, too. And I don't think so anymore; I think it's so important.

NATASHA: ... Originally it was an unwillingness to cause harm and so I concentrated on changing my own behavior, which of course is an ongoing process. I'm always thinking, what can I do differently? But then it evolved, I guess starting off in such a hostile environment that I tried to appease my family and my friends by saying, this is just about what I'm doing and I'm not going to try to change you, to coming around to a point where I don't want to just stand by and let other people do it.

Escalation of a sense of moral imperative was typical; in other words, at each step the individual was at first satisfied with the lifestyle changes they had made, but soon came to realize that there was more that they could be doing to help animals.

SHAMUS: ... You go vegetarian and think you've done something really great, or at least I felt really good about myself. I was like, wow, think of all these animals that I'm not going to eat now. Think about how many animals are going to be saved because of this decision I made. And I guess for me there was a period when I started looking around and everybody's still eating meat. I'm thinking, oh my gosh, there's still so much work to do! Which is why I resisted going vegan, I think, because I thought, oh my god, I've already gone vegetarian, haven't I done enough? And then I came to the point where I realized, no, that's not enough. I need to go vegan. And then I guess I realized at some point, well even that's not enough. Even if I'm minimizing what I'm doing... I really need to do a little more than just control my own lifestyle, and try to persuade other people to do the same.

Sometimes, simply being vegan for a certain length of time causes a person to develop more confidence in their views, as the beliefs become more solid and the vegan identity more integrated into the person's core sense of self. During the initial transition period, a person may feel unsure of herself or her views. An increase of self-confidence sometimes parallels the move

from thinking of veganism (or vegetarianism) as a personal choice to thinking of it as a social issue about which it is important to speak out and inform others.

Although the transition from personal to social is not always the result of enhanced confidence or identity-solidification, this is often the case with individuals who would characterize themselves as “shy” before their transformation, such as Trinity below, and her husband, Dan, whose stories were relayed in a previous chapter. Interestingly, her confidence boost came when she made the transition from vegetarian to vegan, perhaps indicating that veganism is more likely to become integrated into a person’s core sense of self (perhaps because it is a more radical departure from mainstream culture than is vegetarianism). So, it seems an enhanced sense of self-confidence, resulting in part from a stabilization and integration of the vegetarian or vegan identity, will factor into a person’s moving beyond the personal level to the social level. Even though a new vegan or vegetarian may internally feel happy about her decision, this does not always translate into feeling comfortable talking to others about this decision, especially for more introverted people.

TRINITY: I was so happy because I felt better physically and I was really, really happy inside because I finally felt like I wasn’t lying to myself anymore. There was no more guilt; all the guilt was gone. I was doing everything that I thought I could possibly do to not harm animals by whatever I was eating. So that was just a great experience and I felt so much better and then the longer I was vegan the more confident I felt about it, because in the beginning...about vegetarianism in general, I was kind of like oh, I don’t want to tell people. I’m embarrassed about it a little bit because I don’t like being different. I was never the kind of person who was very outspoken anyway, and so this was a big deal to me, but once I became vegan then I was like, you know what? This is the right thing to do and I’m not going to be shy about telling people. I’m going to just tell people up front and talk to them about it and talk to them about why it’s a good thing...I don’t have to worry. I don’t have to feel like, oh my god, somebody’s going to think I’m weird or crazy or whatever, because I know I’m not. I know I’m doing the right thing.

Trinity's comments echo the observations made in the discussion of stigma that concluded that last chapter. An important part of becoming an activist and giving one's life to animal rights is the process of not only rejecting the negative labels that could potentially adhere and create a stigmatized identity, but of also creating a positive sense of self and pride in the new identity. The result is the rejection of a deviant self-identity, replaced by a view of the world-as-deviant. This change in perspective results in the feelings of estrangement discussed in the last chapter (which are even more intense when an individual takes the extra step to become an activist), but rather than feeling there is something wrong with themselves, the stigma is deflected outward to society.

Veganism as Involuntary Master Status

Not only can it sometimes be difficult to implement the lifestyle changes associated with veganism, but the reactions of others can make the transition difficult as well. As Ferdinand points out below, this is not a selling point for veganism.

FERDINAND: I would say that as far as social movements go, this is a harder one to be consistent in because animal abuse has infested every aspect of American life. And in order to start weeding it out it takes a lot of education, a lot of relearning things, a lot of un-learning things and willingness to try new things and a willingness to be in uncomfortable situations. You know, there's a lot of self-sacrifice just in making those lifestyle changes. So certainly that's not an incentive for people to get involved... it's not a selling point [laughs]. Oh, forget all your favorite foods, learn to eat different ones, and have all your friends ridicule you...

Many vegans talk about the difficulty of having "normal" conversations with outsiders because the issue of animal rights always seems to come up. Meal times and social gatherings involving food are especially fraught with tension. Many activists believe that it is fruitless to bring up vegetarianism or veganism when meat is present and so try to avoid the subject in these

situations; however, this does not necessarily stop others from bringing it up. This renders attempts at “passing” (Goffman 1963) difficult due to the reactions of others.

TRINITY: My friends, I think most of them have discontinued being my friends because of our vegetarianism, which is so, I don’t know, depressing. I mean I had some really close friends. I kept in touch with all my friends from high school and college and stuff and you know everything you do, getting together, involves food. And everybody felt uncomfortable around me.... I guess. I mean no one ever said that, but they would say things.

NICOLE: And would you be like constantly talking about it, you know? Or would they ask?

TRINITY: No, they would ask. See that’s the thing. Especially in the beginning I was really scared to talk about it, but everybody else made a big deal about it. So then everybody else would be asking me questions, and I think everybody goes through this, where the whole dinner conversation is about it, and not like you’re preaching, but they’re asking you. They’re making you defend yourself.

Even when vegans try to “blend in,” they find that this can be difficult in certain social situations. In the quote below, describing an occasion where she wanted to downplay her veganism, Jill also mentions the derisive PETA-baiting that is typical of the reactions of many outsiders and which were discussed in the last chapter’s section on stigma.

JILL: I guess one place that I do get nervous about is if we go out to a law firm event with [Trevor’s] work, and if we’re with any of the partners, I do get a little self-conscious because Trevor sometimes goes into overkill... one time we were in New York and we were sitting with the partners, and so I just ordered, they had maybe something like chicken and vegetables so I said, oh can I just have the vegetables. And then when the guy came, he came with some sort of vegetarian plate that was like Alfredo pasta or something like that, so I couldn’t eat it. But at the same time I was like, I won’t make a big deal about it. I just won’t eat. I’ll just pick at my food and pretend. Because everyone at the table already knew what I did for a living [work for an animal rights organization] and they’d already been like, oh, you don’t work for PETA, do you? So at that point I was kind of like, okay. It just wasn’t the best forum for me to be

NICOLE: ...you just wanted to be less conspicuous

JILL: Yeah, exactly. And then of course I went to the bathroom and I come back and Trevor has ordered this humongous plate of vegetables and everybody’s heard...it just made me more self-conscious...

Sometimes it is not the behavior of the vegan that is being scrutinized by outsiders but the behavior of outsiders that is being scrutinized by the vegan, especially when the meat-eater asks

the vegan if she is bothered by her decision to order meat, for instance at a restaurant. This puts a vegan who wishes to fit in or avoid confrontation in a difficult position, because she either has to lie and say she does not mind, or she has to admit that she is bothered, which can obviously introduce tension into an otherwise pleasant social occasion. Even though she admits that it does bother her when people eat meat in front of her, Katie prefers to avoid confrontation and usually remains silent about the issue.

KATIE: ...We always get this, where people are like, oh, is it going to bother you if I order the –? ... if I was really honest, I'd say, you know what? It really does bother me, because I just see a dead animal who suffered. But I didn't. I admit it. I didn't have that courage. So I would just sort of be like, you know, make a face like, yeah but, sort of do it in a sort of humorous way ... I feel like I want her to know. I'm not going to go, oh no, no, no, that's totally fine. Eat what you want. It's just MY thing. No, no, feel FREE.

NICOLE: 'I don't care what other people do. It's just my personal position'

KATIE: Oh god, I HATE when you meet the vegetarian who says that! I was like, no, we really are trying to change people's behavior. So I should say, I should be honest. I hate confrontation. I hate it. It makes me uncomfortable.

Activists also sometimes feel that they must “turn off” their feelings in order to navigate normally unproblematic interaction rituals such as meals in order to preserve social relationships.

NICOLE: ...are most of your friends vegetarian and vegan?

SIMONE: No, actually most of them aren't, and it does really bother me... I hate to say this but it's almost like I have to shut it off and just say, I'm vegan and if you ask me I'll explain to you why I am. But it's really hard to have dialogue when there's flesh at the table. It's sort of like I have to shut it off and not pay attention to it because otherwise I wouldn't be able to cope, and I wouldn't be able to have normal social relationships. But yeah, it really does bother me; unfortunately it happens every day and I just deal with it.

LUKE: ...everybody still eats meat in front of me and we'll go out for my birthday and we'll go to a restaurant where everyone will order meat except for me and my brother ... I don't think they realize that it hurts me when they're eating animals... I only see them once every few months so I try my hardest not to make it a huge scene. When I went home this weekend, I went to a picnic and people cooked lobster. And I guess they had enough respect to kill the, boil the lobsters alive before I got there. So it wasn't a big scene. But I definitely registered my displeasure with it. But they know how I feel, and there isn't really much more I feel that I can do about it.

Being around meat-eaters per se does not bother Sam, but he does find that he always feels “out of place” and alienated from people who are not into animal rights.

SAM: ... most difficult would probably be initially there was a certain degree of alienation from friends and family. You know, like I still feel an alienation from people who aren't vegan or into animal rights... It's very hard for me to just sit there and watch all these other people. Although it doesn't make me mad, I just feel very out of place...so I guess that's the hardest part, just not being able to relate to people anymore [laughs] because you know it's like, oh, we're going out to McDonald's.

Some found it exhausting to be around outsiders who not only did not share their beliefs but also always questioned them about their veganism.

BESS: ... You don't realize how much eating is a social thing until you have to talk about how you eat every time you do it... and always, always having to defend myself... it never ends. The new people you meet who don't know anything about it are like, oh, you're not going to eat this? Or last Thanksgiving we had people over and the whole day, from noon until they went home at 9:00, they were bothering me and teasing me and I was just like [sighs], you know, stop. I am the right one. You are the wrong one. You are weird, not me...when it's not happening very much I'm not meeting a lot of new people. This summer I've met so many new people and so I've had to deal with it a lot. And the frequency that it occurs makes me really frustrated. Every new person I'm like, oh, here we go again. For a while I was carrying *Why Vegan?*s in my purse, but then I stopped. I was just so tired of it. I think that right now that is the hardest thing, always coming across people who don't understand and want to give me a hard time about it instead of being like, oh, that's something to think about.

In addition to feeling that they are constantly called upon to defend their beliefs when mingling with meat-eaters, some people mentioned the fact that animal rights always comes up in extra-movement conversations at unexpected times, which makes it difficult to have “normal” conversations.

STAN: ... I was at a Christmas party at my office and the boss's wife was talking to me and my boss gives me the keys to his summer home up in West Virginia... so I was thanking her for the last time we were there and she was telling me about a postcard she received from the neighbors there and it's somebody fishing and she said, 'Oh! I'm so sorry – that offends you doesn't it? I'm really sorry to bring it up.' So you can't have a conversation with people. It's kind of like that you know...

Becoming an Activist

The progression from just being vegan to devoting one's life to animal rights activism can be a major transition when the two events do not happen simultaneously. Some people, like Sherlock below, find that their convictions become stronger the longer they are vegan, even if they are not formally involved with the animal rights movement during that time. This strengthening of conviction, however, can lead them to seek out the movement and sometimes even reassess their life goals. He also touches on the fact that veganism is "constantly an issue" and that it tends to become a master status, whether one wants it to or not.

SHERLOCK: ... I was thinking about law school and I went through this point, the transition where I felt had to determine what I was going to do with the rest of my life...because the longer I was a vegan, the more serious I got and the more convicted I was and it was something, you're reminded of your veganism every time you sit down and eat, and it's constantly there and it's not something like religion that you can just not talk about, or being gay or something like that where it's not constantly an issue...so I was trying to determine if I wanted to go into a line of work that would kind of resonate with my beliefs and I knew law school wouldn't do that at all...

While veganism tends to become a master status, especially when food is involved, the move from the personal realm of veganism to the social realm of activism colonizes an individual's life even more. While veganism is a part of activism, it does not encompass the scope of changes that accompany becoming an activist. Activism is not easily shut off after one leaves the protest; it changes not only what you do but what you think about as well.

FRED: There's more to the personal side of activism than just being vegan. There's learning how to deal with people in a new way. There's a whole lot of stuff. Being an activist really is strange... it can't help but hurt your life a little bit, because you don't just shut it off. You don't just go to a demo and then come home and shut it off. You're still an activist; you're still thinking about things.

Luke's comments below echo those made by Stan and others above about not being able to "turn it off" in conversations. When the locus of action was internal (veganism), the feeling that animal rights could not be turned off applied to the external realm (social occasions, meals,

conversations, etc.). But now, ironically, the turning off that cannot be done is internal (in one's head), as the locus of action becomes external (activism).

LUKE: I think that probably the most difficult thing is just seeing what happens to animals and knowing that it's not going to change over night and knowing that so many billions of people are aware of these issues but just don't care. It's also kind of been hard just because I feel like I kind of got gypped out of a life... animal rights is all I do and I kind of wish that I could just go out and go to a bar on the weekends and just get drunk or go to some club or whatever and not have to worry about the protest the next day, or the campaign that I'm working on, or my friend that's in jail, or whatever. It's like it's always there; there's always so much more to get done than is possible. So I feel kind of ... not mad, but I just feel bitter that I had to be one of the people that was an activist as opposed to just being a normal 22 year old guy.

Luke speaks of his activism almost as if he had no choice in the matter. This characterization of activism as a sort of compulsion or calling over which one has no real control was reflected in the statements of many of my respondents who referred to their activism as a moral obligation and hence not subject to their personal whims. After I ask him if he ever gets burned out or depressed, Pacey, a law student, says that indeed he does, but that it doesn't matter.

PACEY: ...I frequently get depressed and burned out and I guess my motivation is... it doesn't really matter how I'm feeling. Animals are still suffering and people are still abusing and exploiting animals everyday, regardless of what my mental state is... It really doesn't matter how I'm feeling on any particular day.

Moral Obligation

A recurring theme when activists talked about progressing from veganism to activism was this lack of choice. This is ironic because animal rights activism involves a great deal of agency, but this exercise of agency almost disappears in the accounts of activists, buried under the language of obligation. Activism is perceived as a duty, but never as a choice. Changing one's life is not enough because the problem is too urgent. Activism takes over the individual's life – not just their actions, but their thoughts as well. In some cases, the boundaries between personal life and activism disappear.

PARKER: ...this is not a club, it's not like a choice that people have to just join the movement or leave the movement. If you really believe in animal rights, it's a lifestyle that you lead. I mean every single day of my life is an animal rights day. I carry around *Why Vegan?*s with me...last night I saw a table and I put *Why Vegan?*s down and if I see a bulletin board in a restaurant I'll put one up there. It's not really a choice, well, you're going to be active on this day... It's really an obligation. [NICOLE: and it's totally integrated with your lifestyle?] As much as I hate to admit it, it really is my life. I don't do anything else [laughs]. I mean, I go to school. But at least at this point in my life, it's just... it's a moral obligation for me. I have the privilege of freedom and I feel like I have an obligation to use that freedom to advocate on behalf of those who don't have freedom and that's just, it's not a choice, it's an obligation that I feel, internally, and that's the way it is. I just can't envision myself leading some hedonistic life where all I care about is making money and climbing some social ladder. I couldn't care less if I would remain a grassroots activist for the rest of my life and all I do is just keep on doing what I'm doing now, without the school part. But this is, it's my life. It's a lifestyle for me. I don't view it any differently.

What compels activists to continue devoting their lives to the cause of animal rights in the face of the feelings of burnout or depression that must inevitably accompany this commitment? Again, most spoke of a sense of moral obligation, responsibility, or duty as their primary motivation. Sam places a high value on activism in general, no matter what the issue, although he himself has chosen animal rights.

SAM: ...[activism is] an important thing in my life and I think it should be really important for everyone because... what else can we do, you know? There's too many ways we can improve our lives and the lives of others to not be active about something. I don't care what you're active about as long as you're trying to improve the world in some way. I think it's like our moral obligation to do something – to try and do something.

Sam believes it is a moral obligation for people to try to do *something* to improve the world. Amber too feels a sense of obligation that comes specifically with awareness. This theme came up repeatedly throughout my interviews, too, i.e. the idea that once you learn about an injustice, you are morally compelled to do something about it. If you do not know that an injustice exists, then you obviously are not required to act; however, once you are aware of an injustice then you are no longer absolved of responsibility, and

inaction becomes complicity. Other accounts centered on the themes of guilt and selfishness. Amber says she would feel guilty if she were not an activist. Other respondents, too, mentioned non-activism as a form of selfishness.

AMBER: ...I don't think I could live with myself without being an activist [laughs] because I feel really guilty living on this earth and not doing some good for other beings. I think if you're doing that you're just kind of being selfish –not that I condemn anyone for doing it, because not everyone has had the background to inform themselves on the issues and stuff, but since I know about it, I feel like I can't live without at least trying to fix something.

Pacey is also driven by the fact that he feels worse if he is not active; knowing that one is doing something to at least help alleviate a problem tends to mitigate against feelings of depression, and he feels guilty if he has some free time but does not use it to do something animal rights-related. However, unlike Parker above, who perceives no distinction between his personal life and his life as an activist, Pacey feels guilty for not spending enough time with his fiancée (who is vegan but not quite as involved in movement activities as Pacey) and his dog, so he is torn in two directions (three counting law school), between the demands of home and activism. However, like Parker, he characterizes this struggle as stemming from the fact that he feels an “obligation,” not a desire, to be active for animals.

PACEY: ...I think it's always kind of there... if I spend all my time doing animal rights stuff, I feel guilty because I feel like I'm neglecting my dog, [Cocoa], and I feel like I'm neglecting [Delia] because I'm not spending as much time with her or them as I should be. And then when I'm spending time with them, I feel guilty because I'm not doing as much for animals as I possibly could be doing because I'm obviously, you know, had some free time that I decided to do something else with besides work on animal issues. So it's always a struggle... I think it is more of an obligation than a desire, if that makes sense. You know, it's more something that I'm supposed to, well, something that I have to do... I wouldn't be able to do anything, I don't think, not involving animal rights because I feel like the work that people are doing in the animal rights movement is so important and so vital to, you know, at the very least 10 billion animals a year, that I feel, I mean it does feel like an obligation... and I think animals are particularly helpless...I think that's probably what draws me to it, or where the obligation comes from.

When I ask him if he has any extra-movement interests, hobbies, or leisure activities, he characterizes them as a chance to escape temporarily from the demands of animal rights activism.

PACEY: Bicycles, skateboarding, which I haven't done in years, thanks to animal rights, and music, guitar, movies. Actually, anything – anything that gets my mind off animal rights, I like to do... Drinking. I mean seriously, I mean anything. I think that's why I like movies so much because it's a complete fantasy world. Even if the movie's horrible, I can just kind of get involved in it and I don't think about real world issues for two hours at a time. And I love that; that's great.

New Associations/ Forming Internal Relationships

Those who initially had been trying to fit in by downplaying their veganism, but felt that they were continually being put on the defensive by their significant others anyway, typically progressed to choosing to avoid old ties.

NICOLE: Are most of your friends in the movement now would you say?
 TRINITY: Yeah, I don't have any other friends [laughs]. Either they're in the movement or they're involved with animals in some way... I could very occasionally see a few of my friends that I grew up with, but it's always kind of strained... It's just such an important part of my life now. I have a hard time being around people that don't understand it – I mean as far as being close friends with them... I can occasionally go out for a drink with my friends like that, but whenever food comes into it, it's like I don't like being around it.

Most people found it more difficult to be around meat-eaters as time goes by and the vegan identity becomes more solid;⁶¹ along with the increased confidence in one's beliefs mentioned above, there seemed to be a corresponding increase in one's level of discomfort with being around meat and meat-eaters. These escalating feelings of discomfort, along with feeling put on the defensive when dining with meat-eaters, leads an individual to start forming new associations with those who are involved with the movement.

⁶¹ See appendix for another instance of this.

KATIE: It's funny. As I get older, I am much more bothered by having that around me and having it sit across from me at the restaurant table ...I lived with a boyfriend for a few months who wasn't vegetarian and meat stuff was everywhere, and now I don't think I could do that at all.

SHERLOCK: ... If somebody is cooking meat in a kitchen that I have to walk through, it's funny – it's like I'm practicing Lamaze techniques before I walk through ... I'll hold my breath... it just disgusts me... and I think I'm getting less tolerant. The longer I'm a vegan, the less tolerant I get. And I don't think I could date somebody who's not a vegetarian and that was never an issue before... but now it is.

The formation of new internal ties applies to the romantic realm as well. Part of becoming an animal rights activist and taking on the vegan identity as a master status is deciding only to date other vegetarians or vegans. The individual usually arrives at this decision after unsuccessful attempts to date meat-eaters after their transition to a pro-animal rights consciousness. Typically the idea that one can only date other vegetarians or vegans does not come right away but only after holding the new beliefs for some time; as with being bothered by seeing other people eat meat, and growing more confident in one's beliefs, there is an escalation effect over time in this area as well.

JAMISON: ... I'm never going back to eating meat, and I do think of it as one of the things that really defines me as a person, and defines who I'm comfortable with at this point and who I'm not. I mean, your family is your family you can't do anything about it. But, for instance, I can't see that I would ever live with someone who wasn't at least a vegetarian. I couldn't have a serious romantic relationship with someone who ate meat. I just couldn't conceive of it. It's kind of like an anti-abortionist going out with an abortion doctor [laughs]. It just can't happen at this point.

Sophia broke up with her long-term boyfriend because of their growing ideological differences. Even though he was socially active with other progressive causes, he was not interested in animal issues or in going vegetarian. After attempting to persuade him to go vegetarian, Sophia found she could not live with his continuing indifference to animal issues. Although he agreed with her that what was done to animals

in the name of food production was “horrible,” he just did not want to change his diet. Note how she characterizes his motives as “selfish,” a trait that has been used by other respondents to describe eating meat or in Amber’s case above, to describe how she would feel if she were not active. Sophia describes her unsuccessful attempts to persuade her boyfriend to change his behavior:

SOPHIA: ... he was a real socially active guy, he was into gay rights and all kinds of other issues, but not animals, and that was a real, real problem for me and it eventually was the undoing of my relationship because I had, after a long time, convinced him to watch *The Animals Film* and he watched it. He then called me afterwards and said, Sophia, that was horrible; that was absolutely horrible. And I thought, he’s going to do it. And he said, but it’s just not me; I’m not going to do it. And I said, that’s it. Can’t do it. I loved him... he was my first real love and we’d been together at that point on and off for 8 years and it was very, very traumatic for me to let go of him, but I could not do it. What it comes down to is selfishness, and I was not going to be with somebody who – what he said was, you’re right, this is awful, we shouldn’t be doing this, it’s horrible, but I’m going to close my eyes and do it anyway because I like it, is basically what he said. And I could not accept that. I was like, the bottom line is, I’m not going to be with someone who is that selfish...

NICOLE: So you broke up with him

SOPHIA: Yes, and... after him I said, that’s it. No more men who are not, forget about vegetarian, I won’t date anyone who isn’t vegan... So at that point I made a conscious decision I was not dating anybody who wasn’t vegan... I wanted somebody who was as far along as I was. I didn’t want to have to drag somebody with me.

The decision to date only other vegans is not always easy to put into practice, given the relatively small percentage (around 1%) of the population that is actually vegan. After finding it difficult to meet suitable vegan men on her own, Sophia eventually subscribed to a vegetarian dating service, which is how she met the man to whom she is currently married.

In addition to her dating problems, Sophia also found working in the world of dog and cat shelters to be an unnerving experience, due to the perceived lack of moral consistency among her co-workers regarding animals. After working with autistic children for a while after college, Sophia found that she missed being around animals and so got a job at a dog shelter. This

proved to be a frustrating experience, however, as her expectation that she would be working with like-minded people was not fulfilled. She had looked forward to working with “animal people” when she changed jobs, but once there she realized that most of them engaged in a form of compartmentalization regarding animals that she simply could not understand. This is illustrative of the difference between those who only want to help cats and dogs and those who embrace a more radical animal rights perspective and want to help all animals.

SOPHIA: So I went to [a dog shelter], got a job there as an adoption counselor and basic kennel attendant, did that for about six months and was becoming so disgusted by the fact that I was one of two vegetarians on that staff and that was frustrating the hell out of me... The other person wasn't even a vegan but at least she was vegetarian, and I was a freak there. I was as much a freak there as I was at the autistic school. I was like, people, wake up! Everybody loved the dogs, but it was just this bizarre warped thing about dogs and cats are animals and the rest of these are food. What the hell? And I'd bring in PETA magazines ... and nobody wanted to hear it. And they treated me like as much as of a freak as I had been in a place that had nothing to do with animals. And I was so frustrated by that... I was so repulsed by the whole thing. I was like, I have to get out of here. And I have to be with like-minded people... So I was getting more and more into it.

Contrast the feelings of frustration and alienation from co-workers that she experienced at her shelter job with the positive feelings and social reinforcement she experienced as a new intern at PETA, where she felt “at home:”

SOPHIA: ... the first day I walked into PETA – talk about heaven! ... I came in at the same time as another intern... and we're both standing in the middle of the lobby and just looking at the lobby and looking at each other... posters everywhere and Jodie running by, 'Jodie, rodeo call on line 5!' ... It was just so amazing and there were other interns, there were like six of us and they were all so nice and all about my age and we hung out together. I invited them all over for dinner and I got to be around people who knew, and I didn't have to explain myself... oh, it was unbelievable...I felt so at home. And we went into that first staff meeting...and there were 90 other vegans in this room. I'm sitting there looking around at all these people, normal looking people, every age, every ethnicity, everything, and I'm thinking, I cannot believe this. It just felt so good. I was like, I am home ...

Sophia now owns a vegan retail store with her husband, Paul, the man she met through the vegan dating service. At each step, Sophia gradually disengaged from her old ties and supplemented them by forming new internal associations until virtually all of her meaningful relationships were with like-minded others involved in the animal rights movement. At each step, she was also one hundred percent sure of her beliefs and of the correctness of her actions.

Although most respondents felt nothing but complete certainty regarding the righteousness of their moral position, there was at least one person who felt the transition from the personal level of veganism to the more social level of activism to be difficult and a cause for serious reflection. Although he believed wholeheartedly in an animal liberationist philosophy, Sherlock was hesitant to embrace “animal rights activist” as his master status because he was tacitly aware of the multiplicity of truths inherent in the postmodern condition (although he did not word it exactly this way). He therefore questioned the propriety of forcing his beliefs on others because, at the end of the day, all belief systems are perhaps equally vulnerable social constructions. At this important juncture in his life when Sherlock was making the transition from vegan to activist, he was trying to decide whether to pursue his original plan to attend law school or to abandon this plan in favor of pursuing a career at an animal rights organization and devote his life the cause in which he had come to believe so strongly. This was not an easy choice for him to make, and he did much soul searching before coming to the decision to not attend law school but to instead go work for PETA. This decision constituted a turning point as important as those that caused him to go vegetarian and later vegan.

SHERLOCK: The most difficult thing is that transition that I’ve just recently gone through, that transition from being passively active to being actively active and the entire shift in mentality, and that’s been really tough. **[NICOLE:** In what way?] You know, because for some reason I compare it to religious crispies, Jesus crispies, people who are religiously fanatic. And I’ve met so many different missionaries and things like that, especially when I was living abroad, trying to

convert people in Southeast Asia and Taiwan, and I spent six hours on the bus with this guy from Indiana who was so into his belief and so doped up on it and spent his entire life doing that and sometimes I occasionally feel that, Sherlock, this is just a moral fabrication that I'm going through that is equal to religion, which is a belief in god and a belief system and it's just something that's put together in your mind, and there are these certain rules that you come up with that you need to meet to be morally correct and righteous and to live a good, happy, healthy life and so it's identical, well not identical but very similar, to religion – and I think god freaks are crazy. And the idea of completely dedicating myself to something that can, I don't know, pollute the way I think and the way I filter reality – I don't want to become somebody who when you're having a conversation with them the look in their eyes is distant and just muted because you know they're just so jazzed up with faith and their belief that they're not really on the ground living life and dealing with others. They're not living, it's more of a distraction, and so that scares me. Like with veganism, a little bit, because if I become that...exposed and involved with the movement I run that risk of becoming somebody like, his name was Alex, on the bus in Taiwan, and I just look at him and I think, I totally disagree with everything that your moral philosophy is premised on, and he's committed his entire life to that and there are how many billion people on the world and most of them have some kind of religious belief. And for me to say that they're all wrong – I know my position is equally as vulnerable, and it's just something I came up with. I believe it wholeheartedly, but it's still a belief system. So for me to completely dedicate myself to it, I'm a little hesitant. And that's why it was a big deal for me when I didn't go to law school because it was a very salient shift away from being an animal rights sympathizer and living my life in accordance with my own principles, but being a lawyer and raising vegan kids...

Ubiquity of Animal Exploitation

One of the “occupational hazards” of giving one’s life to animal rights activism is suddenly seeing animal abuse in unexpected places; new activists begin to see animal exploitation virtually everywhere, where before they saw none (Shapiro 1994). In my interviews, a heightened awareness of the ubiquity of animal abuse, and seeing animal exploitation “everywhere,” was one of the most often cited difficulties of becoming involved in the movement.

This hyper-awareness of animal suffering, which others either do not see, do not want to hear about, or dismiss as insignificant, alienates the activist even further from the dominant

culture; it is as if she now has X-ray vision which allows her to see through the cheery veneer of the dominant ideology regarding the normalcy of current human-animal relations and to see instead a horrifying specter of brutal domination, callous exploitation, senseless violence, and unnecessary suffering in just about every social institution. This awareness can be overwhelming for a new activist, and is made all the more maddening because nobody else seems to see what he or she now sees so clearly. For people who have been in the movement longer, it becomes an accepted fact of life that normal relationships (outside the movement) are difficult and that doing “normal” things (like going out to dinner with non-vegans) takes on a whole new meaning.

HANNAH: Having to live through the awareness of what happens, that I hate... believe me, selfishly, I would love to be one of those people that buys things and who makes a nice house and goes home and has like a little happy life [laughing]

NICOLE: But you can't?

HANNAH: No, you can't... you can't have normal relationships. You can't go out to dinner without seeing death around. You just can't do things that normal people do, and you feel like an oddball – a good oddball, but an oddball.

Such routine activities as driving down the road and watching people eat can be a source of profound sadness:

MOE: ...It breaks my heart to see a deer on the side of the road dead. It breaks my heart to see somebody eating a hamburger.

HANNAH: About twice a year... I'll cry all night and wake up the next day and I'll be fine again...one time what kicked it off is I was driving back from Pennsylvania and there was a deer on top of somebody's car and they were driving...and the blood was coming down the side and ...her head was just kind of flopping and... I looked at the car and you just saw these callous jerks in the front seat driving along like they had smugly done something and here this beautiful animal on the top of their car with her life force flowing out of her and I just went home and cried and cried and cried and cried. And just that one thing, you know that one snapshot of something that happened, it triggered like every animal who we were fighting for... How can this be? And how can people be so cruel? And then by the next morning, I was fine.

Like the inability to “turn it off” in conversations discussed earlier, another characteristic of animal rights activism and a reason that it becomes a master status is the perception that one can never take a “vacation” from it. In other words, it cannot be compartmentalized like some other forms of activism.

HANNAH: ... say you're working on death penalty issues or whatever. You can walk away from it...you can go out to dinner with your family. If you're an animal rights activist and you go out to dinner with your family, either you have that fight about what's on that table and you say, you know, look, family, I fight for these victims every single day and you're about to eat them in front of me... you either have that fight or you close your eyes to the victims that you try so desperately to save everyday. But you could go to dinner if you were working on any other social movement and you could have a pleasant time. And you don't have to confront that. Or you ignore your own values and you don't feel good about that either...you can never walk away from it. You can't ever, ever, ever, ever, ever –you can't take a vacation without seeing animal abuse. I mean there's nowhere on this planet you can go to get away from it.

Many respondents mentioned the awareness that accompanies the change in consciousness as being the most difficult aspect of becoming involved with animal rights. This overwhelming sense of awareness makes it impossible to *not* see animal suffering in certain places where it used to be invisible. This sense of ubiquity is characteristic of the transition to activism.

SHAMUS: ...I guess the most difficult thing about it is being so aware all the time, about what's going on. I mean, ignorance is bliss, as they say. And just having to always think about it and not being able to just put it out of your mind...

LARA: The most difficult thing is just knowing. Just that consciousness of every time I see somebody I care about eating the meat. All I can envision is that animal hung upside down suffering... I can always see visually in my mind's eye what that animal went through to get to that point on the plate. Or on the back of the woman who wants to wear fur, or the product that was tested. I always, always see them in some kind of suffering state. That's the worst thing, just knowing.

The burden of knowledge and sense of ubiquity of animal suffering can make an activist feel like a perpetual “killjoy,” which is another reason that activists are more likely to make new associations with people in the movement who see the world in a similar way; these like-minded

others will be more favorable looking-glasses for the activist's self. Katie's comments below highlight the difficulties that activists sometimes face when attempting to maintain external relationships after becoming an animal rights activist. Part of this struggle involves trying to balance the new beliefs with activities that once seemed innocuous, but which now are irrevocably tainted by awareness

KATIE: The most difficult thing is not anything with strategy or on a practical level. I'd say it's the burden you carry through life; you're always the killjoy. You know, your friends want to go out and celebrate, they want to order lobster, they want to go to the rodeo, they want to go to the circus, they want to go to Sea World, they want to get a puppy. You know, we know everything...they want to buy a lipstick, it's not cruelty-free. Or people give you things like, oh, it's your birthday; I made you these cupcakes, or whatever. So that's the hardest thing is always knowing you're going to rain on the parade.

Adaptation and the Cutting of Old Ties

All of these issues lead to the formation of new ties within the movement. These internal relationships are easier and more comfortable; they also militate against feelings of estrangement from the dominant culture, which is represented in some ways by old relationships. To rectify the feelings of alienation documented in the last chapter (reactions of others) some activists choose to voluntarily remove themselves to varying degrees from certain aspects of the meat-eating culture.

NICK: ... I find that I'm just not really interested in people who aren't in the movement. I just don't have time ... and food is an incredibly important social prop...it's central to most of our social experiences and I just can't be bothered...outside the movement I just don't want to deal with people on a personal level.

SOPHIA: ...I've gotten to the point where I've seen so much behind the scenes suffering, I've seen so much pain that it is just hard for me to function being around people who are still contributing to it and so I find it very, very difficult to even eat at the same table with someone or become close to somebody in any real way. Even if they're maybe open to it but just haven't gotten there yet. And I know that's not a good thing but it's a fact of my current emotional state. So, yes

almost all of my friends, at least all my close friends, are vegans or at least vegetarians...

The most extreme form of adaptation is to sever virtually all former ties and to only associate with people in the movement. However, unlike with the cult members studied by Lofland and Stark, this break, when it does happen, occurs only after some time has passed and in response to some of the problems fitting in mentioned in this chapter, rather than at the beginning of the process. Conversion drives the breaking of old connections, rather than vice versa. Waking up one day to find that all of your close relationships are with other activists and sympathizers is part of the process of giving one's life to animal rights.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS:

MORALITY CONSTRUCTION, BOUNDARIES, AND THE ANIMAL-OTHER

Introduction

...many young children are totally oblivious to the conventional moral distinction between humans and all other living creatures...To my son, saving tigers, gorillas, and other endangered species is still as pressing as saving human lives... he clearly has not learned yet how to curb his moral attention in a socially appropriate manner (Zerubavel 1997, p. 47).

In their study of vegetarianism, Beardsworth and Keil (1992) identified four broad types of motivations used by vegetarians⁶² to explain their dietary choices: moral, health-related, gustatory, and ecological. Among their respondents, “moral motives, in various guises, appeared to be the primary ones” (p. 269). Although it is not the only motivation for people to pursue vegetarian diets or vegan lifestyles, in this study I was concerned only with those who made these choices for ethical reasons. In previous chapters, I analyzed the “conversion careers” (Beardsworth and Keil, p. 266) of vegan animal rights activists to discern the role of emotion and cognition in the development of an alternative sense of morality.

In order to further understand these conversion experiences, I looked at certain predisposing schemas, or problem-solving perspectives, used by individuals before they became activists, which gave them a propensity to notice and be concerned with suffering victimization, and protecting the weak. Similar predisposing schemas may be reasonably expected to lead a

⁶² Although my study has dealt specifically with vegan animal rights activists, much of the relevant research on “conversion” processes with regard to animals and morality has been done on vegetarians.

person to work for children or in fields like social work or victim advocacy. The main difference among my respondents was their inclusion of “animal” in the category of victim. While is not unusual for people to expand their mental schema of victimhood to include dogs and cats, whose dominant social construction in American culture is surrogate family member, expansion to include farm animals and others assigned to the cultural category of utilitarian object is less usual and more in conflict with dominant cultural norms.

After analyzing these predispositions, which along with a concern for suffering and victimization often included a fondness for animals, I analyzed the role of socialization in shaping our attitudes toward animals and what it means to go through a de-socialization and re-socialization process, whereby an alternative ideology regarding animals is internalized and acted upon. The key moments in what is sometimes a drawn-out process of re-socialization are the turning points that result in an individual going vegetarian and vegan, and eventually deciding to become an activist and devote his or her life to animal rights.

A key contribution of this study is the idea that turning points can be more complex and lengthy than the terminology of a “point” would suggest. Socialization does not usually unravel quite so quickly; these turning “points,” which serve to essentially spin a person out of the orbit of the dominant culture and into an alternate reality, sometimes take years. Not only does traditional socialization need to be undone, and taken-for-granted knowledge need be unlearned, but also new learning, in the form of re-socialization, must take place. These processes sometimes take time, and they rarely happen “overnight.”

Although these turning points could either be abrupt or gradual, they always included salient identity transformations that could not help but affect the individual’s social relationships, especially with regard to becoming a vegan and an activist. New vegans often found their old

relationships becoming strained, although the amount of tension varied with the supportiveness of significant others at the time of the conversion. While vegan activists increasingly began to feel alienated from their old social networks, they simultaneously started to form new associations with likeminded others who shared their post-conversion worldview. The end result for many was a situation in which most of their close relationships were with sympathetic others who were also vegan, if not activists themselves. Throughout the period of conversion and re-socialization, significant identity changes occurred as a result of the development of a new sense of morality.

Identity, Socialization, and Social Movements

What are the implications of this study for social movement theory? In Chapter 1, I posed questions about recruitment to the animal rights movement and explored the idea that recruitment in this case was at least a two-fold process, given the existence of the equally significant lifestyle and political levels of activism. My research supports the idea that recruitment in some cases must be re-conceptualized as a process that sometimes occurs in stages rather than as a single event. Although I originally posed two separate levels of recruitment to the animal rights movement, lifestyle-consciousness (represented by conversion to veganism) and political-social (represented by collective action with a social movement organization), there are really three levels of recruitment that need to be considered if vegetarianism is included as a separate step occurring before veganism, which was the case with my sample. Although it is necessary to pass through all three levels in becoming an activist, it is not sufficient. In other words, when one becomes a vegetarian, it is not unlikely that they will stop there and never progress any further toward veganism or activism. However, a vegan activist had to pass

through the first stage of going vegetarian, so this should be considered a level of recruitment as well. Although some people passed so quickly from vegetarianism to veganism that it hardly seemed to constitute a separate step in the conversion and recruitment process, other individuals experienced a gap of several years between going vegetarian and becoming vegan. Even among those who had a quick transition to veganism from vegetarianism, none went vegan without first going vegetarian (the fastest transition in my sample was one month between the two steps, but a longer gap was more typical).

Again, this suggests that the concept of recruitment should be expanded to encompass a gradual process that can occur in stages, not only of growing involvement, but also of growing awareness and ideological conversion. This is why conversion becomes an important concept to use in understanding recruitment to animal rights activism. Recruitment tends to be associated with political movements and conversion with religious or lifestyle movements, but as we have seen, in the case of animal rights activism, both levels are equally significant. Therefore I think it useful to refer to the process of becoming an animal rights activist as *conversion-recruitment*. Recruitment can be conceptualized as the time when a person becomes active with a social movement organization, while conversion is what happens in a person's head before this point; in other words, conversion is the consciousness-shift that accompanies the lifestyle stage of activism (vegetarianism and veganism). In the case of the animal rights movement these two concepts are so intimately intertwined that it makes sense to think of them as one compound concept. Conversion is a necessary prerequisite for recruitment to take place, and recruitment is the end result of what we have seen can be a lengthy conversion process for animal rights activists.

This study also demonstrates that conversion is essentially a process of re-socialization, which cannot be understood without examining normal socialization with regard to food practices and animal consumption more carefully. The process of conversion and re-socialization is a direct response to the regular socialization program, which, for animal rights activists, is ultimately rejected after what is often a slow process of unraveling. This is not to say that the slow unraveling is inevitable. Many activists had conversion experiences that were consistent with the concept of a “moral shock” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995), or an epiphany experience that abruptly changed their lives. Not only adults and adolescents experienced moral shocks. A major finding of this study was the very young ages at which many activists first initiated attempts to act upon impulses consistent with an animal rights ideology, although they did not know the words for it yet. Many children experienced moral shocks that resulted in their attempting to resist meat and become vegetarian, but for many of these children it would be years before they could act upon these impulses due to the heavy hand of socialization, which earnestly tried, usually successfully, to steer them back onto the path of meat eating.

While moral shocks are an important component of the conversion-recruitment process, they are insufficient to explain the process of becoming an animal rights activist. In zero cases did a single moral shock cases cause an individual to go from being a meat eater to becoming an animal rights activist. While in the abrupt cases a single moral shock might be enough to move a person from one stage to another (i.e. from vegetarian to vegan, or from meat eater to vegetarian), the more typical pattern is for an individual to experience a series of moral shock-type incidents along not only the path that leads to ultimately becoming an animal rights activist, but also between the different stages of conversion-recruitment. Hence, while these moral

shocks act as important catalysts for action and change, they alone are not usually sufficient to induce a meaningful turning point.

Regarding social movement theory, a central finding of this project is that turning points and identity transformations are at the heart of conversion-recruitment to the animal rights movement. Because food socialization is so important to the process of becoming a competent social actor, significant identity change must occur when a person decides to resist this socialization and choose a different path. Without sufficient support in the dominant culture for a vegan lifestyle, the individual is often compelled to seek out like-minded others, a compulsion which also tends to lead them to the movement itself and related vegan and animal-friendly subcultures. When socialization is resisted, something must take its place, and the re-socialization that takes place is usually within the confines of a movement subculture, although it can also occur with a single like-minded other.

It is here that the importance of social networks to the process of becoming an animal rights activist comes to into play. As we have seen, social networks seem to be less important for the individual making a transition to vegetarianism than they are for a person considering veganism. This is not surprising given that vegetarianism currently enjoys significantly more support in the dominant culture than does veganism. However, in addition to being important for a person who decides to become vegan, social networks also become important at the later stage of sustaining commitment, and it is here that we see vegans deciding to date only other vegans, or finding that their important social relationships have narrowed to be mostly with like-minded others who share their transformed outlook on human-animal relations. New social networks help to sustain the vegan activist's new identity in the face of what is sometimes strong resistance from the dominant culture and significant others with whom the activists had a

relationship before the identity shift. Therefore, social networks are important both for recruiting and sustaining activists.

Another implication for social movement theory is that greater attention should be paid to socialization and identity when analyzing recruitment to social movements that also have a significant conversion and lifestyle component, and which stand in direct opposition to the dominant culture, such as the animal rights movement. Finally, as we push the process of conversion-recruitment back in biographical time, which I did not initially set out to do but which quickly became apparent in my interviews was necessary, we find that many of these activists were already highly predisposed to a favorable reception of the animal rights message. Of course, there may be countless others who possessed the childhood predispositions that I discussed in Chapter 4 but who never even became vegetarians later in life, let alone animal rights activists; my data can only speak to the experiences of those who completed the conversion-recruitment process.

Nevertheless, these childhood stories and memories indicate something present long before contact with the formal social movement. In that the animal rights movement is a manifestation of ideas that are already germinating below the surface of the dominant culture, perhaps as emergent cultural norms (Williams 1973), it makes sense that we might begin to see manifestations of this emergent sensibility regarding animals in the younger members of society. What is equally striking, however, is how strong the forces of socialization and the dominant culture can be in squashing this impulse and channeling it back toward appropriate objects of empathy (in American culture, these are animals defined as pets). Therefore, it may be that many children with this sensitive predisposition grow up to be dog and cat lovers, but not vegetarians. What makes the eventual vegan animal rights activist, as we have seen, is an

accumulation of pivotal events, thought patterns, and emotional experiences that combine in such a way as to compel them to resist the dominant cultural pattern of socialization. While we have seen that early attempts to resist socialization are themselves met with resistance by representatives of the dominant culture, who act as agents of social control, we have not explored why it is that these attempts at rebellion by children are so quickly extinguished. I will examine this issue more closely in the next section.

The Role of Socialization

Why do parents and other agents of socialization often discourage the impulse toward vegetarianism when it arises in children? Part of the reason lies in the fact that adults have internalized the dominant cultural meanings. Hence, threats to this meaning system will be perceived, even if unconsciously, as potential assaults on the self, which has been constructed, in part, using material appropriated through internalization of the most popular version of objective reality. Also, because meat eating is skillfully woven into the tapestry of everyday life, a member of the household who wishes to deviate from this practice may be seen as annoying due to the potential disruption of daily routines and resultant inconvenience wrought by this implicit threat to the comforting patterns that are the micro-expressions of the structured social order.

Besides the inconvenience factor, internalization is probably the most salient reason why a child will encounter resistance from significant others qua cultural gatekeepers. Berger and Luckmann (1966) write:

The individual... is not born a member of society. He is born with a predisposition toward sociality, and he becomes a member of society... The beginning point of this process is internalization... internalization in this general sense is the basis, first, for an understanding of one's fellowmen and, second, for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful and social reality (pp. 129-30).

Internalization, accomplished through successful socialization, virtually guarantees that meat eating will not be perceived as an arbitrary dietary preference, but rather as necessary and inevitable; conversely vegetarianism and veganism may be perceived as threats to the dominant ideology. As a result of the regular socialization program, meat eating becomes reified and as such is perceived as a necessity rather than something drawn into the social world by human beings themselves.

Reification is... the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness... as soon as an objective social world is established, the possibility of reification is never far away. The objectivity of the social world means that it confronts man as something outside of himself. The decisive question is whether he still retains the awareness that, however objectivated, the social world was made by men – and therefore can be remade by them. In other words, reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a[n]...inert facticity... Human meanings are no longer understood as world-producing but as being, in their turn, products of the ‘nature of things’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 89).

However, reification is neither permanent nor impermeable; this apprehension of dominant cultural meanings as part of the “nature of things” is always vulnerable to threats from newer members of society, the young:

The new generation posits a problem of compliance, and its socialization into the institutional order requires the establishment of sanctions. The institutions must and do claim authority over the individual, independently of the subjective meanings he may attach to any particular situation. The priority of the institutional definition of situations must be consistently maintained over individual temptations at redefinition. The children must be ‘taught to behave’ and, once taught, must be ‘kept in line.’ So, of course, must the adults. The more conduct is institutionalized, the more predictable and thus more controlled it becomes. If socialization into the institutions has been effective, outright coercive measures can be applied economically and selectively. Most of the time, conduct will occur ‘spontaneously’ within the institutionally set channels. The more, on the level of meaning, conduct is taken for granted, the more possible alternatives

to the institutional “programs” will recede, and the more predictable and controlled conduct will be (p. 62).

It is understandable that older people will have more at stake with regard to changing patterns of behavior that have been internalized. For while it is true that adults too must be kept in line, following internalization, adults can be expected to willingly conform to social norms and expectations without the application of the more coercive measures that are sometimes needed to keep the under-socialized child in line. Regarding the socialization of the child, Berger and Luckmann postulate a dialectic between nature and society (p. 180):

Biological factors limit the range of social possibilities open to any individual, but the social world, which is pre-existent to each individual, in its turn imposes limits on what is biologically possible to the organism. The dialectic manifests itself in the *mutual* limitation of organism and society (p. 181).

They use the example of men bearing children to illustrate the biological limits to what is socially possible. Conversely, because life expectancy varies with social location, Berger and Luckmann use the example of longevity to illustrate society’s limitation of the organism’s biological possibilities. They also use the examples of sexuality and, pertinent to the discussion here, nutrition to demonstrate the social channeling of biological drives, which appear to be quite malleable over the spectrum of human culture and history.

While both sexuality and nutrition are grounded in biological drives, these drives are extremely plastic in the human animal. Man is driven by his biological constitution to seek sexual release and nourishment. But his biological constitution does not tell him *where* he should seek sexual release and *what* he should eat... Sexuality and nutrition are channeled in specific directions socially rather than biologically, a channeling that not only imposes limits upon these activities, but directly affects organismic functioning. Thus the successfully socialized individual is incapable of functioning sexually with the “wrong” sexual object and may vomit when confronted with the “wrong” food. As we have seen, the social channeling of activity is the essence of institutionalization, which is the foundation for the social construction of reality (pp. 181-2).

If children were permitted (by significant others or other agents of social control) the full range of expression of their biological drives, then the social order would be threatened, and if they were allowed to continue in this fashion, the social order would collapse. It is not only biological drives which are channeled and contained during socialization; intuitive or emotional impulses too must be contained. Hence we can categorize the child who resists eating meat as a troublemaker in the metaphoric classroom of socialization, just like the recalcitrant child who resists bringing his biological impulses under control. Although resistance to meat may not be a biological impulse, whatever its origin, this resistance must be smoothed over and reshaped and eventually exorcised from the child if normal socialization is to be successful.

It may seem unlikely that a child would refuse to submit to “civilized” control of his or her biological drives but, according to Berger and Luckmann, far from being rare, it is a normal part of the socializing process. All children resist to a certain extent, but are typically brought into line with cultural expectations. Berger and Luckmann state that resistance is a common manifestation of the dialectic between nature and society mentioned above:

This is, of course, most obvious in the case of primary socialization. The difficulties in first socializing a child cannot be accounted for simply in terms of intrinsic problems of learning. The little animal fights back, so to speak. The fact that it is fated to lose the battle does not eliminate its animality’s resistance to the ever more penetrating influence of the social world. For example, the child resists the imposition of the temporal structure of society on the natural temporality of his organism. He resists eating and sleeping by the clock rather than by the biologically given demands of the organism (p. 182).

And he also sometimes resists eating animals, although this is not a “biologically given demand.” The impulse toward vegetarianism that is observed in some children is not necessarily a manifestation of this nature and society dialectic, nor is it the only way in which children resist socialization; however, it does provide an interesting illustration of resistance to socialization into the dominant culture. Part of this resistance stems from competing social constructions:

As social constructions, the meanings of animals seem to be fixed and enduring. The tenacious persistence and widespread acceptance of these meanings suggest that they are cultural phenomena – part of the normative order of the society in which they occur. Much like other cultural phenomena – love of country, motherhood, or the success ethic – the meanings of animals are passed from generation to generation... The result is that children will come to view what constitutes a wild or tame animal as hard and fast ‘fact’ whose meaning is a given – external to human culture and social process. Yet we know sociologically that ‘facts’ can vary because in different places and times people will assign them different meanings (Arluke and Sanders 1996, p. 10).

Even within the same culture, we may find different meanings competing for ideological relevance. The main impetus behind youthful resistance to eating meat is that the child in most cases has come to define animals as other-than-food, either as a result of intuition or the accumulation of competing socializing influences, some of which encourage him or her to identify and empathize with animals rather than to view them as utilitarian objects. These competing socializing influences, which impede the smooth infusion of the dominant culture into individual consciousness and identity, include the presence of pets in the home⁶³ who are defined as adjunct family members⁶⁴ and children’s culture in the form of games, toys, movies, and

⁶³ Pets are more likely to be found in homes with children. “Families with children are more likely than any other household to have pets, despite popular stereotypes that depict pets as surrogate children for childless couples or company for lonely widows” (Melson 2001, p. 32).

⁶⁴ The process of turning a dog into an adjunct family member “begins when a dog is taken into the home... Naming the new pet begins its transformation from a generic puppy into a specific member of the family. The name affords the dog an identity and makes it easier to talk about and direct activities toward it as though it were part of the family... After becoming engrossed in their dogs, most owners come to the realization that they are treating their pets as genuine family members” (Arluke and Sanders 1996, pp. 10-11). However, this definition of the situation is vulnerable to being broken by the more powerful member of the relationship and because of this power differential, the identity of dogs as surrogate members of the family is fragile at best. Hence, the bond can be severed in such a way that would never happen to “real” family members: “Acquiring a status in the family is contingent on family members’ willingness to meet the pet’s needs. Pets that do not obey ‘house rules’ or that are considered ‘too difficult’ may be given away or euthanized” (p. 11). Although “adjunct family member” is the dominant social construction of dogs in American homes, it is still just that: a social construction. This social construction is sustained only through the benevolence of the powerful, which, given the current legal status of pets as property, is always optional.

books, which are overwhelmingly populated with animal characters. Children live in a world full of animals – both real and imaginary (Melson 2001).

Children’s movies often feature talking animal protagonists that engender sympathy in the audience. This elicitation of a sympathetic response is especially problematic for the dominant ideology when the protagonist is a farm animal, as in the case of the popular movies *Babe* and *Babe: Pig in the City*, which have been criticized for confusing children about the proper place of pigs in society, i.e. as a source of bacon, pork chops, and barbeque (Pearson 1998). While these movies have been denounced by some because they encourage identification with farm animals and hence create cognitive dissonance by sending children contradictory messages about whether pigs are “friends” or “food”⁶⁵, the animal rights group PETA, in an effort to capitalize on its phenomenal box-office success, incorporated the movie *Babe* into a vegetarian campaign shortly after its release featuring the slogan “Please Don’t Eat Babe for Breakfast.”

Obviously, both critics and supporters perceive the mixed messages contained in children’s movies like *Babe*, *Chicken Run*, and most recently *Finding Nemo*, all of which feature animals that we regularly eat as the sympathetic protagonists (indeed, in some cases the protagonist’s struggle is to avoid being eaten, which does not fit the masking tendencies of much

⁶⁵ A critic writes:

The quandary of disconnected meaning – “see how cute the pigs is? Now stick him on your fork” – arises full force with *Babe: Pig in the City*. Like the 1995 original, the sequel puts one of our most popular groceries squarely at the center of a heroic fable, in which children identify with a plucky, kind-hearted creature who hopes to surmount his fated destiny as a slice of baloney... Hollywood... is increasingly crossing over from symbolic to literal terrain, with onerous implications for parents. Acts of anthropomorphism that foster sentimentality, drawing children to the box office with puppies and fawns and lion cubs, are reconcilable to the degree that we don’t eat pets and wild animals... How, exactly, a child can emerge from *Babe: Pig in the City* to eat a ham sandwich without blowing a gasket is beyond my guessing” (Pearson 1998).

cinematic fare for children when it comes to the realities of the dominant culture); the only difference is whether this ambivalence is seen as a positive or negative cultural development. Critics like Pearson do not think that anthropomorphism in children's movies is negative per se – as long as it does not extend to farm animals. Because most Americans eat neither wild animals nor companion animals, their representation in art or popular culture is not viewed as a threat to dominant cultural practices. She rightly recognizes the potential challenge to the dominant ideology inherent in cultural products which promote identification with, and hence sympathy for, farm animals who are destined to be killed and eaten. Although hunters have also criticized the movie *Bambi* for single-handedly turning a generation against hunting (Cartmill 1993), the ideological threat inherent in *Bambi* is less significant because far fewer Americans engage in the practice of hunting than in meat eating. In 2001, just six percent of Americans hunted,⁶⁶ compared with the approximately 98 percent who eat meat at least occasionally.⁶⁷

Regarding hunters' criticism of the movie *Bambi* and "the Bambi syndrome" it has allegedly created, Cartmill writes, "Many hunting writers seem to think that if *Bambi* and other Disney products could somehow be suppressed, opposition to hunting would evaporate. The prevailing view in the hunting community today was expressed in a 1973 speech by Warren Page, formerly Shooting Editor of *Field and Stream*:

The serious hunter of the U.S. [is] under strong and conspired and deliberate and planned attack and the causes of our ridicule are brutally simple... For one thing, in this country we have undergone an entire generation of brainwashing. Not only our kids but our wives, our brothers, our mothers, our cousins, our brothers-in-law have for 25 years been subjected to constant film and TV

⁶⁶ *Source*: The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation has been conducted about every five years since 1955. It provides information on the number of participants in fishing, hunting, and wildlife watching (observing, photographing, and feeding wildlife), and the amount of time and money spent on these activities.

<http://fa.r9.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>

⁶⁷ *Source*: A 2000 National Zogby Poll sponsored by the Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG). <http://www.vrg.org/nutshell/poll2000.htm>

presentations of the Disney myth. In the Wonderful World of Disney animals are cuter than people. Wolves spend their time playing like kittens. The lion and the lamb love one another and only man is the bastard in the black hat.... whose chief aim is the spilling of Bambi's blood. Now this is the Bambi Syndrome. The Disney films may not have started out that way, but once it became clear that sentimentality and outright anthropomorphism would make money, that's the way the films went... They deliberately misinform viewers of basic biological facts (quoted in Cartmill, p. 180).

Children's realistic animal stories, too, stimulate empathy with animals through the use of a number of literary conventions typical of the genre; for example, children's realistic animal stories often tell the story from the animal's point of view, which encourages the reader to imaginatively assume the perspective of, and hence sympathize with, the animal (Johnson 1996). These elements of American children's culture may be seen as embodying counter-definitions of reality regarding the human-animal relationship, whereby the animal is transformed metaphorically from an object to a subject.

These counter-definitions are also facilitated by the increasing presence of companion animals in American homes. In 2004, according to an annual survey conducted by the APPMA, a not-for-profit pet industry organization, 62 percent of U.S. households (or 64.2 million households) had pets, as compared with 1988, the first year the survey was conducted, when 56 percent of U.S. households owned a pet. Dogs or cats are found in at least 1 out of 3 households; 31 percent of U.S. households have at least one dog, and 27 percent have one or more cats. Multi-pet households are common as well; 46 percent of all households own more than one pet.⁶⁸

Along with the increase in pet ownership there has occurred a shift in the primary motivation for keeping pets. Throughout much of history, pet keeping was associated with social status, but today it is more common for people to cite companionship and affection as the main

⁶⁸ *Source:* The American Pet Products Manufacturers' Association (APPMA) *2003/2004 National Pet Owners' Survey*. The survey reports that the number of U.S. pet-owning households has increased by more than 10 million since 1992. http://www.appma.org/press/press_releases/2003/nr_04-14-03.asp

reasons that they have a companion animal (Sanders 1999). This also signifies a shift in the primary definition of (companion) animals from decorative or utilitarian objects to subjects-in-interaction with whom one is thought to share a genuine relationship and an emotional bond. This definition, although primary, is not the only definition that exists for dogs and cats in the culture.

In addition to the mythic (or dominant) perspective (Arluke and Sanders 1996, pp. 107-8) of companion animals as surrogate friends and family members, there exists a competing definition of dogs and cats as disposable objects. Evidence of this alternative construction can be seen in the high rate of euthanasia of healthy dogs and cats each year due to owner relinquishment and a lack of suitable homes for surrendered, adoptable animals.⁶⁹ The definition of the pet as a disposable object is also illustrated in cases where veterinarians are asked to euthanize healthy dogs and cats for the simple convenience of their owners⁷⁰ (Sanders 1999). Competing definitions also include the dog as racing machine, as in the context of a dog track

⁶⁹ Of the approximately 6-8 million cats and dogs entering U.S. shelters each year, 3-4 million, or 50 percent, are euthanized (The Humane Society of the United States, <http://www.hsus.org>).

⁷⁰ Sanders found, in his study of a veterinary clinic, that the control exercised by the client regarding the euthanasia decision created the most troublesome ethical dilemma for the doctor. The amount of moral stress experienced by the veterinarian was related to the perceived legitimacy of the rationale offered by the client in support of euthanasia. Reasons ranged from the most legitimate, i.e. those that revolved around the animal's quality of life, to the least legitimate, i.e. simple convenience.

From the vet's perspective, the least justifiable reason for euthanizing an animal – especially one that is healthy – is for the simple convenience of the owner. Clients who employ this category of rationales are judged to be morally suspect. They are perceived as defining the animal as a piece of property rather than as a sentient being with feelings and interests: 'The ones I really can't stand are the clients who come in here and they want to euth the animal for all kinds of ridiculous reasons – they are moving to a smaller apartment, or they just got a new couch and the cat doesn't match the color, or the dog has grown up and isn't as cute anymore. It's like it's this piece of trash that they just want to throw away.' As the level of perceived legitimacy of the client's reason for requesting euthanasia declines, the veterinarian's ethical dilemma... becomes more pronounced (p. 77).

(Arluke and Sanders 1996), and the dog as symbolic projection of masculinity, whose killing would be justified at the first sign of being a “cur” (defined as displaying cowardice or fear in the pit or losing a fight), as in the context of dog fighting subcultures (Evans, et. al. 1998).

However, the dominant social construction of dogs and cats in the U.S. today is as a “companion” and “adjunct family member” (Arluke and Sanders 1996). As noted by Pearson, the critic of *Babe*, this social construction is unproblematic to the extent that we do not eat dogs and cats. The trouble starts when the definition of animals as companions or subjects-in-interaction jumps categories and begins to be applied to animals in a new category: the utility or tool category, i.e. farm animals and laboratory animals. This constitutes a confusion of cultural classifications and threatens the social, and moral, order.

Ambivalence in how humans regard animals in Western societies is nothing new; indeed, according to Arluke and Sanders (1996), when we look at these attitudes, one of the most glaring consistencies is inconsistency (p. 4):

Inconsistent behavior toward animals is omnipresent in Western society... From the sociologist’s perspective, what is most interesting is not to identify such contradictions or reveal the assumptions underlying them – a task more ably served by philosophers – but to understand better what it is about modern society that makes it possible for people to shower animals with affection and to maltreat or kill them, to regard them as sentient creatures and also as utilitarian objects. How is it that people seem able to balance such significantly conflicting values and live comfortably with such contradiction? How is it that instead of examining these conflicts, so few people are even aware of them?

We take this ordinary ambivalence toward animals as a sign that social forces must be working successfully, so successfully that in modern societies many people do not experience these contradictions as a problem...(p. 5)

There are psychological factors, enabled by structural arrangements, which allow the average adult to *not* experience these contradictions as a problem. Plous (1993) notes that while psychologists have begun to focus on animal rights issues, they have neglected the larger question of how people think generally about their use of animals; “today, the APA journals have

yet to publish a single full-length study on the topic” (p. 12). However, after reviewing the existing research on attitudes toward the use of animals, two general themes were identified:

Most survey respondents report (1) that they are concerned about the well-being of animals, and (2) that they support the selective use of animals (particularly for food and research). These results agree closely with public opinion polls published in newspapers and magazines (Plous 1993, p. 14).

Plous then discusses several psychological factors that allow people to reconcile the conflict between these two themes including: (1) Structural variables that dissociate consumptive practices from the infliction of harm; (2) Mechanisms that reduce personal conflict when dissociation is threatened; (3) Ingroup – outgroup biases; and (4) Factors relating to perceived similarity of animals and humans.

Regarding (1) above, a number of psychological factors serve to dissociate consumptive practices from the infliction of pain or suffering. Although dissociation may sometimes be intentional, it is more often the result of structural variables, such as the language surrounding animal use. For example, animals are commonly referred to as “crops” instead of live animals and consumptive practices are dissociated from the infliction of pain by using euphemisms for killing such as “harvesting,” “bagging,” “thinning,” “managing,” and “controlling.” Animals themselves are also described impersonally as “game,” “trophies,” “surpluses,” and “resources.” Plous writes, “Because inanimate objects are incapable of suffering, this depersonalization serves to dissociate consumption from the infliction of pain (p. 16).” Animals are also rendered inanimate in laboratories, where they have been referred to as “living test tubes,” in the American legal system where they are considered “chattel” or “personal property,” and in language relating to food consumption, where we often use a different name for the consumed animal than for the live animal:

Cows are “beef,” calves are “veal,” pigs are “pork,” and so on. Even when the same word is used to indicate the consumed animal and live animal – as in chicken, turkey, shrimp, or lobster – the consumed animal is usually indicated by a singular noun without an article, whereas the live animal is represented by a plural noun of a singular noun with an article. People do not eat chickens; they eat *chicken*. The fact that plants are not generally given dual names suggests that such distinctions are more than useful conventions (p. 18 [emphasis in original]).

A second component of dissociation is the physical appearance of animal products. Since many Americans find it difficult to eat animal products if the consumed animal too closely resembles the live animal, body parts that are associated with life or personality (such as the eyes, face, or brain) are rarely eaten, and most animals are marketed without their heads or feet. According to Plous, the importance of this form of dissociation is widely recognized within the animal industries:

For example, *Meat Trades Journal* (“Meat,” 1977, May 5, p. 12) warned that ‘to acquaint a customer with the knowledge that the lamb chops she has just purchased were part of the anatomy of one of those pretty little creatures we see gamboling in the fields at springtime is probably the surest way of turning her into a vegetarian’ (quoted in Plous 1993, p. 18).

Along with trying to prevent the consumer from conjuring the image of a live animal, but rather to encourage him or her to think of meat as coming from an inanimate object (note the term “livestock”), the physical remoteness of animal industries also reinforces the dissociation between consumptive practices and the infliction of pain:

Intensive farming operations, slaughterhouses, meat-packing stations, animal laboratories, and ‘fur farms’ are typically remote or inaccessible. Farm animals also receive far less media attention than do other types of animals, and virtually all of the popular magazines and educational television shows about animals focus on wildlife rather than farm animals or intensive farming. Partly as a result of this remoteness, public awareness concerning animal products is often minimal (p. 20).

The final aspect of dissociation discussed by Plous, and most relevant to the discussion at hand, is socialization. The ways people are socialized to think about animals mitigates against

the potential discomfort that may arise as a result of conflict between the two recurring themes in the attitudinal surveys mentioned above, i.e. support for both the well-being of animals and for the use of animals for food and research. Although most adults have developed ways to deal with potential dissonance regarding inconsistency in our attitudes toward animals, children, being not yet fully socialized and having less developed defenses, may be more vulnerable to this discomfort, especially that which accompanies the inevitable realization that meat comes from animals. However, socialization works to minimize potential conflict in a number of ways, which help to preserve the smooth functioning of the overall system and facilitate the integration of the individual into it.

From childhood, Americans are taught both to love and to consume animals. Conflict between these practices is avoided in part by de-emphasizing consumed animals as objects of affection. For example, of the annual average of 837 different stuffed animals sold between 1987 and 1989 by the second largest manufacturer in the United States (the only leading company able to provide statistics), an average of only 3% were cows, pigs, or chickens. Bears, bunnies, dogs, and cats accounted for 492 (or 59%) of the variation. Similarly, one of the largest retail toy catalogs in the United States recently offered 34 different stuffed animals, none of which was a cow, pig, or chicken (Plous 1993, p. 21).

This helps to explain in part why the animalization of children's culture noted above, and the resultant tendency for children to empathize with animals, does not more often cause problems in terms of socialization into the dominant culture. For, despite occasional disruptions, most children do in fact grow up to accept and internalize eating meat and other animal products as normal, even desirable, practices.

Besides de-emphasizing consumed animals as objects of affection (a tacit norm violated by movies like *Babe*, *Chicken Run*, and *Finding Nemo*), potential conflict is warded off during socialization in additional ways:

Conflict is also minimized by socializing children to believe that meat is necessary for adequate nutrition and that meat comes from happy farm animals

who live in idyllic settings. Many school children take field trips to visit old-fashioned farms, but few ever visit modern, large-scale production farms... Yet in the United States, almost all chickens and the majority of hogs are raised in intensive farming operations that rely on total confinement (p. 21).

According to an interview study of school children conducted by Plous and his colleague, Melissa Doty, not only are children left with the impression that farm animals lead untroubled and happy lives because of the information that is omitted when they are taught about food and farming, but many children are also unaware of the uses to which farm animals are put. Their findings suggest that even through age 10 or 11, children frequently fail to link common animal products with live animals (pp. 24-5). So not only are facts deliberately left out,⁷¹ but when they ask questions, children are often misled and given a false impression of what life is like for animals in today's modern "factory" farms, where they are treated more like machines than living creatures.⁷²

In addition to micro processes of socialization that encourage both dissociation and identification in different contexts, and macro processes like consolidation and intensification in

⁷¹ Although this has not always been the case and is today not the case in smaller communities that rely on traditional methods of farming for food, one could say there is something of a silence surrounding the raising and killing of animals for food in modern, urban societies like the United States. This silence is, of course, part of dissociation, but is also invoked, figuratively speaking, when dissociation is threatened. When not avoided altogether the subject is sometimes presented in ludicrous fashion, as in advertising campaigns that feature smiling anthropomorphized cartoon animals who actually *want* to be eaten (Plous 1993, p. 27), which conveys the implicit message that by exploiting and killing them, we are doing animals a favor.

⁷² See Singer's (2002) *Animal Liberation* (revised edition); Mason's (1990) *Animal Factories* (revised edition); Scully's (2002) *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals and the Call to Mercy*; and Finsen and Finsen's (1994) *The Animal Rights Movement in America: From Compassion to Respect* for detailed descriptions of sweeping changes in farming practices since World War II that have led to increasing intensive confinement for animals. For the results of several recent investigations inside the U.S. meat industry that have uncovered inhumane conditions in slaughterhouses due in part to increasing production speeds which have resulted in, among other atrocities, animals being skinned and butchered while still alive, see Eisnitz's (1997) *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry*. On how these industry changes have negatively affected slaughterhouse workers, see also Eisnitz (1997) and Schlosser's (2002) *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*.

the agriculture industry, other macro changes such as demographic shifts in the form of urbanization and industrialization, scientific advances in the study of animal behavior and consciousness, and the inclusion of animals into theories of morality and ethics in the field of academic philosophy have facilitated the emergence of competing definitions of the human-animal relationship. Along with these specific social changes are general historical circumstances, such as increasing societal complexity, which affect the emergence of competing definitions of reality regarding the proper place of animals in human society. Berger and Luckmann write, “Once there is a more complex distribution of knowledge in a society, unsuccessful socialization may be the result of different significant others mediating different objective realities to the individual. Put differently, unsuccessful socialization may be the result of heterogeneity in the socializing personnel” (p. 167). They state that even minimal distribution of knowledge promotes a proliferation of different versions of the common reality and suggest that deviance (or “abnormality” as they put it) “becomes a biographical possibility if a certain competition exists between reality-definitions, raising the possibility of choosing between them” (p. 168). This helps to explain why vegetarianism, veganism, and animal rights are issues now but were not 300 years ago.

However, although there may be competing definitions of reality, including the “biographical possibility” of becoming a vegetarian or vegan, this choice constitutes a path that is still considered by many to be deviant or abnormal. Although the number of vegetarians and vegans has increased over the last decade, they still comprise a small proportion of the overall population. In a 2003 Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) Harris Interactive survey, 2.8 percent of those surveyed said they never eat meat, poultry, or fish/seafood, and 1.8 percent of this group said they never eat meat, poultry, fish/seafood, dairy products, eggs, or honey (vegan). In 1994

and 1997, the VRG asked the same question in a Roper Poll. The number of vegetarians then was about one percent. Their report states, “According to this poll, the people most likely to never eat meat, poultry, or fish are those living on both coasts, residents of large cities, and women working outside the home. Interestingly, the split between male and female vegans is about equal, while twice as many women are vegetarian as men. About six percent of 18-29 year olds said they never eat meat, poultry, or fish.”⁷³

One may be misled by the seemingly sudden appearance of an abundance of vegetarian-friendly products in mainstream grocery stores, e.g. soymilk, nondairy ice cream, tofu, veggie burgers, and meatless hot dogs, to believe that “everyone is going vegetarian.”⁷⁴ However, while the ease of obtaining vegetarian and vegan-friendly products such as these, which were previously found only in health or specialty food stores, is welcome by vegetarians and vegans, the industries are responding to wider changes in consumer behavior, such as the fact that more people are becoming aware of the health risks associated with animal products; therefore more consumers are cutting back on meat and dairy products for health reasons (the legions of Atkins Diet devotees notwithstanding) but not necessarily going vegetarian. Those who seek out these products out of moral concern for animals are still a much smaller segment of the population.

We may agree, following Berger and Luckmann, that unsuccessful socialization as it occurs in children may be the result of heterogeneity in social influences – in other words, with different socializing agents mediating different objective realities, children are receiving contradictory messages and hence are not being socialized into one way of thinking about animals – but can we say that the term “unsuccessful socialization” also applies to adults who reject meat? Berger and Luckmann write:

⁷³ *Source:* <http://www.vrg.org/journal/vj2003issue3/vj2003issue3poll.htm>.

⁷⁴ A student in my SOCI 3350 (Animals and Society) class made this observation.

By 'successful socialization' we mean the establishment of a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality (as well as identity, of course). Conversely, 'unsuccessful socialization' is to be understood in terms of asymmetry between objective and subjective reality. As we have seen, totally successful socialization is anthropologically impossible. Totally unsuccessful socialization is, at the very least, extremely rare, limited to cases of individuals with whom even minimal socialization fails because of extreme organic pathology. Our analysis must, therefore, be concerned with gradations on a continuum whose extreme poles are empirically unavailable (pp. 163-4).

So, too, we can say that successful socialization regarding human-animal relations exists on a continuum. While the super-socialized person may never question human supremacy over animals or the institution of meat eating and in fact may embrace the dominant ideology, the under-socialized will abstain from consuming animal products altogether and will reject the dominant ideology and replace it with a new alternative ideology. There are also many people between these two extremes. For example, some people reject eating meat out of concern for animals or vague intuitions that is "wrong," but do not supplant the dominant ideology with an entirely new philosophy. For this reason, these people will be less concerned about consistency and are less likely to adopt a vegan diet and more likely to remain just vegetarians. Then there are people who eat meat but occasionally have misgivings, whether articulated or not, about the practice (or, if not the morality of meat eating itself, then the institution of factory farming as it exists in modern industrial societies). Others refrain from beef but eat chicken, while others reject all meat but do eat fish. These different orientations, however, point to the existence of an alternate meaning system pushing against the walls of the dominant reality, which, especially with this push from without, is also and always vulnerable to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions.

What is "unsuccessful socialization" in the context of human-animal relations? With regard to Berger and Luckmann's idea that successful socialization implies symmetry between

objective and subjective reality, this statement is problematic. Which objective reality? Whose objective reality? This seems inconsistent with their argument that with greater societal complexity comes multiple realities. Is it not the case that a person can be under-socialized into the dominant objective reality, yet be equally as socialized into a new identity and belief system, or, as they put it, “plausibility structure”?

The unsuccessfully socialized individual himself is socially predefined as a profiled type – the cripple, the bastard, the idiot, and so on. Consequently, whatever contrary self-identifications may at times arise in his own consciousness lack any plausibility structure that would transform them into something more than ephemeral fantasies.

Incipient counter-definitions of reality and identity are present as soon as any such individuals congregate in socially durable groups. This triggers a process of change that will introduce a more complex distribution of knowledge. A counter-reality may now begin to be objectivated in the marginal groups of the unsuccessfully socialized. At this point, of course, the group will initiate its own socialization processes. For example, lepers and the offspring of lepers may be stigmatized in a society... As long as such individuals, even if they number more than a handful, do not form a counter-community of their own, both their objective and subjective identities will be predefined in accordance with the community’s institutional program for them... The situation begins to change when there is a leper colony sufficiently large and durable to serve as a plausibility structure for counter-definitions of reality... the individuals prevented from fully internalizing the reality of the community may now be socialized into the counter-reality of the lepers’ colony; that is, unsuccessful socialization into one social world may be accompanied by successful socialization into another (pp. 165-6).

There are substantial differences between lepers and vegans, the most obvious of which is that “vegan” is a voluntary status whereas “leper” is an ascribed status. However the larger point that society has the power to stigmatize those who do not “fit” and that members of stigmatized groups will have difficulty creating new plausibility structures and counter-definitions of reality in isolation is well taken. It is related to attribution and the question of internalization versus externalization of blame, i.e. whether the individual sees herself as having the problem (internalizing stigma) or externalizes and sees society as being problematic. These points are

also related to social movement formation and underscore the power of groups – as opposed to individuals – to redefine situations and transform personal troubles into social issues (Mills 1959 [1976]). This is not to say that a person cannot create an alternative version of reality in her own mind, but it will be significantly stronger if others also share that vision. Asch's (1956) experiments on social pressure and perception are instructive here as well, especially the finding that when subjects had even one other person agree with them, this significantly changed their willingness to not conform to the group. As his results showed, it is much more difficult to be a minority of one than to be part of a minority of two. Asch concluded that it is very difficult to maintain that you see something when no one else does. The importance of other people who share the same version of reality is especially salient for vegans, as was seen in the preceding chapters.

Briefly discussed earlier, an important distinction must be made between children, on the one hand, and adults, on the other, resisting socialization. Much of this discussion has focused on children's resistance to meat eating, hypothesized as being a result, in part, of competing socializing influences in their cultural environment. However, as Berger and Luckmann point out, adults, too, need to be kept in line; it is not only children who resist the dominant socialization program. For adults the dynamics are different, as they can exercise agency not available to children. And for adults who undergo re-socialization, there exists, *ipso facto*, something – a body of knowledge, internalized (or semi-internalized) beliefs, values and norms, etc. – that needs to be un-done, whereas for children who are still in the throes of primary socialization and may more accurately be described as pre-socialized, resistance takes a different form as they are not attempting to unravel prior socialization but rather are resisting it in the first instance, before internalization takes place.

Although I have probably used phrases such as “socialized completely,” I have only done this as shorthand for comparing the experience of children with that of adults. Of course, socialization does not end with childhood; socialization is an ongoing process that continues over the life course. Transformations that occur in adulthood are also part of the socializing process, from the less radical changes that accompany secondary socialization (typically used by sociologists to refer to the learning of specific roles associated with adulthood for which primary socialization has not prepared one fully, e.g. becoming an employee, spouse, or parent) to the more radical transformation that accompanies re-socialization. As previously discussed, Berger and Luckmann use the term “alternation” to refer to such radical transformations:

To talk about transformation...involves a discussion of different degrees of modification. We will concentrate here on the extreme case, in which there is a near-total transformation; that is, in which the individual ‘switches worlds’... Such transformations we will call alternations (pp. 156-7).

Although the transformation that accompanies becoming an animal rights activist has many things in common with the process of alternation described by Berger and Luckmann, it also differs in significant ways, as we saw in Chapter 6. However, animal rights activists do “switch worlds” in a way that can be considered a near-total transformation, and while we have considered the role of socialization in thwarting or facilitating the conversion-recruitment process, we must also take into account the dynamics of constructing an alternate sense of morality that accompanies this process.

The Moral Self of the Animal Rights Activist

Crucial to the conversion-recruitment process is the development of a new “moral self” (Schwalbe 1991). Drawing upon Mead’s social psychology and ethical theory, Schwalbe

illuminates the link between the moral self and social structure, and argues for the inclusion of morality in the sphere of sociological concerns:

[Mead] conceived of moral development in terms of ‘enlarging the self’ by learning how others perceive, interpret, and respond to the world – in other words, by improving role-taking abilities...Because of its centrality to Mead’s thought, the self is necessarily central to this approach... a Meadian view of moral action, with the self as its focal point, can help us see better the social embeddedness of individuals as moral actors. A larger purpose of this is to recover moral action as a subject for sociological analysis and to show its relevance for what are usually considered more macrosociological issues, such as the reproduction of social structure (pp. 281-2).

Thus, the self must be taken into account when analyzing moral action from a sociological perspective. In the case of conversion to an animal rights perspective – and indeed in the case of all “before and after” conversion experiences – the construction of a new self-identity is central. To replace what is left behind, certain elements of a new self must emerge. This new identity is at odds with the dominant culture, normative patterns of consumption, and social norms regarding food, morality, and the proper place of animals in human culture.

The existence of alternative moralities highlights the fact that cultural attitudes toward animals are social constructions rather than fixed meanings, and as such are subject to challenge and change (Arluke and Sanders 1996). The contested meaning of animals has been exacerbated as two conflicting trends have increased. On the one hand, pets are increasingly occupying an ostensibly elevated status as honorary family members and substitute persons. On the other hand, the number of animals who are killed for food and other consumer products has increased exponentially, as the conditions in which they are kept have worsened. As companion animals have been increasingly humanized and treated as “more than” animals, farmed animals have been stripped of their animality and recast as things, our relations with them devoid of sentimental concern. Both pigs and dogs are obviously animals; however membership in the

socially sub-constructed category “companion” or “commodity” has serious consequences for the individual members of these species.

While the intensity of this disjuncture may have increased since the drastic changes in farming methods after World War II (which were discussed in Chapter 1) on the one hand (Finsen and Finsen 1994), and the growing popularity of pets as companions⁷⁵ and providers of affection on the other (Sanders 1999),⁷⁶ the unequal treatment of animals in the human moral universe is itself nothing new. According to Arluke and Sanders (1996), ambivalence has always characterized human treatment of animals, and our modern society is no different in this respect.

They write:

Indeed, our society is shot through with conflicts running across all groups and circumstances. It is true, of course, that more people than ever before suffer conflicts over their use of animals. More people than ever before feel that it matters what we do to animals. And more people than ever before are committed to an idea of “humaneness” that sees suffering as wrong. Yet alongside these recent concerns are [practices] that uphold this ambivalence and make it normal (p. 187).

As a result of this deep ambivalence, it can be said that our culture is afflicted by “moral schizophrenia” regarding animals (Francione 2000). Our moral attitudes about animals are schizophrenic, according to Francione, because “there is a profound disparity between what we

⁷⁵ As evidence of the growing perception of pets as family members and companions rather than objects to be dominated are symbolic gestures like the campaign, spearheaded by national animal rights group In Defense of Animals (IDA), to change the terminology in city codes from “owner” to “guardian.” This campaign has met with some success, as several cities have implemented the language change in their animal ordinances, including San Francisco and Boulder, Colorado. It should be noted, however, that as long as the law still considers animals to be the property of their owners, the language has no legal bearing. However, Elliot Katz, a veterinarian and president of IDA, hopes the change will be more than symbolic and will be part of a significant change in how people see their dogs and cats (Irvine 2004).

⁷⁶ Also, the philosophical underpinnings of animal usage have met with serious challenges during the postwar years, most strikingly from modern evolutionary theory in biology and the rejection of dualistic thinking in philosophy, which posited that the differences between humans and all other animals were differences in kind rather than differences in degree (Finsen and Finsen 1994).

say we believe about animals and how we actually treat them. On one hand, we claim to take animal interests seriously... On the other hand, our actual treatment stands in stark contrast to our proclamations about our regard for their moral status” (pp. xix- xx). Recent studies have examined the ways in which people, especially those who work directly with animals, are able to resolve and accept this ambivalence and inconsistency enough to allow them to function in their day-to-day lives with minimal cognitive discomfort (Plous 1993; Phillips 1994; Arluke and Sanders 1996; Frommer and Arluke 1999; Serpell 1986).

How do people form their moral attitudes, and what is the relationship of these attitudes to the self? During the course of normal socialization, people internalize social prescriptions about the human-animal relationship that are fraught with inconsistency and contradiction. Indeed, an important component of the socialization process is the appropriate channeling of empathy; the boundary-work that accompanies such channeling is a major source of moral inconsistency regarding animals. As discussed in the chapter on predispositions, in terms of empathy socialization, it is not uncommon for young children to balk at eating meat when they learn of its source. It is less common, however, for parents to indulge the child’s preference by allowing him or her to forgo the meat. The meat-eating habit, formed early in life as a result of socialization into the dominant culture’s foodways, is a product of social control that is administered in the usual ways: through parents, peers, and social institutions like schools and the media. The centrality of food to social interaction and cultural rituals cannot be overstated, and the assimilation by children into the dominant food culture is routine and usually unproblematic.

To the extent that one’s values and beliefs are in harmony with the dominant culture (or a viable subculture), the core moral self should remain stable. It is when a crisis occurs that people

tend to experience life-altering transformations in their identity, which are often accompanied by “turning points” (Strauss 1959). The process of conversion to a vegan animal rights perspective is often a series of such turning points, which were analyzed in Chapter 5. At the end of the process a new moral self has emerged. This conversion process was also examined in Chapter 5.

In terms of the actual conversion careers of animal rights activists, despite the particulars of individual life histories, patterns emerged. Beardsworth and Keil (1992) identified two main ways in which the process unfolds for vegetarians: a relatively gradual process of change or a more abrupt one:

... The first type appears to involve a relatively gradual process of change, as the individual’s ideas evolve and vague dislikes and misgivings (in some cases reaching back into childhood) take shape and become more pressing... In several instances, moving out of the family home meant that the individual could break with the foodways imposed by parents, and make the move toward vegetarianism they may have aspired to for some time.

However, in the case of the second type of conversion the change was clearly a much more abrupt one, and frequently triggered by a ‘conversion experience’ which respondents could usually recall in considerable detail. Such experiences were commonly associated with distress or disgust, and could lead to a sudden change in eating patterns... Particularly significant here is the way in which meat is recognised, emotionally as well as rationally, as part of a once living creature and hence reconceptualized as ‘flesh’ (pp. 266-7).

These two “types” of conversion careers – characterized by slow versus abrupt change – were evident in my respondents’ stories as well. The fact that recruitment is often a gradual process, punctuated by turning points and mini-conversion experiences, is a feature of animal rights activism that I discussed in Chapter 5. There were certain specific factors that influenced people during their conversion careers. Drawing on Lofland and Stark (1965), I divided these influential factors into two main categories: *predisposing conditions* and *situational contingencies*. The factors within these categories were as follows: empathic or sensitive child (predisposing), strong affinity for animals (predisposing), meeting a vegetarian or vegan (situational), subcultural affiliation (situational), reading a book or seeing a video (situational) ,

and specific experiences (situational). Similarly, Amato and Partridge (1989) identified five “initial influences” in their study of vegetarians. These initial influences were people, books and other literature, specific experiences, organizations, and films. Their categories are similar to those that I have listed as situational contingencies; these authors did not discuss predispositions.

In telling the story of their growing awareness and eventual involvement with animal rights, my respondents touched on one or more of these themes; the predisposing factors provided a backdrop to the situational contingencies, at least one of which all the respondents experienced. Many times, these situational factors constituted turning points. Sometimes they were one in a series of “mini” turning points. But with each variation in specific conversion narratives, the stories were driven by emotional and cognitive dynamics. As discussed in Chapter 3, when activists reconstructed their conversion careers they offered accounts that were in some cases laden with emotion; at other times, they emphasized the rational thought processes that caused them to change their minds about animals.⁷⁷ Sometimes both types of accounts were used by the same person, but at different points in the conversion-recruitment process.

Emotions and Social Movements

Despite the fact that emotion and cognition were juxtaposed in Chapter 3 as a way to analyze the vocabularies of motive and accounts used to describe pivotal turning points during the conversion careers of animal rights activists, these two ways of apperception are perhaps more similar than classic dichotomies would suggest. However, because of the long and dubious history of emotions in sociological theories of social movement theory – first privileged but

⁷⁷ I do not wish to suggest that “emotion” and “cognition” are easily separable categories. Feelings and thoughts are often intimately related. However, the justifications that each type of account represents are of interest here, and for this reason I separate them into ideal types with subcategories corresponding to themes that emerged in the interviews.

pathological, as in collective behavior traditions, then ignored, as in resource mobilization theories (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001) – an investigation of emotion by itself is warranted.

Increasingly, sociologists who study social movements have begun to incorporate emotions into theories of recruitment, participation, and collective identity. Although they are all related, feelings are just as important as cognitions and social networks in motivating people to participate in social movements. Especially in movements that require some sort of conversion experience, emotions may be particularly important as catalysts to further thought and action. Although most of the activists in my study recognized the importance of using rational arguments to convince others, they themselves seemed to be more motivated, at least initially, by their emotions. Elsewhere, studies have looked at the role of shame and guilt as motivators (Scheff 1988, Groves 1997).⁷⁸ Further research into the nature and application of empathy, sympathy, compassion and other “moral” emotions would help shed light on the eternal question of why people participate in social movements.

Besides taking seriously the role of emotions in motivating people to participate in social movements, studies linking micro-level analyses of emotions to macro structures would be fruitful. On the shaping of emotional experience, analyses of historical and cross-cultural variability in the experience of particular emotions would be helpful, as would research into the changes in emotion culture caused by large-scale institutional shifts that cause changes in emotion culture (Thoits 1989, p. 334, p. 336). For instance, large-scale changes in agriculture and patterns of urbanization are two important historical trends that have changed the human-animal relationship in myriad ways. This is well-worn territory. But the ways in which these

⁷⁸ See Thoits (1989) for an overview of theories and research in the sociology of emotions.

larger structural changes have helped shape emotion culture and emotional experience are less well documented.

Also, micro processes like emotional socialization obviously influence and reproduce macro structures through conformity to the dominant culture. When dissenting “emotional deviants” are able to translate their personal trouble or experience into a social issue (Mills 1959), they can mobilize and attempt to affect social change. Sometimes these attempts are successful and sometimes they are not. Either way, the role of emotions in social movements includes not only the experience of activists’ deviant emotions (if not the emotions themselves, then the intensity – the heightened sensitivity – or the object – animals – can be seen as inappropriate) but also attempts by activists to resist stigmatization by redefining these emotions as normal and the dominant emotional culture as pathological. In the case of animal rights activism, the struggle over the definition of the situation includes condemnation of the emotional compartmentalization and cognitive disassociation that is practiced during routine, everyday acts involving animal use, which reproduce the social structure, including institutionalized animal exploitation. Because emotional socialization is usually successful, these practices have been internalized and are thus acted upon unconsciously without reflection most of the time. Animal activists, to the extent that they accept and are not ashamed of their emotions (and connecting with likeminded others may be crucial in this regard), are in effect striving to substitute their definition of emotional normalcy for that which is currently dominant. Social movements rely on creating emotion where there was none, to make people “see” injustice and to get fired up enough to do something about it.

It is in this “seeing” that emotion and cognition fuse. Perception is the elemental link between feeling and thinking. Emotions depend upon perceptions, particularly the perception of

a powerful visceral image. Sociology of the mind is crucial to understanding emotions. Of cognitive sociology, which tries to explain why our personal ways of thinking are similar to as well as different from the way other people think, Zerubavel (1997) writes:

In highlighting the social aspects of cognition, cognitive sociology reminds us that we think not only as individuals and as human beings, but also as social beings, products of particular social environments that affect as well as constrain the way we cognitively interact with the world (p.6).

We share certain “mindscapes” with members of our social groups, which serve to focus and limit our perception. The “tremendous power of society to affect our taste, feelings, and moral senses by essentially controlling the gates to our minds” cannot be overestimated (p.52). Not only does our social environment affect *how* we perceive the world; it also determines *what* we perceive – what actually enters our minds in the first place. Perception necessarily involves some *imperception*, so what we actually see is determined by norms of “focusing and attending,” which take the form of mental horizons and mental fences. These mental fences determine what is in the “background” (i.e. irrelevant or “out-of-frame”). Mental horizons serve to close our minds; one way this is accomplished is through “moral focusing,” which refers to the fine lines that confine our attention to a certain “circle of altruism” (p. 39).

Mental horizons and patterns of mental focusing vary across cultures and across social settings within the same culture. In other words, different patterns of mental focusing are promoted by different cognitive subcultures within the same society. So while the dominant culture may not encourage focusing on the suffering of animals used by humans for food, certain subcultures do. The animal rights movement therefore can be considered a “cognitive subculture,” with different norms for moral focusing that include animals in the foreground of perception, where they are usually bracketed off and remain out-of-frame when it comes to everyday moral concern.

Boundaries and Moral Focusing

The concept of boundaries is also central in tying together emotion, cognition and moral concern. Organization and classification, like focusing and perceiving, are mental acts that we all perform as human beings and as individuals. One of the examples Zerubavel (1997) uses is the way that we usually classify nonhuman animals in terms of their perceived proximity to us. “Yet,” he writes, “‘proximity’ is conventional” (p. 54). In other words, different cultures often carve different islands of meaning out of the same reality, for instance, definitions of edibility. All cultures distinguish between “edible” and “non-edible” objects; yet there is tremendous variation within these categories (Fiddes 1991, Harris 1974). “Norms of classification” lead Americans to eat pigs and cows yet to avoid horses and dogs; this is an example of cognitive norms in action. There are other “logical” ways for dividing up the world besides our own (p. 56) as evidenced by the existence of cross-cultural variation. And, as the existence of the animal rights movement shows, even within the same culture, subcultures can create their own logic of consumption and edibility. The social nature of classification is further evidenced by the fact that the lines we draw change over time. This is certainly true with regard to the perceived boundary between humans and other animals, which has grown more permeable over time.

Regarding boundaries, Zerubavel distinguishes between “rigid-minded” cultures (for example, Orthodox Judaism and Gypsy culture) and “fuzzy-minded” cultures (for example, Navajo and Eskimo cultures). Rigid-minded cultures are highly preoccupied with boundaries and obsessed with preserving mental purity and avoiding mental contamination. They are characterized by “either/ or” classifications. Fuzzy-minded cultures, on the other hand, have an aversion to boundaries and reject pigeonholing. These cultures are comfortable with and encourage ambiguity. They are characterized by “both/ and.” It is not only different cultures but

also *different social domains within the same culture* that promote different styles of organizing the world in one's mind (pp. 58 -60).

Animal rights activists have a more fluid conception of the boundaries between humans and other animals than does the official culture. Activists reject the logic that excludes animals from the sphere of moral consideration and which would have us suppress or deny empathic responses that involve taking the role of the *animal* other. Of "moral focusing" and the fine lines that separate the relevant from the irrelevant, Zerubavel writes, "our moral sentiments are rarely ever boundless" (39). In other words, some bracketing of empathy will probably always exist. However, although moral sentiment completely without limits does not exist, animal rights activists certainly have a mental horizon that more closely approximates boundlessness than the dominant culture when it comes to animal suffering and the "appropriate" confinement of moral attention to a conventional, and human, "universe of responsibility" (Gamson 1995).

Further research into the dynamics of emotion and cognition in social movements should take into account such issues of moral focusing⁷⁹ and the processes of socialization through which we acquire our moral horizons. Many children do take animals' interests into account; the meat epiphanies experienced, if only briefly, by many young children are just one example of this tendency. Thoughts and emotions regarding animals and the boundaries regulating attention and feeling, and hence moral sentiments, are learned, and unlearned, through a variety of social forces, the power of which is exerted through conventional socialization. Zerubavel writes:

Our moral horizons, too, are acquired through a process of learning. The fact that many young children are totally oblivious to the conventional moral distinction between humans and all other living creatures, for example, makes it quite clear that such a distinction is neither natural nor logical. To my son, saving tigers,

⁷⁹ Shapiro (1994) addresses the issue of perception and animal rights activism in "The Caring Sleuth: Portrait of an Animal Rights Activist" (*Society and Animals*, Vol. 2, No. 2). His findings are consistent with the themes that I explored in the discussion of predispositions and mental schemas in Chapter 4.

gorillas, and other endangered species is still as pressing as saving human lives. Like so many other young readers of *Charlotte's Web* and *Bambi*, he clearly has not learned yet how to curb his moral attention in a socially appropriate manner (p. 47).

It is not only children who have a different mode of “seeing.” Since different cognitive subcultures, even within the same society, promote different styles of mental focusing, it is not surprising that mental horizons and norms of moral focusing can become sources of bitter contention: “Thus, while many of us basically consider animals morally irrelevant, animal-rights activists explicitly condemn such a fundamentally anthropocentric stance as morally narrow-minded” (Zerubavel 1997, p. 44).

Mental horizons can and do shift over time, however. Hence the importance of “cognitive revolutions” that reverse the relation between what we notice and what we usually ignore. These cognitive revolutions “literally alter the shape of our phenomenological world by sensitizing us to things we have hitherto ignored” (p. 46). Zerubavel uses Goffman’s pioneering work on social interaction as an example; his work sensitized sociologists to a whole level of social life that until that point had been ignored, and indeed had not been “seen.” Animal activists themselves experience a “gestalt switch,” (Kuhn 1970, pp. 11, 122, quoted in Zerubavel 1997) and when they mobilize for social change the ultimate goal is to incite just such a cognitive revolution en masse, wherein animal suffering would not only be brought to the foreground but would come to be considered morally relevant as well.

Activists themselves go through a process of evolution from thinking of animal cruelty as a “personal trouble” (i.e. the product of individual deviants) to a “social issue” (i.e. the product of social institutions). Regarding this switch in activists’ perception of animal cruelty as characterized by unfortunate but isolated incidents to being a systemic feature of society, Groves (1997) writes:

... activists reflected on how they themselves had earlier in their lives stripped animals of their petlike qualities. Most obviously, they had turned animals into “food,” cows into “beef,” and pigs into “pork.” Comfortably anesthetized by modern means of production, the animal rights activists reflected, we have become insensitive to animal suffering. Animal cruelty no longer appears an isolated, accidental occurrence. It is “sanctioned,” “systemized,” and “institutionalized” by a society that routinely strips animals of their sentience (pp. 89-90).

Why do activists make this perceptual switch? This is a question that I have attempted to answer throughout this dissertation by reporting some of the cognitive and emotional dynamics underlying the process of consciousness change. The fact remains, however, that most people do not experience the moral shocks or turning points regarding animals that animal rights activists do. Most people do not see the same connections and make the same inferences, and hence do not feel morally compelled to change their eating habits (Fox 1999, p. 308). Meat is an important cultural symbol (Fiddes 1991, Adams 1991) whose emotional and social power should not be underestimated when thinking about why more people do *not* become vegetarians or vegans. It is important to note that this question obviously reinforces the dominant ideology and could easily be inverted; instead of asking why people become vegetarians or vegans, we could ask why people eat meat and other animal products. This inversion leads us to question cultural socialization rather than recruitment to political activism. To reverse the traditional form shows that the way the question is usually asked serves to naturalize and reify the dominant culture.

Compartmentalization also helps keep others from experiencing the same emotions and cognitions as animal rights activists. Compartmentalization creates:

... various divisions within thought, and separations between thought and feeling, that then function to block out or keep at a distance concepts that bear important relations to one another. For example, we know that the animals we eat are subjected to many kinds of suffering in factory farming, but we choose not to think about this and go on eating them (Fox 1999, p. 40).

As many have pointed out (Francione 2000, Arluke and Sanders 1996, Serpell 1986), the

human-animal relationship is fraught with contradiction and inconsistency, and psychological mechanisms like detachment and compartmentalization of thought and feeling help to keep boundaries in place and ambivalence at bay. Further studies of boundary work would be fruitful in shedding light on the ways in which people construct, and re-construct, morality in everyday life. The concept of boundaries is central to the ways in which people perceive the social world and their place in it. The construction of an alternative moral sensibility regarding animals, upon which the modern animal rights movement rests, is largely dependent upon the dissolution of conventional boundaries and subsequent collapse of taken-for-granted cultural categories. More research regarding the ways in which boundaries are negotiated in everyday life (Nipper-Eng 1996) can tell us much about how and why people become animal rights activists.

Finally, the alternative moral sensibility driving the animal rights movement is dependent upon the construction of independent moral selves. This construction of the moral self is the central process at work during the conversion careers of animal rights activists. Throughout this dissertation, I have looked at the role of cognition and emotion in stimulating the turning points, moral shocks, and other psychosocial phenomena at work during an individual's transition from meat-eater to vegetarian to vegan to animal rights activist. But attention must also be paid to the process of identity construction. How is the moral self of the animal rights activist created?

Taking the Role of the Animal-Other

Schwalbe (1991), drawing upon the ideas of G.H. Mead and the cognitivist perspective in social psychology, emphasizes the importance of role-taking in the resolution of moral problems in everyday life. Among other things, moral reasoning requires the ability to:

... understand types of situations and types of social actors, to understand types of social relationships, to appreciate the value of feelings, and to make logical

inferences about persons, situations, and the consequences of various lines of action for people's feelings and for the creation of new situations (pp. 286-7).

Moral thinking is a complex activity that involves more than role-taking. However, the importance of role-taking will vary depending upon the definition of the moral problem:

If they are defined in terms of dilemmas arising from competing justice and equity claims, then formal operational thought (in Piaget's sense) becomes more important than role taking. In this view moral problems are essentially logical puzzles to which formal rules can be applied to arrive at correct... solutions... If moral problems are defined, however, in terms of conflicting values and interests embodied in partially overlapping perspectives, then role taking assumes preeminent importance... If they are puzzles of any kind, they are communicative ones whose solutions arise out of negotiating new meanings and social relationships, not out of decontextualized philosophizing (p. 287).

The *moral self* is not an entity separate from the social self in general, according to Schwalbe, but rather may be defined as a "set of self-related cognitive elements that underlie moral action" (p. 288). The elements underlying moral action include: (1) impulses to role-take that are rooted in the 'I,' (2) the expansiveness of the other, or role-taking range, (3) conceptions of the self as an object possessing moral characteristics, and (4) a sense of self-efficacy that motivates action in the face of moral problems (p. 288). The first two elements concern the self as a receiver and processor of social information; the latter two refer to the self as an object to itself. The immediate concern here is with the first two elements, although self-conceptions and one's sense of self-efficacy are no doubt of central importance when trying to explain participation in social movements, such as animal rights, that have been characterized as "moral crusades" (Jasper and Nelkin 1992). However, that part of the moral self that is characterized by role-taking seems especially relevant to the study of meaning construction among animal rights activists.

According to Schwalbe, an important distinction in this matter is the ability to role-take versus the inclination and impulse to use it; in other words, the moral actor must have a

propensity to consider his or her actions from the perspectives others (p. 288). The possession of role-taking ability is not the same as the application of this ability. Possession is a necessary but not sufficient condition. He writes:

I am proposing that we think of role-taking propensity as that element of the self that inclines individuals to apply whatever role-taking abilities they possess. I see this propensity as both subject to contextual influences and as a disposition that exhibits a baseline stability across situations. As a disposition, it is that part of the self that might be described as the will to moral responsibility... Motivation to take alternative perspectives on a problematic situation is thus one key element of the moral self. The ability to do this, widely and flexibly, depends upon role taking *range*, which refers to the diversity of perspectives represented in an individual's consciousness (p. 288-9 [emphasis in original]).

He goes on to speculate on the relationship between social structure and the moral self, asking, what sorts of experiences might foster a disposition to take the role of others? I would add to this question, what sorts of experiences not only foster a propensity to take the role of others but also to act empathically upon the information gleaned during this process?⁸⁰ Patterns of moral socialization and other elements of social structural location, such as segregation, will affect the development of this ability. After discussing other connections between social structure and the moral self, he suggests future directions for sociological research on moral development and moral judgment, which include investigating how the moral self develops, what the key experiences are that shape it, and how individual differences come about.

It is also important for research on the development of the moral self to look not at just children and adolescents but at adults as well. The cognitivist view, based on stage theories of development, holds that by late adolescence a person's highest level of cognitive and moral development is essentially fixed (Schwalbe 1991). The Meadian view, in contrast:

... considers development of the moral self as a process that can continue throughout the lifespan. A new line of research... might thus focus on how the

⁸⁰ This distinction is related to the difference between sympathy and empathy articulated by de Waal (1996) in Chapter 3.

moral selves of adults are shaped by the problem-solving demands particular environments force upon them, and by the problems adults seek out for themselves. Sociologists ought also to study the function of the moral self in the face of moral problems that arise in natural settings. Despite hundreds of studies of moral reasoning, knowledge of what people do when they confront real moral problems in everyday life is quite limited... getting at these processes will require more field studies of moral problem solving in everyday life (pp. 299-300).

Studying the ways in which animal rights activists, as well as participants in other social movements, through re-socialization develop new moral sensibilities that compel them to individual and collective action is one such area where in which everyday moral problem solving could be investigated in future research. Not just the moral reasoning of animal rights activists, but that of meat-eaters and other omnivores (semi-vegetarians, etc.) as well, could be studied to see how different individuals resolve potential dilemmas regarding the morality of consumption specifically and human-animal relations generally. Schwalbe's conception of the "highly developed moral self" is that it is a powerful force for change (p. 298). Therefore, another potential application of his theoretical framework is to investigate "how strong moral selves, as might be found in political and organizational dissidents, lead to troublemaking and to political and organizational change" (p. 300). There would be much to gain by linking this theory of the moral self with studies of social movement participation.

Kohlberg's research is also relevant to the discussion at hand, as his stage theory of moral development extends beyond adolescence and also addresses the potential of a highly developed moral self for social change. In his well-known theory of moral development, Kohlberg (1981) identified six progressive stages that individuals pass through, each representing a higher level of reasoning. Based upon their responses to hypothetical ethical dilemmas presented by interviewers, respondents were coded according to the type of reasoning they used to reach their answer (rather than by the answers themselves). Expanding upon Piaget's primarily two-stage

theory of moral judgment,⁸¹ Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning, each of which may be categorized according to three general levels. Unlike earlier stage theories, which usually stopped at adolescence, the progression of intellectual development proposed by Kohlberg begins in childhood and may continue through adulthood. Children always pass through the stages in order and they do not “skip” stages. According to Kohlberg’s theory, not all children will reach the highest levels of moral reasoning, based on factors such as the degree of intellectual stimulation (more stimulation leads to higher levels of reasoning), but to the degree that they do reach the higher stages, they reach them in successive order (Crain 1985).

The three levels of morality identified by Kohlberg are pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each level has two stages. At the level of pre-conventional morality, the stages are 1.) punishment-obedience orientation and 2.) instrumental relativist orientation. At level two, or the level of conventional morality, the two stages are 3.) good boy-nice girl orientation and 4.) law and order orientation. At level three, or post-conventional morality, the highest level of moral reasoning, the stages are 5.) social contract orientation and 6.) universal ethical principle orientation (Kohlberg 1981).

Table 10. Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Reasoning⁸²

Level One: Pre-conventional	<u>Stage 1</u> : Punishment-Obedience Orientation <u>Stage 2</u> : Instrumental Relativist Orientation
Level Two: Conventional	<u>Stage 3</u> : Good Boy-Nice Girl Orientation <u>Stage 4</u> : Law and Order Orientation
Level Three: Post-conventional	<u>Stage 5</u> : Social Contract Orientation <u>Stage 6</u> : Universal Ethical Principle Orientation

⁸¹ Although Piaget identified four stages of intellectual development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational), according to Crain (1985), “most of his findings fit into a two-stage theory. Children younger than 10 or 11 years think about moral dilemmas one way; older children consider them differently... younger children see rules as fixed and absolute... The older child’s view is more relativistic” (p. 118).

⁸² This table was adapted from <http://www.vtaide.com/png/Kohlberg.htm>, which summarizes Kohlberg’s stage theory of moral development.

Moral reasoning at level one is characterized by an emphasis on punishment, authority, and adherence to rules. At level two the emphasis moves toward shared values, norms, and group expectations, with children starting to act and think less individualistically and more like members of conventional society. The focus becomes that which is good for society as a whole rather than what is good for each individual person. At level three, individuals become more concerned with universal principles, values, rights and justice. The concern is less with maintaining social order and more with imagining what the best society would look like (Crain 1985). Gilligan (1982), who modified Kohlberg's theory to include gender differences in moral reasoning orientations, summarizes these three levels as follows:

Kohlberg terms these three views of morality pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional, to reflect the expansion in moral understanding from an individual to a societal to a universal point of view. In this scheme, conventional morality, or the equation of right or good with the maintenance of existing social norms and values, is always the point of departure. Whereas pre-conventional moral judgment denotes an inability to construct a shared or societal viewpoint, post-conventional judgment transcends that vision. Pre-conventional judgment is egocentric and derives moral constructs from individual needs; conventional judgment is based on the shared norms and values that sustain relationships, groups, communities, and societies; and post-conventional judgment adopts a reflective perspective on societal values and constructs moral principles that are universal in application (pp. 72-3).

According to Kohlberg, moral leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplified individuals whose conception of justice followed the reasoning of stage six.

According to these people, the principles of justice require us to treat the claims of all parties in an impartial manner, respecting the basic dignity of all people as individuals. The principles of justice are universal; they apply to all... In actual practice, Kohlberg says, we can reach just decisions by looking at a situation through one another's eyes (Crain 1985, p. 124).

Vegan animal rights activists also exemplify this stage of reasoning. As we have seen, they are concerned with universal principles of justice and compassion and strive to live their lives as well as reshape the world in accordance with these moral principles. As I have argued

with regard to Schwalbe's conception of role-taking and the moral self, animal rights activists develop an expanded definition of "other," which includes nonhumans in its universe of responsibility (Gamson 1995). In taking account of ethically ambiguous situations through the eyes of others in order to determine a course of action, an animal's perspective becomes one of many possible perspectives and that animal's interests are included in the calculation and given some, if not equal, moral weight. Although it seems that animal rights activists exemplify Kohlberg's stage six moral reasoning, he has stopped using this stage and relegated it to the realm of the theoretical:

Until recently, Kohlberg had been scoring some of his subjects at stage six, but he has temporarily stopped doing so. For one thing, he and other researchers had not been finding subjects who consistently reasoned at this stage. Also, Kohlberg has concluded that his interview dilemmas are not useful for distinguishing between stage 5 and stage 6 thinking... Theoretically, one issue that distinguishes stage 5 from stage 6 is civil disobedience. Stage 5 would be more hesitant to endorse civil disobedience... At stage 6, in contrast, a commitment to justice makes the rationale for civil disobedience stronger and broader (Crain 1985, p. 124).

Using this criterion, the beliefs and actions of many animal rights activists are consistent with stage six reasoning. In the endorsement of civil disobedience, or breaking a law that one believes to be unjust, the moral self can become an instrument for social change, consistent with Schwalbe's conception above.

Role-taking is an important tool in moral development, and emotions may be just as important as cognitive reasoning in honing this ability. Of all the emotions, empathy in particular explicitly involves taking the role of the other. Sociologists have recently begun to investigate the role-taking and other symbolic interactionist capabilities of animals (Sanders 1999, Alger and Alger 2003, Irvine 2004). During the course of my research, I became interested in a related question: how does the human ability to take the role of the animal-other affect experiences of empathy, perhaps the dominant emotion when it comes to animal

advocacy? As large-scale changes cause animals to more frequently be included in our cultural network of “others,” we may also begin to see increasing identification with their various plights as powerless subjects in a human world. However, seeing is one thing; being motivated to act is another. Further research into the relationship between perception and emotion, seeing and feeling, will help us to understand how people construct moral selves that include not only the animal’s perspective but also the will to act on this expanded perspective.

In the preceding sections, I have tried to weave together threads from the sociology of emotions, cognitive sociology, and moral development to answer questions about participation in the animal rights movement. Further investigations into how and why people become animal advocates constitute just one potential area of research for sociologists interested in the growing sub-field of “animals and society.” My study has focused upon how animal activists become adept at taking the role of the animal-other through processes of re-socialization. The knowledge gained through this empathic exercise results in goal-directed action aimed at personal and social change for the purpose of improving the lives of animals.

Alger and Alger (2003) studied role-taking from a different perspective: that of the resident cats living in a no-kill shelter. In their creative ethnography, in which the cats were treated, along with the humans in the setting, as “partners in interaction” rather than as subjects (p. 201), they argued, “just as in the case of humans, the self in animals is social in its nature and development.” Sanders has also argued that animals, at least domestic dogs, “have the ability to take the role of the (human) other and share in authentic social interactions” (Sanders 1999 p. 146). Humans, too, can and do imaginatively assume the role of the (animal) other. This is especially evident when studying human guardians and their domestic companion animals, with whom they can be said to share a genuine, mutually beneficial, social relationship. However,

what is less obvious is how people develop the ability to take the role of “general animal others” in addition to “specific animal others,” especially when the animal-others are members of a cultural category like “food” that reduces the animal to a tool existing only for human ends. Recent Hollywood sympathetic anthropomorphic renderings such as *Babe* (1995), *Chicken Run* (2000), and *Finding Nemo* (2003) aside, it is arguably more difficult to identify with an anonymous animal-other than with a specific animal-other, and farmed animals are nothing if not anonymous in American culture.

In the development of the social self, individuals advance from only being able to take the role of significant others to being able to adopt the perspective of the whole community in the form of “the generalized other” (Mead 1934). So too, perhaps, is the development of a moral self that regards animals’ interests as relevant incumbent upon learning to take the role of a generalized “community” of animal-others, rather than just the perspective of a special companion (i.e. one’s pet), who is perceived as an individual, significant other. The development of a “generalized animal-other” may be the first step toward expanding the moral self to care not only for animals marked as acceptable objects of concern (cats and dogs) but also for those animals who have been defined as tools and commodities by the dominant group.

In discussing the future of animals in sociology, Alger and Alger (2003) state “sociologists must extend the perspective of social stratification to the study of human-animal relations. Animal advocates see that animals are severely oppressed in modern, industrialized cultures” (p. 209). The key to why this is so may be that animal advocates have a more expansive generalized other rooted in the less bounded type of empathy that allows for trans-species role-taking. Obviously in the case of animals it is more accurate to say taking the “perspective” of the other, since animals do not occupy roles in the same sense that humans do

(other than those “roles” into which they are cast by human society, such as “pet,” “research tool,” “food,” etc.). Also, Mead’s generalized other takes into account not just the perspective of a community of others but also its attitudes toward the self. Of course taking the role of the animal-other does not include imagining the attitude of the animal towards the person (except in cases where the animal is a companion) but rather is restricted to imagining what the animal is *feeling* in various situations. As such, it is grounded more in emotion than Mead’s generalized other.

Other Directions for Future Research

In addition to the possibility of trans-species role-taking and the development of a more expansive generalized other, future research could address the question of success and commitment to the cause of animal rights. It is true that many new activists come into the movement with considerable energy and optimism. What happens when success is not forthcoming? Does commitment wane with a lack of success at achieving movement goals? Obviously, my data cannot address this interesting question because it is a snapshot that captured respondents during one moment in time. I am unable to say whether my respondents are still as involved in the movement as they were when I interviewed them. Although my data reaches into the biographical past of my respondents via their narrative reconstructions, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study of activists to examine how their commitment waxes and wanes (or remains relatively constant) over time.

Three scenarios seem likely with regard to commitment and movement success, based upon themes that surfaced during my interviews with activists. First, it is possible that over time feelings of disappointment with the perceived lack of success of their efforts may lead to a

progressive decrease of involvement and eventual disengagement from the cause. Even though they may remain a vegan and ideologically committed to the cause, they may drift away from traditional activism, feeling disillusioned with the results. However, it could be argued that if the individual remains devoted to veganism and animal rights principles at the lifestyle level that this does not actually represent a weakening of commitment or crisis of faith but rather a questioning of tactics.

A second possibility that does include an unambiguous disintegration of commitment would be that the individual abandons veganism (and maybe even vegetarianism) altogether after a certain amount of time. Although I believe that this scenario would be rare among the people whom I interviewed, it does happen. In fact, more than one of my respondents commented on the phenomenon of activists dropping out of the movement and abandoning veganism with utter incomprehension, saying that they did not understand how anyone who was *really* committed in the first place could ever make this choice (the implication being that these people who eventually abandoned their beliefs were involved with the movement for the “wrong” reasons from the very beginning [for social reasons, for example] and were never truly committed to the cause).

The third possible scenario with regard to commitment and success involves a redefining of the concept of “success.” In this case, the commitment level remains the same but the definition of success is modified, in a sense ratcheted down. For the new activist, success typically means achieving wide-reaching goals such as animal liberation, the abolition of animal exploitation, and that everyone (or at least a critical mass of consumers) will go vegan. After some time spent working in the movement, the goal changes to making a “smaller” difference, which I discussed earlier as the phenomenon of activists utilizing a sort of theory of diminishing

returns. In other words, a good day is one in which you reach perhaps one out of one hundred people with your flyer. Activism continues to be worthwhile, even as the comprehensive goal of animal liberation recedes from the horizon of immediate possibility, because you are changing a few individuals, who will in turn hypothetically influence a few more, and so on. The struggle for animal rights is a long, uphill battle, but despite the magnitude of the obstacles, it is still a battle worth fighting. Most of the activists whom I interviewed said that although they still believed in the goal of animal liberation (i.e. that it was possible), if it ever were to happen it would be far into the future and not even close to being something that they would see achieved during their lifetimes.

This more “realistic” attitude stood in contrast to the sense of hopeful optimism that most activists felt upon first becoming involved with the animal rights movement. Many expressed that they had unrealistic expectations for relatively quick success. For instance, many believed that fur would go away after a few protests or that most people would go vegan or vegetarian after being presented with animal rights information. This expectation reflected their own personal experience of being galvanized into action after learning unsettling facts; therefore, they predicted that others would react similarly to the same information. After time passed and they became more experienced activists, they were disappointed to realize that this was not the case and adjusted their expectations and definitions of success accordingly. In these cases, it seems that the perceived righteousness of the goal and the possibility, no matter how dim or far into the future, of some measure of success is powerful enough to keep the commitment in place. In addition, activists believe that if they can persuade even one person to go vegetarian or vegan that a tangible difference will be made for a specific number of animals whose lives will be spared as a result of this single individual’s lifestyle change. The concrete success of saving

even one animal in the future seems to be a solid enough victory to keep feelings of despair, defeat, and demoralization at bay. I think that the diminished expectations and redefinition of success scenario is common for those who stay active in the movement. I did not encounter anyone who believed that the goal of animal liberation was hopeless or impossible (I did ask a question about this). Future research could shed light on these questions of commitment and social movement success.

Also related to the question of morality is the presence of guilt over past behaviors. Future research might take a closer look at the role of this emotion in propelling a person to convert to a vegan lifestyle and further investigate the impact of guilt on the dynamics of identity change and moral development. These guilty feelings serve as a window into an individual's conscience and express the belief that they have transgressed some moral or ethical boundary in the past. Judging by the appearance of the words "guilt" or "guilty" during interviews, feelings of guilt over past and present behaviors were not uncommon among vegetarians and vegans in transition. I coded each mention of "guilt" separately unless it was used multiple times in the same sentence or to refer to the same incident; in these cases even though the person may have mentioned "guilt" or "guilty" three times, it would only be coded once. I also did not code mentions of "guilt" that did not refer specifically to animals, animal rights, or veganism. For instance, one person said that she felt guilty because she loved her job as the director of an animal sanctuary so much and another said that he was sometimes "guilty" of anthropomorphizing his cat. These are examples that would not have been included in the tally.

After calculating the number of times that "guilt" was mentioned during the interviews, I found that eighteen different respondents mentioned guilt in the relevant context (i.e. having something to do with past or present behaviors regarding animal consumption or the treatment of

animals in general), and guilt was mentioned overall a total of 31 times. Ten people mentioned guilt once, five people mentioned it twice, two people mentioned it three times, and one person mentioned guilt on five different occasions during the interview. There did not appear to be a gender difference as nine men and nine women mentioned having guilt feelings.

Respondents mentioned guilt in two main contexts, one having to do with their own actions and the other consisting of a projection onto the motivations of other people. Included in the category of their own actions were those who mentioned feeling guilty during the transition to vegetarianism or veganism when they had a temporary lapse and “slipped up.” For instance, Sherlock “regressed” after four months of being a vegetarian (at age 14) and ate a file-o-fish sandwich. He felt very guilty after eating this sandwich and never regressed again. “Cheating” or backsliding seems to happen with some frequency among vegetarians and vegans in transition. However, this word needs to be used cautiously because of the nature of the sometimes-lengthy turning points experienced by activists. Many individuals think about the idea for some time before actually committing to it and so slipping up during this transition period would not technically be considered backsliding, as the person has not yet committed to the change. However, when cheating occurs after the decision to become a vegetarian or vegan is made, there is a cause for guilt feelings. Consistent with themes explored elsewhere in this dissertation, guilty feelings seem to be more internally generated (i.e. the person feels guilty even if no one else is aware of the cheating) with regard to vegetarianism than veganism, which seems to depend more heavily upon external social factors, such as the presence of like minded others, to evoke the guilt.

In addition to guilt over a temporary lapse in one’s vegetarianism or veganism, other catalysts for guilt mentioned in the interviews included being in the presence of vegetarian

friends before the person had gone vegetarian herself, becoming aware of the fact that animals had died in diabetic research to produce current medications, hurting or killing animals in the context of fishing or hunting (with “real” guns or with BB guns), riding horses (who the person later came to realize probably did not like carrying people on their backs), and not spending enough time on activism. Respondents also talked about not having to deal with the “guilt” anymore once they made the decision to go vegan. It is perhaps for this reason that more activists did not mention feeling guilty over having consumed animal products in the past. It seems that going vegan serves to wipe the slate clean in a sense. The number of respondents who reported feeling really good about themselves after going vegan was so striking that this positive feeling may have outweighed residual guilt over past actions.

Regarding the second category of responses, several people attributed guilt feelings to those who reacted in an especially negative manner to either their activism or veganism. In these cases, the hostile reactions of outsiders were typically understood to reflect underlying guilt and what seemed to be disproportionately angry or rude responses were perceived almost uniformly as attempts by the outsider to reconcile feelings of uneasiness over their own actions by attacking the vegan activist. In other words, activists interpreted hostility from outsiders as a defensive reaction to obscure guilty feelings that lingered not very far below the surface.

Concern with the innocence of animals stands in contrast to the theme of guilt that arose in many interviews. A word search for the terms “innocence” and “innocent” was less fruitful than that for “guilt” and “guilty.” “Innocence” was mentioned a total of eight times by five different respondents (one man and four women). In order to conduct a more meaningful comparison of the ideas of guilt and innocence, however, a deeper analysis than a word search would be required, because different words were at times used to express the same idea; for

instance, words like “undeserving” and “helpless” also reflect the idea that animals are innocent. The same applies to “guilt;” sometimes people use phrases like “felt bad” or expressed the idea of guilt in other ways without using that exact word. The theme of animals as innocent victims was discussed in Chapter 3, but future research could more fully explore the ideas of guilt and innocence with regard to moral development, identity transformation, and social movement activism.

Conclusion

An investigation by PETA of West Virginia slaughterhouse Pilgrim’s Pride made headlines recently and spawned an investigation of alleged cruelty and mistreatment of chickens at the facility. An undercover PETA investigator, who worked at the slaughterhouse for eight months, documented footage of plant workers, among other things, slamming chickens against walls and stomping on them. The prosecutor investigating the case said that he did not believe the workers’ actions constituted “torture” and he had not yet decided whether he would press charges. Cases like this, alleging cruel and inhumane conditions inside slaughterhouses, are increasingly making headlines.⁸³ In the West Virginia case, the prosecutor said, “Some people think this is the worst thing in the world. Others think it's not a big deal because they were going

⁸³ Warrick, Joby. 2001. “They Die Piece By Piece: In Overtaxed Plants, Humane Treatment of Cattle is Often a Battle Lost.” *The Washington Post*. Tuesday, April 10; Eisntiz, Gail, 1997. *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry*. New York: Prometheus Books; Schlosser, Eric. 2002. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Perennial: New York (see chapter 8, “The Most Dangerous Job.”)

to die seconds later anyway. I don't think anybody's happy about what happened, but we're going to deal with it the way I think is best to deal with it.”⁸⁴

How people deal with this and cases like it in the future remains to be seen.⁸⁵ As is evident in the prosecutor’s quote, this is contested territory, and we are far from a cultural consensus regarding how animals ought to be treated. However, the symbolic reversion of farmed animals from anonymous, faceless commodities and “absent referents” (Adams 1991) into individual subjects, and from raw materials and objects back into living, breathing creatures, may be an important part of the process of stimulating empathy for them, so that even people who do not wish to stop eating meat will come to care about the welfare of these animals. Stimulating empathy for the invisible creatures who provide our food is exactly what farm animal rescue and protection organizations like Farm Sanctuary and others⁸⁶ attempt to do through their work. By rescuing farmed animals and giving them a name and a biographical history, they force a category switch: from object to subject-of-a-life. In this metamorphosis from commodity to companion, the rescued animal is reconstructed within a new cultural category: the animal as individual.

⁸⁴ Smith, Vicki. 2004. “Workers in Chicken Cruelty Case Blame Time Pressure.” *The Daily Press*. August 3. Retrieved August 6, 2004. (<http://www.dailypress.com/news/local/virginia/dp-sou--chickencruelty0803aug03,0,3764602.story?coll=dp-headlines-virginia>)

⁸⁵ The workers ultimately were not prosecuted in this case.

Former workers at a processing plant who were caught on tape allegedly kicking, stomping and slamming chickens against a wall will not face criminal charges, a prosecutor said Tuesday. Ginny Conley, head of a state prosecutors' organization, said that while the incident at the Pilgrims Pride plant in Moorefield was disturbing, it does not warrant criminal charges because ‘these were chickens in a slaughterhouse.’ (Vicki Smith, Associated Press, Tuesday, January 11, 2005).

⁸⁶ See <http://www.farmsanctuary.org> (Farm Sanctuary in New York and California), www.animalsanctuary.org (Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary in Maryland), <http://www.pigs.org/default.asp> (PIGS, a Sanctuary in West Virginia), <http://www.pasadosafehaven.org> (Pasado’s Safe Haven in Washington), and <http://www.animalplace.org/> (Animal Place in California). For a list of farm animal shelters in the United States, see <http://www.farmanimalshelters.org/links.htm>.

Although animal rights activists accept and champion this construction of animals as individuals deserving of moral consideration, the dominant culture does not share this vision. Most people do not question such ancient and routine practices as meat consumption; in addition, as long as animals are considered property, their interests will never be taken seriously (Francione 2000). Activists attempt to stimulate a meaningful re-examination of, and cultural conversation about, the morality of society's collective actions toward animals, although the goal of animal rights advocates is not only to make conditions better or more humane for animals on their way to the plate but to eventually eliminate them entirely as commodities.

As we conclude, it might be helpful to return to the question, why did the animal rights movement emerge when it did? The appearance of animal rights advocates occurred alongside widespread changes in animal agriculture, particularly the growth of intensive confinement systems (or factory farms) that have been in existence only since World War II. These developments introduced fundamental changes into the traditional ways that animal husbandry had been practiced throughout history. Therefore these structural changes may have helped push the entire issue, which used to be nonexistent, onto the cultural agenda. The veritable explosion of debate about the ethics of animal use (which is now considered an appropriate subject for debate and theorizing among moral philosophers, as is abortion) may be attributed in part to objective changes in the scope and scale of animal exploitation, which were made possible with advances in production and technology. So, while activists attempt to push these issues onto the public agenda, structural changes, especially changes in production and technology since World War II, may have helped to push the activists onto the agenda.

The structural context of the movement matters in another way as well; since the problem of production has virtually been solved, people who may have had qualms about eating meat at

earlier points in history can now act upon them, not only without dying, but also without compromising their health. There is no reason to think that the predispositions that were discussed in Chapter 4 did not exist in people throughout history and well before the appearance of an organized movement for animal rights. However, these individuals would have been more isolated and would not have had a viable social context in which to act upon their feelings of sympathy for animals.

Of course, there have been vegetarians throughout history, and the absence of a political movement for animal rights would not preclude individuals from acting upon their predispositions in their personal lives, if not in the social or political spheres. But now that there is an organized social movement surrounding animal rights, it makes it easier for people to make the sociological leap from their personal lives to the social milieu. In other words, now that a legitimate and expanding movement exists, more people may be compelled to act upon these predisposing schemas when they are in place, as there is now an organized outlet and social format in which to express their qualms about eating animals.

In addition to the existence of an organized social movement for animals, the fact that we are living in a postmodern age is yet another structural factor that renders animal rights sentiments comprehensible. Until the 1920s, a quarter of the U.S. labor force was rural. It is difficult to imagine animal rights sentiments taking root during such a period in history. In addition to these demographic shifts and changes in production, concern for animals has tended to wax and wane with concern for humans throughout history, and the contemporary animal rights movement, which emerged alongside the human rights movements that took hold in the 1960s, is no exception (Finsen and Finsen 1994). The modern animal rights movement reflects the emergent cultural trend toward the rejection of boundaries, some of which begin to blur and

seem arbitrary when viewed through the lens of the postmodern condition. With the advent of postmodernism, boundaries began to be perceived as mere conventions invented by the powerful, rather than as the reifications and manifestations of obdurate reality they had once been. All rights revolutions are the result of this breakdown of conventional boundaries and animal rights, again, is no exception.

The sensitivity that may have always existed but was never talked about (like sex in the Victorian Age) becomes meaningful in a postmodern age. Sensitivity becomes rational and sensible. The postmodern environment is one in which sensitivity can take root and grow, and even take over one's life. This does not mean that the sensitive disposition did not exist before, or that people have not always been sensitive. However, the cultural context has changed as this new conviction about boundaries being arbitrary has seeped through over decades, hence creating a culture more hospitable to sensitivity toward, and sympathy for, animals. In a sense, this sensitive disposition is being caused by the world, which has changed. The animal rights movement is but one extreme manifestation of this boundary-blurring sensibility, which has gradually begun to saturate the culture to the point where it does not seem completely unreasonable to believe that our era someday will be condemned for its treatment of animals. Even if we do not agree with this sentiment ourselves, it hardly seems inconceivable or ridiculous to imagine that others might think this in a culture where sensitivity has become rational and boundaries have become permeable. On the other hand, it has been over 500 years since this now famous quote (often falsely attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, who, despite the historical confusion surrounding this oft-repeated quote, actually was a vegetarian) was penned: "I have from an early age abjured the use of meat, and the time will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals as they now look upon the murder of men."

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APPENDIX

1. Annotated list of field observations (demonstrations, meetings, rallies) for the first 18 months of the study:

November 25, 1998.

Atlanta

Organization: Animal Defense League / Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade.

Event: "Fur-Free Friday" demonstration.

This was part of a national day of action (and was therefore relatively large) and was also the first protest I attended. It was an anxiety-producing experience. I saw five activists get arrested and almost got arrested myself but managed to slip away from the officer and run off the mall property and back up to the street. After this, I engaged in a series of lengthy email correspondences with my initial contact, in which he answered many general questions for me about the movement, about which I knew very little before starting this research. As mentioned, this helped me to "get my feet wet" and he also ended up introducing me to other key people in the movement and vouching for me, etc. The grassroots segment is particularly concerned with government repression and is suspicious of outsiders who could be infiltrators. Several high-profile FBI/ grand jury cases show that this is indeed an obdurate threat, and though the extent may be exaggerated, activists are not completely paranoid. This is especially true because the grassroots groups act as aboveground spokespersons for the illegal underground activities of the Animal Liberation Front. My initial contact also helped me to arrange my first interview, with a visiting activist from Minnesota.

New Year's Eve, 1998.

New Jersey.

Organization: New Jersey Animal Defense League.

Event: Anti-fur demonstration.

I attended a protest at Furs by Guarino, Route 1 in New Brunswick. That night, I talked with the two co-directors of the group over dinner and went back to their apartment, where they showed me their scrapbook, which contains tons of newspaper clippings, articles, and photos. We went through each one and they explain them to me. They talked about the history of their group, changes in the movement, etc. We talked about turnover rate and commitment. They told me about their experiences with NJ- ADL in terms of recruitment and commitment of activists. We talked about various issues of concern to the grassroots community. I did not ask them for interviews because I am still in the process of making up the questions and figuring out what I want to ask.

February 1999.

Atlanta.

Organization: Atlanta Animal Rights.

Event: Organizational Meeting

I attended an organizational meeting, at which approximately thirty young (teenaged) activists, mostly punk “hardcore kids,” were present. Many spoke on different issues and concerns regarding the Atlanta animal rights scene and I took extensive notes on what was said.

March 20, 1999.

Atlanta.

Organization: Vegetarian Society of Georgia.

Event: “The Great American Meat-Out.” (held annually on Gandhi’s birthday)

Meeting and film screening of “A Cow at My Table,” an award winning documentary about meat and culture created by a Canadian filmmaker.

April 1999.

Atlanta.

Organizations: In Defense of Animals, Friends of Animals, and Atlanta ADL /CAFT.

Event: Anti-vivisection demonstration.

Emory University. “Lab Day,” during World Week for Animals in Laboratories (WWAIL). I attended a protest at Yerkes primate facility in Atlanta. I videotaped the entire protest, including the arrests of two activists, my key informant and his girlfriend, who was arrested when she asked the police why her boyfriend was being arrested. I ended up going to court with her, as a witness, but her case was stayed (her boyfriend was already in jail at this time for this arrest). There were seven total arrests that day, including one intentional act of civil disobedience, with about sixty people taking part in the demonstration.

May 1999.

Charlestown, West VA.

Organization: “PIGS, a Sanctuary:” (a pig sanctuary for rescued and abused domestic, farmed pigs and also Vietnamese pot belly pigs, who were marketed heavily for a time in the 1980s as exotic pets, with disastrous results).

Event: Sanctuary open house and tour.

Grand re- opening and sanctuary tour to celebrate the facility’s move to a new patch of land that is much bigger than their previous location. I heard many speakers, stories, personal testimonials, and collected lots of literature. I learned about sanctuary shelter operation, including why and how they do it. I heard many impassioned speeches and stories about farm animal rescue. I petted many pigs and took photographs. I also met the co-organizers of DC’s major grassroots group, Compassion Over Killing (COK).

May 1999.

Washington, D.C.

Organization: Compassion Over Killing.
Event: Outreach.

I hung out on a street corner watching COK members pass out leaflets about veganism during busy lunch hour pedestrian traffic.

June 1999.

Atlanta. Emory University.

Organization: Primate Freedom Tour, In Defense of Animals.

Event: Anti-vivisection demonstration.

This was a stop on the Primate Freedom Tour. I attended a demonstration and planned civil disobedience at Yerkes primate research center, resulting in seven arrests (six adults and one juvenile).

June/ July 1999:

Atlanta. Dekalb County.

Event: Lots of time at the jail.

My contact was sentenced to 30 days in Dekalb County jail for the Yerkes arrest back in April, during which time I corresponded with him, visited him in jail, and helped his girlfriend in her efforts to get him released. I drove her around and helped in trying to understand the complicated and frustrating Dekalb County legal system.

August 1999.

Chicago. Northwestern University.

Organizations: Primate Freedom Tour and Chicago Animal Defense League.

Event: Anti-vivisection demonstration. This was a stop on the Primate Freedom Tour.

September 1-4, 1999.

Washington D.C.

Organizations: Many. COK (local), the activists from the Primate Freedom Tour, and activists from various chapters of many regional and national animal rights groups.

Event(s): Anti-vivisection demonstration, march to the capitol, rally, and civil disobedience action.

I attended a conference and rally in Washington D.C. The rally comprised the end of the “Primate Freedom Tour,” which consisted of a busload of activists (from different cities and various animal rights groups) riding around the country last summer, stopping to protest at various research facilities that conduct experiments on live primates (vivisection). During the three month- long Primate Freedom Tour, at each stop activists would hold a protest and attempt to organize a debate or open forum concerning the benefits of primate research between the activists and the researchers or administrators involved with animal experimentation at each institution. Almost always, this request for a public forum was denied. In addition to the regular protests, at each stop an activist would lock him or herself up in a cage for various amounts of time, usually 48 – 72 hours, without food or water, to dramatize the conditions of primates at

research facilities. The culmination of this tour, which began in Oregon on June 1 1999, was a national protest at the National Institutes for Health (NIH) in Bethesda Maryland, followed by a rally at the Washington Monument, during which members of the animal rights community, representing various organizations, spoke out on a variety of topical issues facing the movement. The rally was disrupted by a premeditated act of civil disobedience, which consisted of about four activists scaling the side of the Washington Monument and dropping a banner that read, "NIH Wastes Millions on Fraudulent Primate Research" [insert picture]. This caused much commotion on the ground, as police swarmed and activists began to chant. Police scaled the wall after the banner-hangers in an attempt to get them down. On this same weekend I attended a workshop/ conference on political action for animals in the year 2000, which was the beginning of a coalition between grassroots activists and the Humane Society of the United States. The conference was held in the HSUS offices in downtown Washington DC. Various aspects of strategy were discussed with an emphasis on political action (legislative efforts as well as lobbying representatives and getting pro-animal candidates elected to office).

September 1999.

Athens.

Organization(s): PETA - People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (national), SETA - Students for the ethical Treatment of Animals (local).

Event: "American Radical Gathering." A national conference for radical activists representing a variety of causes and social issues.

I attended a conference in Athens, called the American Radical Gathering, at which a representative from PETA, based in Norfolk, VA, had flown in to give a speech and to operate a literature table. While I sat with him as he "tabled" and distributed literature, I asked him various questions about his involvement with animal rights and PETA as well as the difficulty, challenge and rewards of traveling around speaking to people about animal rights issues and how he felt about his new-found work with PETA (he was a brand-new employee, having only been there about 3 weeks at the time of our interview, but he had also gone through a very rigorous training session that lasted several weeks, which was interesting to learn about). I was fortunate to be able to schedule a formal interview with him the following day before his plane took him back to PETA headquarters in Virginia.

October 1999.

Athens.

Organization: Students for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (UGA chapter).

Event: Anti-McDonald's demonstration.

Protest and leaflet at two local McDonald's (part of an international day of action against McDonald's).

December 28, 1999.

Manhattan.

Organization: New York City- Animal Defense League.

Event: Anti-fur demonstration.

I attend a Herald's Square Macy's protest and presentation of a petition with thousands of signatures urging the department store to stop selling fur and fur-trimmed garments. The demo is on the sidewalk right in front of the famous Macy's Christmas display windows with those mechanical dolls, and tourist/ pedestrian traffic is very heavy, as people queue inside velvet ropes on the sidewalk to glimpse the windows. It is extremely cold. I observe the difference in rapport between the police officers and protesters here in New York compared with other places I have been, particularly in the South. The cops are both congenial and professional in their dealings with the protesters; it all has the appearance of being very routine. Some of the police officers and protesters address each other by name and ask questions about the other's Christmas, etc:

"Did you have a nice Christmas?"

"Yeah, but I ate too much!"

"Yeah, me too!"

"How long you guys going to be out here today?"

"Oh, probably about two hours. It depends on how long people can stand the cold."

"Yeah, it's cold today!"

In contrast to this rote cordiality, in Dekalb county in Georgia, police officers often show up to peaceful demonstrations wearing full riot gear, and the only conversational exchanges tend to be the reading of rights when they arrest protesters.

March 2000.

Washington, D.C.

Organization: Compassion Over Killing. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Events: Demonstration against Norway's slaughter of baby seals. Anti-leather press conference at The Gap.

I attended a demonstration at the Norwegian Embassy to protest the government's slaughter of baby seals. Later that day I attended an anti-leather demonstration and press conference at the Gap in Georgetown. Celebrity and rock star Crissie Hynde, from The Pretenders, was speaking out for animal rights and fielding questions from reporters about leather, etc. She was in town for a concert and acting as a spokesperson for PETA, who is currently running the anti-leather Gap campaign.

March 2000.

Athens

Organization: Students for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Animal Action Network.

Event: Clyde Beatty/ Cole Brothers Circus protest.

Demonstration, pass out leaflets about the animal cruelty charges pending against the circus.

Other:

In addition to those listed above, I attended weekly Atlanta CAFT/ADL demonstrations at Rich's department store in front of Lenox Square Mall for approximately one year.

2. The following is an excerpt from a draft of the email that I sent to activists requesting an interview:

Your name and email were given to me by [-----]. I am writing to ask for your help with a project I am doing. I am working on a Ph.D. in sociology and my dissertation research is on animal rights, specifically recruitment and how people become involved with veganism and activism. For my project, I am interviewing vegan activists about how and why they became involved with animal rights...The questions ask basic stuff like when did you first start thinking about animal rights issues, when (and why) did you go vegan, when did you become active, etc., and also what you think were important factors in your decisions along the way. I am collecting activists' stories in order to look for patterns and see if there are any factors that are most important in penetrating the veil of socialization and the dominant culture and bringing to consciousness an alternative set of ideas about how we as a society should treat animals. I am interested in the mechanisms of social change, especially how micro-level changes in consciousness change macro structures like institutions and culture.