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# An Examination of Vegan's Beliefs and Experiences Using Critical Theory and Autoethnography

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**AN EXAMINATION OF VEGAN'S BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES USING CRITICAL THEORY  
AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

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LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**at the**

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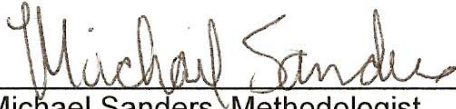


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**AN EXAMINATION OF VEGAN'S BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES USING CRITICAL THEORY  
AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

**CHRISTOPHER A. HIRSCHLER**

**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study uses critical theory, autoethnography, and in-depth interviews with vegans to explore and analyze the initial impetus to become vegan, the sustaining motivation to persist, the impact the diet and associated practices have had on the participant, and vegan's assessment of omnivore's eating practices. In-depth interviews with three vegans in each of the following professions were conducted: medical doctor, registered dietitian, farmer, professional animal activist, and philosophy professor. Participants were asked to reflect on "narratives of experience" (Caelli, 2001), the story created from their interview. Interviews were analyzed using critical theory to critique the Western approach to diet and food production and hegemonic practices related to food choices.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study was designed to explore vegan's beliefs related to their own and society's food choices. It sought to understand what led vegans to make the choice to eschew animal products. It examines the social, psychological, philosophical and health-based reasoning employed by vegans and how these beliefs and practices impact them and their relationships with others. At the heart of this investigation is an attempt to explain the factors that enabled these individuals to exclude animal products from their diet and consumer purchases and to explore explanations vegans give as to why many people in the United States consume animal products.

While consuming animal products is the norm, the participants, the vegan author, and subsequently the writing style challenge this paradigm. Throughout this text words are chosen that challenge the meat eating standard (Dunayer, 2001; 2003). For example, meat is sometimes referred to as "animal flesh," and when referring to animals the pronoun "it" or "that" is replaced with "he" or "she." This is a deliberate attempt to highlight the assumptions many people make who eat meat, is reflective of

language used by animal protectionists (Adams, 2003; Dunayer, 2001; Dunayer, 2003; Stibbe, 2001), and is part of how I conceptualize the application of critical research.

This study sought the explanations vegans provide for the wide acceptance of animal products, including factors such as psychological defenses, health-based arguments, tradition, and the use of language. Vegans representing five professions are included. Vegan philosophy professors, farmers (persons formerly involved in the raising and/or slaughtering of animals), animal activists, medical doctors, and registered dietitians were interviewed. This diverse assemblage allows for multiple, informed opinions related to issues relevant to the choice of becoming vegan. While the interviews reveal how becoming vegan affects one's personal and social life, irrespective of one's eventual career path, these five professions were chosen because they all directly relate to vegan diets: health, nutrition, farming practices, animal welfare, moral and ethical issues, and animal advocacy.

Nutrition and dietary habits have obvious implications for individual's health and the health of the nation, and animal products are a main source of calories for many Americans. Animal products are widely consumed in the United States and are a major source of saturated fat and calories and the only source of dietary cholesterol (Nestle, 1999; Walker, Rhubart-Berg, McKenzie, Kelling, & Lawrence, 2005).

The US population typically consumes diets high in meat and saturated fat and low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. This dietary pattern increases the risk for heart disease, certain types of cancer, stroke, and diabetes – four of the leading causes of death in the USA... Meat and



dairy foods contribute all of the cholesterol and the great majority of the saturated fat to the diet typical in the USA. Although dietary fats play an important role in a variety of biological functions, dietary saturated fats have no identified health benefits or minimum safe intake levels (Walker, et al., 2005, p. 349).

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and is related to a diet high in saturated fats (Nestle, 1999, Willett, 2001; Walker, et. al, 2005; Ornish, 1998). Additionally, billions of animals live lives of confinement and suffer in a multitude of ways due to intensive agricultural practices (Marcus, 2005; Scully, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Eisnitz, 1997). Therefore, it is worth questioning whether Americans need to consume animal products.

This study addresses these and other questions involved in food choices in a land where many are unaware of the apparent contradiction between their dietary habits and their professed love for animals.

While meat consumption is a cultural norm in the United States, some individuals may experience psychological uneasiness about this practice. Many Americans, who may even live with beloved companion animals, would likely consider themselves to be nonviolent toward other animals or possibly even animal lovers, but they consume the bodies of nonhuman beings on a daily basis and seem to experience no overt distress. How can this be? Furthermore, what makes it possible for people to experience the flesh of certain animals as not only edible, but

palatable, while the flesh of other animals will cause them a sense of disgust and revulsion? Why do ethical vegetarians-those who do eschew meat for moral reasons-recoil at the notion of meat in precisely the same way that meat eaters tend to respond to the idea of eating “exotic” animals? (Joy, 2002, p. 1)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Little research (MacNair, 1998; McDonald, 2000; Larsson, Ronnlund, Johansson, & Dahlgren, 2003) has been conducted that explores the process of becoming vegan. There is an absence of literature that contains a comprehensive accounting of the experiences and beliefs of vegans. Examining the experience of present-day vegans provides insight into their motives and the transformational process that led them in a direction that is opposite the dominant meat-eating culture. Therefore, this study addresses the multiple issues related to vegan diets. What are the reasons a person chooses to become vegan? What elements are important in the behavior change process that enables one to adopt such a relatively drastic diet? Lastly, what are the perceived or experienced health benefits associated with vegan diets?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate vegan’s experiences and beliefs in relation to the use of animal products. Inherent in this exploration is an examination of vegan’s motivation, philosophical and health beliefs and the impact the diet has had on them intrapersonally and interpersonally. It explores what the experience is like becoming and living vegan. I expected each person would have

consumed animal products at some point and made a decision to eliminate those products from their life, and this was true for each participant.

Vegan's knowledge and attitudes towards vegetarian, vegan, and omnivorous diets are explored. Participant's knowledge about the health implications of animal product consumption or avoidance, the philosophical arguments surrounding the use of animals for food, and the environmental consequences of animal production processes which include large numbers of animals who are highly confined is analyzed.

This study sought to uncover the motivation behind becoming vegan and the motivational factors that helped participants sustain their practice. Additionally, it may be the first study to examine vegan's beliefs regarding omnivore's consumption of animal products. Vegans will be asked to explain why omnivores have not adopted a vegetarian or vegan diet. Vegan's speculation about why others have not become vegetarian or vegan is important because their journey, from meat-eater to vegan can be interpreted as a personal evolution. A participant in McDonald's (2000, p. 9) study said, "The curtain was pulled back. The truth was made known." Many vegans express "amazement that they had not seen the connection" between "nonhuman animals and the food they ate" (McDonald, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, the participants in this study may help facilitate non-vegetarians and non-vegans to see the "truth" that they were previously unable to see themselves, prior to their "catalytic experience" (McDonald, 2000, p. 9).

## Significance of the Study

Examining the beliefs of vegans provides insight into the beliefs, motivations, practices and difficulties related to vegan diets; diets that go in opposition to the dominant meat-eating culture. Vegans are a relatively unstudied group and their experience may add to our understanding about other marginalized groups and how these groups respond to the hegemonic forces that they operate against. On a greater scale, this research delivers insights that may help reverse the trend in the evolving nutrition transition (towards the use of more animal products) in the U.S. and around the globe. Additionally, the topic of food choices is especially relevant because of the growing consequences related to current agricultural practices. “The industrial agricultural system, now the predominant form of agriculture in the USA and increasingly world-wide, has consequences for public health owing to extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, unsustainable use of resources and environmental pollution” (Walker, et al., 2005, p. 348). The researchers note multiple concerns: animal feed that includes animal products, arsenic, and antibiotics, and the health threat to communities in the vicinity of agricultural operations and the workers who staff these facilities. Additionally, they write that predictions of a global population increase from 6.3 billion to about 9 billion people within the next 45 years that coincides with a trend towards increasing meat consumption foretells a perilous state of affairs (Walker, et al., 2005). Considering about 60% of grain is fed to livestock in affluent nations (most people in poor countries eat grain directly), and this conversion process – converting calories from grain to calories from meat – is inefficient, this means that countries like the U.S. are

eating a diet that wastes resources and contributes to obesity (a symbol of excess) while 1/6<sup>th</sup> (1 billion) of the world's people are undernourished (Walker, et al., 2005). Matters may worsen if forecasts of a near doubling of global meat production, from 218 million tons (1997-1999) to 376 million tons by 2030 occurs (WHO, 2003). It is for these reasons that Walker et al. (2005, p. 348) state "It is of paramount importance for public health professionals to become aware of and involved in how our food is produced."

Considering many Americans think of themselves as "animal lovers," and millions of companion animals are cared for lovingly, what explains the high level of animal product consumption in America? The high degree of consumption is more difficult to understand given the powerful animal rights and animal welfare arguments against consuming meat, dairy, and eggs (Regan, 2004; Marcus, 2005; Scully, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Eisnitz, 1997), as well as the numerous health benefits associated with plant-based diets (Barsotti, Morelli, Cupisti, Meola, Dani, & Giovannetti, 1996; Crane & Sample, 1994; DeRose, Zeno, Jamison, Joshua, Braman, McLane, & Mullen, 2000; Dwyer, 1988; Esselstyn, 1999; Fisher, Levine, Weiner, Ockene, Johnson, Johnson, et al., 1986; Ornish, 1996; McDougall, Bruce, Spiller, Westerdahl, & McDougall, 2002). Furthering the case against high levels of consumption is the fact that industrial animal agriculture adversely impacts the environment (Novotny, 1999; Williams, 1995; Schlosser, 2001; Walker, et al., 2005; Hayden, 2003; Robbins, 2001). Since these 15 vegans have made the transition away from animal products their answers may have implications for individual and societal health, including both physical and mental health, the lives of animals, and the environment.

## Research Questions

Research questions were designed to elicit answers that would illuminate what it is like to be vegan. These questions were derived largely from my experience being vegan and my extensive knowledge of vegan practices and beliefs. How or why does one decide to adopt what many consider to be a radical diet? What impact does that have on their self-image or how others interact with them? What do they think about “living among meat eaters” (Adams, 2003)? This study sought to address the 6 broad research questions below.

1. What are the reasons a person chooses to become and remain vegan?
2. What elements are important in the behavior change process that enables one to adopt such a relatively drastic diet?
3. What was the transitional experience like (socially, intra-personally, and physically)?
4. What is it like to be vegan?
5. How do vegans explain why most people continue to eat animal products?
6. What perceptions do participants hold in relation to their meat eating colleague’s knowledge and beliefs about vegan diets and food production practices related to animal products?

Specific interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

As predicted, the answers to the interview questions reveal that vegans demonstrate extensive knowledge in the following areas: animal rights and animal

welfare arguments, the positive benefits associated with vegetarian and vegan diets, the negative externalities associated with industrialized animal agriculture, and how language is used to diminish the perceived negative impact of humans on animals raised for food. Another prediction was that this group of vegans initially encountered many social difficulties as a direct result of their dietary choices. Furthermore, despite currently being considered to be influential people, they were predicted to still endure a social strain that is the result of their dietary practices. Both of these predictions came to fruition, but the extent of the strain was less than anticipated and varied greatly among participants.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made:

1. Participants would provide truthful answers to the interviewer's questions.
2. Participants were capable of knowing what motivated and sustained their food choices and how it impacted them in a multitude of realms (personal, social, and physical).

### **Delimitations**

The following were delimitations of the study:

1. Participants were not randomly selected, but were the result of efforts made to produce a varied sample that represented vegans with expertise in philosophy, nutrition, farming, animal welfare, and animal advocacy.
2. I collected data by means of in-depth interviews.

3. I was responsible for data collection and analysis.

### **Limitations**

The following limitations existed in this study:

1. My personal beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions have influenced the direction of the study, including the interpretation and analysis of data.
2. The quality of the data collected may vary due to various factors including the interviewer/interviewee relationship and interaction.
3. Because this sample included a high percentage of individuals who many would consider influential vegans with expertise in their field of study, the findings do not represent all vegan's experiences and beliefs.
4. There was a relative scarcity of female participants with only three out of 15 being women.
5. There was a lack of diversity with only one African American participating and one who stated "other"; the rest were Caucasian.
6. Only two participants were in their twenties.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Animal Activist*: One who does work (leafleting, protesting, film making, writing, etc.) on behalf of animals who are not under their personal care.

*Autoethnography*: "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness as it connects the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Ellingson, 2000, p. 2293).



*Critical theory/critical research:* a research paradigm that “challenges the status quo”; emancipation and transformation are central goals of this type of research. The researcher’s values play a prominent role in this research, the product of which is a “form of cultural or social criticism” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129-130). “Critical theory is centrally concerned with releasing people from falsely created needs and helping them make their own free choices regarding how they wish to think and live. Framed this way, it is much closer to democratic ideals than people realize.” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 364)

*Farmer:* One who raises livestock. For the purpose of this study, when referring to a one of the three participants who were farmers the term will indicate a person formerly involved in the raising and/or slaughtering of animals.

*Omnivore:* one who eats both vegetable (plant) and animal substances (foods).

*Vegan:* although the term vegan is technically meant to indicate a person who avoids all animal products, nutritive and non-nutritive, for this study a vegan will refer to someone who does not consume any nutritive animal products and who could be considered a “practical vegan” (Ball, 2004); one who attempts to avoid the purchase of non-nutritive animal products when it is practical to do so in addition to the dietary elimination of animal products.

*Vegetarian:* for the purposes of this study, vegetarian will indicate a person who does not consume any animal flesh (e.g. fish, chicken, cow, lamb, pig, etc.), but who does consume dairy, eggs, or both. “Vegetarian” will therefore indicate a lacto-ovo vegetarian, lacto-vegetarian, or ovo-vegetarian.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This review of literature serves several purposes. First it is important to explore the history of vegan diets including its philosophical basis, the number of adherents, and the literature that has been conducted that directly pertains to (lacto-ovo) vegetarians and vegans. The literature related to vegetarians has relevance to vegans as both diets exclude meat, and individuals often transition from a vegetarian to a vegan diet (McDonald, 2000). The next section covers behavior change theories and how they might explain how individuals are able to transition to a vegan diet.

Review of prejudice and stigma literature is included since this is an issue for many vegans (Adams, 2003; Weiss, 2000; Stepaniak, 2000). The inclusion of this topic can be directly attributed to my insider status and knowledge of issues that affect vegans. My own experience, the formal interviews I conducted with eleven vegan informants for the pilot study (discussed in the Methodology section), and numerous informal discussions with vegans all clearly reveal that prejudice occurs due to one's status as a vegan. Having read extensively on the topic of vegan diets and the issues that are important to vegans, such as health, animal welfare/rights, the environment, and

social relations with meat eaters (Adams, 2003; Allen, et al., 2000; Ball, 2004; Beardsworth and Keil, 1992) I have addressed how diet, especially a vegan diet, has implications for individual and global health, the lives of animals, and the environment.

Psychology related to animal product consumption is included because vegans in this study are asked, “Why isn’t everyone vegan?” Therefore I explore the literature that addresses the psychological explanations for why most people consume some animal products. Psychology is useful in explaining food choices because individuals employ a number of psychological defenses that appear to enable them to eat meat (Joy, 2002). Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) is explored in detail (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Aronson, 1999) as is psychic numbing (Lifton, 1986; Lifton & Markusen, 1990), and how language affects how we think about animals raised for food (Dunayer, 2001).

The literature review is concluded with an examination of the five occupations selected. Some background information about the profession and how the profession relates to vegan diets is provided. For the occupation of philosophy professor, rather than cite the training they receive or how many philosophy professors there are, arguments made by philosophy professors and those who philosophize about the rights of animals are included.

The section devoted to registered dietitians is lengthier than that of medical doctors. This should not be interpreted to mean that doctors are less (or more) important than registered dietitians or that registered dietitians have more influence in national nutrition policy, or any other such conclusion. Registered dietitians receive more coverage than medical doctors for the simple reason that the focus of registered

dietitian training is nutrition while doctors receive little nutrition education (Halsted, 1998; Association of American Medical Colleges, 2005). Additionally, although I am critical of registered dietitians (and doctors), if I had a question related to nutrition, I would feel more confident in the answer I received from the average registered dietitian than the average doctor because of the differences in their educational training related to nutrition.

A final point related to the literature review is important: it includes both academic, peer-reviewed materials and popular press materials. While the vast majority of references come from peer-reviewed journal articles, non-peer-reviewed materials are included for several reasons. A number of books or articles are written by vegan authors who are critical of the use of animals for food (Adams, 2000, 2003; Ball, 2002; Dunayer, 2001; Francione, 2000; Marcus, 2005; Regan, 2004; Scully, 2002; Stepaniak, 2000) and therefore simultaneously provide additional vegan perspectives while adding unique critical arguments. Festinger (1957), as the creator of the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, and Aronson (1999) as a prominent social psychologist known for his work in the same area of study, are both referenced because of the importance of this theory in our understanding of animal product consumption. Schlosser (2001, 2004) wrote about the fast food industry and industrial techniques employed in animal agriculture while Pollan (2006) explores how various foods get to our plate. The last two authors provide an omnivorous, everyman view of food, but they also point a critical lens at production practices that seem, in many cases, to mirror views or concerns of vegans. In most cases, peer-reviewed sources chosen for inclusion in this dissertation document

similar ideas or issues to those which are not peer-reviewed, but the “popular press” sources offer some unique phrasing or related concept and therefore offer value while not sacrificing credibility. Due to the breadth of topics involved in a discussion of the determinants of food choices it is essential to carefully consider all sources of information. All non-peer-reviewed sources that were included were carefully chosen for the reasons outlined above.

### **Vegetarians**

Although this study focuses on vegans, vegetarianism is mentioned because many vegans started out as vegetarians, and both eschew meat products. There are a number of diets that are labeled “vegetarian.” An ovo-lacto vegetarian consumes eggs and dairy along with fruit, vegetables, grains, and beans. A vegan is often thought of as the ultimate vegetarian and this individual consumes no animal products whatsoever. Beardsworth and Keil (1992) found vegans to have gradations and levels of “strictness.” Some vegans will exclude all foods that have an animal connection, such as honey, animal derived vitamin D (D<sub>3</sub>), and other non-food products. Other vegetarians may eat fish (pesco-vegetarian) or limit certain meats yet consider themselves vegetarian. Some vegetarians eat a sparse amount of fruits and vegetables, consuming mostly unhealthy “junk foods.” So, there is a spectrum of vegetarian diets that range from those that include some meat (semi-vegetarian) to those that include no animal products. Where an individual lies on this vegetarian continuum does not necessarily reflect their consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains, beans and other healthful plant foods.

Vegetarianism has grown in popularity during the past twenty years. In 1979 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that just 1.2% of Americans considered themselves to be vegetarian (Swinder & Trocchia, 2001). However, by 1994 seven percent of Americans defined themselves as vegetarian (Swinder & Trocchia, 2001; Dietz, Frisch, Kalof, Stern, & Guagnano, 1995). Therefore, in 1994 there were 12.4 million Americans eating a vegetarian diet (Rajaram, & Sabate, 2000). And, over 30 million have explored vegetarian diets (ADA, 1995). However, estimates by a VRG Zogby poll (2000) indicate .9 percent or 1.7 million Americans are vegan and only 2.5% or 4.8 million are true vegetarians (i.e. they don't consume flesh), while up to 48 million are "vegetarian inclined" (Ginsberg & Ostrowski, 2003, p. 1). The Vegetarian Resource Group "estimates that 30-40 percent of the country's consumers are in the market for meatless items" (The Vegetarian Journal, 2003).

In another Western country, the UK, estimates indicate that seven percent or 4 million individuals are vegetarian and about twelve percent of youth are vegetarian. Additionally, about 41 percent of those in the UK are eating much less meat (The Vegetarian Society, 2000).

This trend towards vegetarianism or a "vegetarian orientation," in which there is an increasing tendency to reduce meat intake (Krizmanic, 1992; Richter & Veverka, 1997), may be part of the solution in combating the rising trend in obesity and its concomitant chronic diseases, both within the United States and around the globe. Epidemiological evidence, discussed by Schneider (2000), indicates there is a global rising tide of obese and overweight individuals, many children among them, in

developed nations and those countries in transition. It appears that the Westernization of many parts of the world has brought with it a U.S. pattern of eating (Hale, 2003) that is contributing to chronic disease development.

Females choose vegetarianism more frequently than males. This has led some to conclude that “meat is gendered: Meat, particularly red meat, has been associated with masculinity and power, whereas fruits and vegetables, and grains have generally been associated with femininity and weakness” (Allen, et al., 2000, p. 19). A series of surveys carried out by Social Surveys [Gallup] Ltd (1990) revealed that 12.8 percent of females compared to 7.1 percent of males ate meat rarely or not at all (Beardsworth and Keil, 1993). Santos & Booth (1996) note that the gender disparity “may reflect a difficulty coping with the menarche... the blood in red meat may become a symbol of the bodily changes which some teenage girls may struggle to cope with and/or resist” (Kenyon & Barker, 1998). They offer as support the finding that “the mean age at which the vegetarian subjects began abstinence from meat is 12.2 years, around the time of menarche” (Kenyon & Barker, 1998). Adams (1990) has also suggested a link between menarche and vegetarianism in her text, *The sexual politics of meat: A feminist vegetarian critical theory*.

Research has been conducted that investigates the personality characteristics of both vegetarians and omnivores. Allen, et al. (2000) conducted two studies published within the same article. The first study compared vegetarians (n = 9) and omnivores (n = 143) on right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. The second study sought to measure human values using the Rokeach (1973) Value Survey in order to

identify any differences between vegetarians and omnivores. The authors conclude that vegetarians have an interest and ability to reconnect to animals while omnivores are more inclined to subscribe to the hierarchical domination model which, in relation to animals, leads to objectification; animals are no longer viewed as individuals. While they did obtain some significant results, the effect value was small and did not substantially improve predictive ability.

Dwyer et al. (1974), as cited in Beardsworth and Keil (1993), placed vegetarians in one of two groups: “joiners” and “loners.” Joiners were affiliated with some type of vegetarian group or network while loners were more individualistic. Loners were found to view their diet as simply one aspect of their lives, while joiners were more likely to view their diet as enmeshed with their spiritual beliefs, and these beliefs placed them outside of mainstream society.

### **Vegans**

Vegans represent a group of individuals who abstain from the consumption, dietary or otherwise, of any animal product. The history of veganism goes back to 1944 when The Vegan Society was formed in England, as an offshoot of The Vegetarian Society (Stepaniak, 2000). The founding members intended veganism to be a philosophy and a way-of-life, not simply a dietary practice. The Vegan Society (1979) in England, in its Articles of Association defines veganism as follows:

Veganism denotes a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude  
– as far as is possible and practical – all forms of exploitation of, and  
cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose; and by



extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals, and the environment.

The American Vegan Society, formed in 1960, “championed the philosophy of ahimsa, a Sanskrit word interpreted as ‘dynamic harmlessness,’ along with encouraging service to humanity, nature, and creation” (Stepaniak, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, in order to live by the principle of ahimsa and to “fully apply the vegan ethic, not only are vegans compelled to do the least harm, they are compelled to do the most good” (Stepaniak, 2000, p. 2). The American Vegan Society (2007) lists six pillars of compassionate living, the first letter of each pillar spells out ahimsa: abstinence from animal products; harmlessness with reverence for life; integrity of thought, word, and deed; mastery over oneself; service to humanity, nature, and creation; advancement of understanding and truth. Stepaniak notes that “veganism is more than what a person does or doesn’t eat – it comprises who a person is” (2000, p. 5).

Veganism as a “dietary practice” is rare among those living in developed countries. Traditional Western meals include an abundance of meat and most individuals are raised eating meat. While a considerable quantity of literature exists that deals with the health benefits of a vegan diet and the environmental and animal rights arguments related to this practice, little has been written about the motivation to become vegan, and even less literature exists that covers vegan’s perceptions of why omnivores reject vegetarianism or veganism.

It is also rare for individuals to be born into vegetarianism or veganism given the emphasis on meat in Western culture (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993; Povey, Wellens, &

Conner, 2001). In fact, “Twigg (1983) argued that in Western culture, ‘meat is the most highly prized of food. It is the centre around which a meal is arranged. It stands in a sense of the very idea of food itself’” (Allen, Wilson, Hung Ng, & Dunne, 2000, p.18). Therefore, vegetarians and vegans make a conscious choice that is in opposition to societal norms (Larsson, et al., 2003).

One small qualitative study of vegans in a town in northern Sweden found that vegans could be categorized into three distinct groups: conformed vegans, organized vegans, and individualistic vegans (Larsson, et al., 2003). “Conformed vegans socialized mainly with other vegetarians often in groups and wished to share the main attitudes and behaviors of the group. They were not convinced in their veganism and the informants reported that most often they eventually dropped out” (Larsson, et al., 2003, p. 64). In contrast to conformed vegans, the organized vegans were committed to vegan ideology, were animal advocates, and often protested against animal abuses. The individualistic vegans “were very convinced in their decision about being vegans but had no need for unifying and associating themselves with other vegans. Most often they interacted with omnivores and did not try to convince them about the benefits of being vegan” (Larsson, et al., 2003, p. 64). Additionally, veganism was seen as part of their life, not their entire identity. They felt secure in their decision and believed they would be vegan for their lifetime. The researchers found that a person may move from one category to another during their “career” as a vegan, for example, from conformed to organized or individualistic.

## **Dietary Behavior Change**

What are the reasons a person chooses to become vegan? What elements are important in the behavior change process that enables one to adopt such a relatively drastic diet? This section explores behavior change models that might help to explain how vegans made their dietary change. Studies that focused on the transition to a vegan diet are reviewed.

As noted previously, vegetarians choose their diet and are usually not born into vegetarianism (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993). Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics involved in behavior change. There are several models that are used in the area of health behavior.

The transtheoretical or stages of change model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1982, 1983) was first used as a general model of intentional behavior change. The model includes a progression of behavior change stages along a continuum from precontemplation, to contemplation, to preparation, to action, and then maintenance. This model also incorporates a decisional balance measure; a listing of the pro's and con's of a potential behavior change (Velicer, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Brandenburg, 1985). While this model has been largely used in relation to smoking cessation (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983) it has also been applied to other health-related issues such as alcohol use, mammography screening, and exercise (Marcus, et al., 1992).

The "pros" of becoming vegan include the reasons that motivated the change: health, moral concern about the treatment of animals, distaste for animal flesh or products, and a preference for the taste of vegetarian foods (Larsson et al., 2003). In

addition, the benefits may include a sense of greater spirituality, a feeling of contribution to the cause of animals, an improvement in self-image, and respect from others. However, the “cons” might include a lack of support from family (Larsson et al., 2003), a reduction in access to convenience foods, the potentially greater cost of meat “replacements,” and social isolation.

An interesting, but as yet not fully explored application of the transtheoretical model is in the area of food choice - specifically what events lead an individual toward a vegetarian or vegan diet and move them from the precontemplation stage through to the action stage? Beardsworth and Keil (1992) have shown in a qualitative study that there is often a cue to action that initiates movement from precontemplation to contemplation.

Conversion to a vegetarian diet may be a slow process that evolves over a period of months or years (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). For many, moving out of their parent’s home allowed the individual to begin to form their own foodways. For some, this change, from what Charles and Kerr (1988) described as the centrality of meat and its linkage to what is considered a suitable meal, occurred during their teenage years, a time of individuation that often includes a rejection of parental values, possibly including food (Gong & Heald, 1988).

At the other end of the spectrum, some conversions were immediate. One respondent reported a sudden realization that the “meat” was actually the flesh of another, formerly living being. This reconceptualized notion of meat as “flesh” is what Adams (1990) referred to as bringing the “absent referent of the donor animal back into

view” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992, p. 267). Adams (1990) states that vegetarians tend to use language that violates conventions that “mask the origins and nature of meat by maintaining the position of the donor animal as absent referent” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992, p. 284).

Beardsworth and Keil (1992) conducted a qualitative study with 76 vegetarian respondents. The purpose of the study was to illuminate the motives for the various forms of vegetarianism that are practiced, the process that led to becoming vegetarian, and the evolving path of their vegetarianism. The reasons for eating a vegetarian diet included moral convictions, health reasons, revulsion at the thought of eating meat, animal rights issues, and issues related to feminist ideology. Moral motivations were the most frequently cited primary motivator (n=43) and included a concern for both non-human and human welfare (global food supply, deforestation). Health was reported as the primary motivator for 13 of the 43 respondents while 9 participants gave gustatory preferences (regarding taste and texture) primacy. Motivations were found not to be static and changed over time; certain issues became more or less important over a person’s life.

In a MORI (1989) survey of 1,997 adults in Britain, 61% of vegetarian respondents did not like “factory farming methods,” 58% believed slaughtering animals for food was immoral, 49 % cited health reasons, and 38% did not like the taste or texture of meat (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). A 2003 survey of The Vegan Research Panel, which included 1,249 responses, found the main reasons for being vegan were

ethical/moral (82%), dietary/health (14%), spiritual/religious (2%) (The Vegan Research Panel, 2003).

McDonald (1998; 2003) has concluded that in terms of understanding the process of becoming vegan, Mezirow's transformation theory does not explain how one learns to become vegan. McDonald (2000, p. 6) describes a learning process which vegans go through that includes *who I was* (background and experiences), a catalytic experience (learning about cruelty which led to repression or becoming oriented), repression and/or becoming oriented ("intention to learn more, make a decision, or do both"), learning (about animal abuse and/or how to live as a vegan or vegetarian), decision (making the choice), and world view ("the new perspective that guides the vegan's new lifestyle"). In a commentary of McDonald's work, MacNair (2001, p. 67; 69) emphasizes the answer to why and when individuals take the path of veganism may be explained by the role that is played by one's practical knowledge (e.g. how to cook) and ideological beliefs (e.g. the value of all life), or instrumental learning (self-efficacy in dietary practices) and communicative learning ("having a commitment to the ideals of vegetarian or vegan practices"). "Differences in gender, age, ethnic background, educational background, family relationships, friendship networks, proximity of other vegans, availability of vegan food, experiences, and personality" all are likely to play a role in deciding to become vegan (McNair, 2001, p. 69).

### **Transformative Learning**

Transitioning from an omnivorous diet to a vegan diet is a clear example of transformative learning. Studying the transformational learning experiences of 12

ethical vegans, McDonald, Cervero, and Courtenay (1999, p. 8) note that “One of the more dramatic actions that an individual can take is to make a major change to her or his diet. Eliminating all animal products for ethical reasons is an extreme dietary change.”

The essential features involved in a transformative learning experience are provided by McDonald, et al. (1999) in their succinct summary of the main tenants of Mezirow’s (1978) theory of adult transformational learning: “following a triggering event, or disorienting dilemma, individuals experience a sequence of events.... These events lead to a transformation in perspective...”

The events following a disorienting dilemma are self-examination; critical assessment of assumptions; recognizing that discontent and transformative experiences are shared; exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills; provisionally trying new roles; renegotiating relationships and building new ones; and reintegrating the new perspective into one’s life. Other features include the importance of critical reflection on assumptions, democratic dialogue, and reflective emancipatory action, or praxis. (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 6)

Ettling (2006, p. 65) wrote, “Transformative learning, which implies a deep structural shift in one’s consciousness and way of being in the world, presumes an authentic, value-based awareness.” Transformative learning deeply affects a person, and “is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18).

Implicit in transformational learning is the goal of “independent thinking” (Merriam, 2004, p. 61). According to Roberson and Merriam (2005, p. 285), adults engaged in self-directed learning are “motivated by the unique issues of one’s life, especially that of time, family, and loss.”

Merriam believes the ability to reflect critically, especially on our own and other’s assumptions, requires advanced cognitive development. “Furthermore, to be able to engage in reflective discourse with others assumes the ability to examine alternative perspectives, withhold premature judgment, and basically to think dialectically, a characteristic of mature cognitive development” (Merriam, 2004, p. 61). “Critical reflection on experience is key to transformational learning. Having an experience is not enough to effect a transformation” (Merriam, 2004, p. 62). It is the reflection on experience that leads to growth, not simply the experience. Specifically, Merriam (2004, p. 62) states it is “premise reflection, or critical reflection on assumptions” about “self (narrative), the cultural systems in which we live (systemic), our workplace (organizational), our ethical decision making (moral-ethical), or feelings and dispositions” that leads to transformational learning.

To engage in effective transformative learning one must be able to think dialectically, accepting “inherent contradictions and ambiguities, alternative truths, and different world views” (Merriam, 2004, p. 64). However, Merriam acknowledges that “adults need not be at the pinnacle of some model of cognitive development to experience transformative learning” (Merriam, 2004, p. 66). She cites two studies, McDonald (1998) and Kovan and Dirkx (2003), in which the transformations of some of



the ethical vegans and environmental activists were found to have occurred “without being aware of the change process” (Merriam, 2004, p. 66). Merriam (2004, p. 66) emphasizes that there seems to be a significant difference between a person who has mindlessly assimilated to a new culture “without either critical reflection or rational discourse” and one grounded in critical self-reflection of one’s assumptions of self and culture.

Should transformative experiences be the result of chance, or should educators, activists, or those interested in creating social change attempt to initiate change by introducing knowledge that has the power to create a disorienting dilemma? Ettlting (2006) raises a number of questions regarding the ethics of educators attempting to foster transformational learning in the classroom:

Do educators have the right to ask people to examine and change their basic assumptions as part of our educational programs? Should one expect learners to seek this kind of learning experience? Is it justified to pose real-life dilemmas that force examination of one’s life story and lived assumptions? (p. 59)

However, it is important to realize, “education” is taking place with or without intervention. For example, one of the hurdles vegans encountered was overcoming the “miseducation” they received in school and in society in the form of posters on school walls with images of “smiling cows” or advertisements of “cows grazing in pastures, rather than the factory farms that is their reality” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 12).

Using a critical perspective to examine the function of power in the transformation process of the 12 ethical vegans they interviewed, McDonald, et al. (1999) found the disorienting dilemma involved learning about the fate of animals used for food, the powerlessness of the animals, the awareness that they had unknowingly “assumed the species ideology” and understanding the tenants of a “vegan ideology.” They “discovered society’s humanness – its self-perpetuating but largely unconscious ideology that keeps nonhuman animals subjugated. Participants found themselves struggling against powerful cultural and interpersonal challenges to their newly discovered ideology” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 11). The result of this species, “normative ideology is the widespread and unquestioned use of animals for almost any human purpose, the most obvious and frequent being for human food” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 13). However, it wasn’t enough to simply recognize their involvement in a species ideology and make a choice to extricate themselves from it.

Participants found themselves struggling against powerful cultural and interpersonal challenges to their newly discovered ideology. Power emerged as an integral force that shaped the transformational learning journey beyond the decision to adopt a new meaning perspective. To adopt a new meaning perspective, participants had to do more than make a decision. They had to live their new perspective in the everyday world. Thus, transformational learning emerged in this analysis as an ongoing, dynamic journey of learning. (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 11)

The 12 participants in this study had learned “mostly unconsciously” an “assimilated set of beliefs regarding the inferior status of animals” and it was this normative ideology that was “challenged and changed” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 13). Their parents had provided a model of what to eat and how to think about what or who they were eating. A university professor in the study said, “What you get fed as a child you think is right” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 13). Learning from vegetarian and vegan peers, publications, conferences, and cookbooks assisted participants in replacing beliefs that originated in childhood. But by changing their diet they “severed themselves from the dominant ideology and forced a redefinition of their interpersonal relationships” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 15)

McDonald, et al. (1999) found that the vegans had to continually work against the power of the dominant ideology. “Discovering that nonhuman animals are powerless in relation to humans, the vegans initially felt compelled to dismantle the conditions of power. To advocate on behalf of nonhuman animals....” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 17) Yet, each participant became less vocal over time as their ideas were attacked and their feelings hurt. This caused them to “temper their pedagogy” (McDonald, et al., 1999, p. 18). While their initial, possibly overzealous, proselytizing may have been a contributing factor in the reactions they received from others, McDonald, et al. believe a critical reading reveals:

The unconscious power of the normative ideology to regulate conformity.... The vegans came to believe they could be most effective in alleviating animal cruelty by silencing their voices, discussing veganism

only when asked, muting what they believed to be the truth, and living by example. (p. 19)

### **Prejudice and Stigma**

As stated previously, my personal experience with prejudice and stigma associated with my vegan diet, the many informal conversations I have had with other vegans who have described similar stories, the pilot study I conducted with eleven vegans who all recounted at least one experience that could be labeled prejudiced and the literature that indicates vegans encounter social problems (Adams, 2003; Weiss, 2000; Stepaniak, 2000) are all reasons for inclusion of this portion of the literature review. What follows is a thorough review of theories of prejudice and stigma which are then extrapolated to vegans.

Unfortunately, no studies were found that directly investigated the prejudice encountered by vegans. However, each of the eleven participants I interviewed as part of the pilot study relayed that they were viewed as outsiders and encountered varying levels of prejudiced treatment. Understanding prejudice as it relates to vegans necessitates filtering through theories of prejudice (e.g. racism, sexism) and deciding upon the potential explanatory ability of that theory in the context of dietary-related prejudice. It is noteworthy that until fairly recently, there was scant research that considered prejudice from the victim's perspective (Swim & Stangor, 1998).

#### ***The Victim's Perspective: Understanding Prejudice***

An explosion of research from the target's perspective began around the start of the last decade of the Twentieth century (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). However, no

research has been conducted on the prejudice experienced by those eating a vegan diet. A search of the database Ohio Link yielded no articles that primarily investigated prejudice as it relates to being vegan or maintaining vegan or vegetarian diets as of April 21, 2007 though a few mentioned the social difficulties experienced by vegans (McDonald, 2000; MacNair, 2001; Hobbs, 2005).

Weiss (2000, p. 36) notes, "In our meat-eating culture, your choice is not likely to be welcomed with open arms." She suggests the newly confirmed vegan educate themselves in order to better explain and defend their position, otherwise it might backfire when approaching loved ones, especially parents.

Stepaniak (2000) devotes 60 pages to the interpersonal and intrapersonal considerations associated with being vegan. Throughout the text she responds to letters she has received over the years as an advice columnist on compassionate living for Vegetarian Voice magazine. Stepaniak's sound advice includes the suggestion that "It is hard to maintain a compassionate attitude toward people who are hostile, mean, or belittling to us. But how we respond to them is a large part of being vegan, too" (p. 54). She counsels one woman who writes of her struggles with her husband over the "boundary of not having animal products in my home" by recognizing that "It is challenging enough for vegans to be out of step with the culture at large, but to feel alienated within your own home is especially difficult" (p. 65).

Considering the lack of coverage given to the prejudice directed at vegans, despite its frequent occurrence, it is worthwhile to investigate this phenomenon. As Swim and Stangor (1998) point out, "Understanding the target's perspective can help

explain the struggles targets face in their attempts to develop the least personally costly way to deal with prejudice” (p. 5). Prejudice may be thought of as “the negative feelings associated with a particular group. These negative feelings may include anger, fear, disgust, or mere discomfort” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 4). From a target’s perspective, prejudice may be thought of as a stressor or daily hassle (Swim & Stangor, 1998). Additionally, prejudice may be viewed as a structural road block that restricts opportunities or information (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995).

Costs of prejudice also include a stifling or a silencing of the victim. The dominant group may minimize victim’s complaints or assertiveness by implying that targets are overly sensitive (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Haslett & Lipman, 1997). Victims may tend to expend mental energy thinking about prejudiced encounters or potential encounters and attempt to “maximize correct judgments while minimizing the judgment errors that are most costly” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 25). Costs of false alarms (identifying prejudice when it does not exist) include being identified as overly sensitive (Feagin & Sikes, 1994), mistrust which can negatively affect relationships (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1989), and behavioral restriction that can cause a contraction of one’s social circle (Swim & Stangor, 1998).

Pinel (2002) proposes that heightened stigma consciousness, combined with a “vigilant, distrustful stance when interacting with out-group members” intensifies the problems inherent in social interactions between out-groups. However, there are logical reasons why stigmatized individuals maintain vigilance; it may reduce the chance of being discriminated against (Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand,

1995), or help the stigmatized maintain their global self-esteem (Crocker, Voelk., Testa, & Major, 1991) and performance self-esteem (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Yet, there are negative consequences that often follow from believing the world is prejudiced.

Believing one's interaction partner is prejudiced may provoke intergroup "tension and divisiveness" (Pinel, 2002, p. 178). Research has shown that a type of self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when individuals expect to be treated negatively; vigilant targets seem to provoke negative responses from others (Curtis & Miller, 1986; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Alternatively, low stigma conscious individuals spend little time reflecting on their stereotyped status (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Considering there are both positive and negative consequences associated with attributing negative interactions to prejudice, how does one decide whether to be vigilant or not? Pinel argues that the crucial consideration lies in the "distinction between expecting to be stereotyped before entering into a stereotype-relevant situation and suspecting that one has been stereotyped after experiencing the outcome of a stereotype-relevant situation" (Pinel, 2002, p. 184). The former response may elicit negative reactions that may impede satisfactory relations, while the later reaction would avoid provoking a negative interaction or pre-encounter anxiety, yet provide the target with information that may be useful in future interactions with those individuals, if any.

Targets who employ a "zero-miss" strategy may be labeled as oversensitive or complainers (Swim & Stangor, 1998), but this may be more beneficial and less costly in an environment that is highly prejudicial (Vorauer & Ross, 1993). Conversely, some

groups tend to perceive less prejudice than base-rate information indicates (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). This “may reflect a general tendency for people to hold ‘positive illusions’ or ‘illusions of unique invulnerability’” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 27). However, as Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) note, not all groups (e.g., European American men) maintain positive illusions; there appears to be some psychological benefit to “attributing negative feedback to oneself rather than to discrimination.” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 28). It seems that attributing negative feedback to the self adds an element of controllability that is not present when attribution of negative feedback is assigned to prejudice, but at the cost of self-esteem as it relates to performance (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Conversely, research has shown individuals may attribute negative outcomes to prejudice thereby protecting their self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). In this case, a vegan might think, “It’s not me. It’s them. They are prejudiced against all vegans.”

Attributing negative outcomes to prejudice is a reactive form of a psychological strategy employed to protect the self. Proactive coping methods, preemptively utilized, are “preparations to prevent or mute the effects of the stressor” and involve target’s use of “their knowledge and awareness of when, where, and by whom, and in what manner prejudice is most likely to occur” and enable the victim to “structure their interactions and environment to minimize or avoid the hurtful aspects of encountering prejudice or discrimination” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 38). This method, however, has costs associated with it. Targets may attempt to avoid prejudice, thereby negating the need to employ *secondary compensation* (Miller & Myers, 1998) methods to alleviate the hurt caused by prejudice, by deciding “what to say in certain situations, how to



present themselves, and where to socialize, live, go to college, and work” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 39).

This type of avoidant behavior or *primary compensation* is a “form of coping which reduces the threats posed by prejudice by enabling the stigmatized person to achieve desired interpersonal outcomes despite the existence of prejudice in a particular situation” (Miller & Myers, 1998, p. 191). Employment of this strategy requires an evaluation of who is likely to be prejudiced. Therefore, based upon past experiences with individuals or by employing stereotypic cues about who is likely to be a perpetrator of prejudice, targets rely on stereotypes of stereotypers (Casas, Ponterotto, & Sweeney, 1987; Rettew, Billman, & Davis, 1993). Using all available means to detect prejudice is valuable due to the subtlety with which modern forms of prejudice occur (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Swim & Cohen, 1997).

### ***Detecting and Overcoming Stigmatization***

Victims, due to their familiarity with prejudice, may be considered experts in detecting prejudice (Essed, 1992). A first step in appraising whether prejudice has occurred involves deciding upon the acceptability of an event (Essed, 1992). When an event is deemed unacceptable, an individual will attempt to determine whether there is an acceptable excuse for this occurrence (Essed, 1992). Individuals have “expectations about normal or ideal interaction patterns and violations of these patterns can facilitate a search for explanations” (Swim & Stangor, 1998, p. 44). When interactions are negative or unexpected people are more likely to seek attributions (Hastie, 1984; Malle & Knobe, 1997).

Stigma research has focused largely on the negative impact of stigmatization on those stigmatized. However, there is value in examining how stigmatized individuals adjust and flourish in the face of prejudice.

There are at least three important psychological processes that stigmatized individuals engage in to avoid the negative consequences of stigma: compensation, strategic interpretations of the social environment, and calling upon multiple identities. Some stigmatized individuals attempt to compensate by trying “harder by being more persistent or assertive”(Shih, 2004, p. 178). They may also attempt to improve their social interaction skills in order to compensate (Miller & Myers, 1998). This may involve closely monitoring their social interactions and taking their social collaborator’s view point (Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbbaum, 1990). Stigmatized individuals may also seek to disconfirm stereotypes (Kaiser & Miller, 2001) and devalue the dimensions on which they are disadvantaged (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001).

Stigmatized individuals may “strategically manipulate their interpretations of their social environments to protect their sense of self-worth”, in part by “making selective social comparisons” (Shih, 2004, p. 178). In-group comparisons to those experiencing similar or worse outcomes (Crocker & Major, 1989) may help alleviate their perceptions of inequity (Kessler, Mummendey, & Leisse, 2000).

Additionally, stigmatized persons may rely on one of their alternate identities (Shih, 2004). As Hewstone (2000) has pointed out, individuals have multiple identities. Thus, a vegan may call upon their occupational, religious, or gender identity in different situations thus blunting the impact of the stigma. Identity switching can be an important

tool in reducing stigmatization in given social situations. Individuals may strategically switch their identities to those that are more valued in a given social situation and de-emphasize those that are not highly valued (Hogg & Abram, 1988; Pittinshy, Shih, & Ambady, 1999).

Visibility management, managing one's stigma (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003), deserves attention as it relates to vegans. Interviews of twenty gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) youth revealed that a great deal of thought and energy went into the management of their stigma (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003).

[The term] visibility management refers to the dynamic, ongoing process by which GLB youth make careful, planned decisions about whether they will disclose their sexual orientation, and, if they decide to disclose, to whom and how they disclose, and how they continue to monitor the presentation of their sexual orientation in different environments. (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003, p. 233)

The authors emphasize that it is not simply a matter of "coming out" or verbal disclosure, but rather a complex, mentally demanding, and ongoing process of identity regulation that involves numerous strategies and modes of communication. It includes determining the potential consequences from a chain-reaction effect of telling someone who does respect their privacy and assessing what friendships mean in the absence of disclosure. One youth said, "You acquire all these friends and stuff and in the back of your mind you think, 'they're not really my friends because if they knew who I was they would drop me.'" (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003, p. 233)

## ***Conclusion***

All individuals experience stigma at one time or another. For instance, one may be stigmatized in their youth and labeled “too young” or they may be stigmatized as being “too old” (Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2000). However, the degree to which a stigma is felt and the impact it has on one’s social relationships is unique to the particular stigma and the individual experiencing it. For instance, while being “too young” may involve restrictions in terms of driving, voting, curfews, and being taken seriously by adults, youth are not stigmatized by the vast majority of their peers based upon their age. However, vegans, accounting for probably less than 1% of the U.S. population represent a tiny minority, and feeling “out of step with the culture at large” (Stepaniak, 2000, p. 65) encounter a fair amount of prejudice from the meat-eating majority, most of it subtle. While all the vegans in the pilot study recalled a time when they were the targets of a hostile reaction due to their veganism, these encounters were the exception. More troubling was the fairly constant feeling of being viewed as different and the implications this had in their relationships. The same was true of the 15 vegans in this current study.

According to the vegan participants, vegans also tend to manage their stigma. Depending upon the social setting, vegans may determine that disclosing their veganism will not be received well. However, vegans are sometimes unable to conceal their vegan identity because they are detected due to their meal selection or because they are “outed” by someone who knows their vegan status. In these situations they may decide to share little information in an attempt to deflect attention.

They may also wonder how their veganism has impacted their relationships and attempt to alter their identity to compensate for this stigma. Therefore, vegans do engage in visibility management (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003), which can be mentally taxing and is not an available option for individuals with more obvious stigmas.

### **Health**

Many vegetarians and vegans mention health as an initial influence in eating a plant-based diet, as well as a sustaining force (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). There is good reason for this belief. Large studies in America and in Europe have found that vegetarians live longer than omnivores living in the same geographic areas (Walter, 1997; Key, 1995; Key, 1996). The scientific literature and popular press is replete with information supporting the efficacy of a plant-based diet (Barsott, et al, 1996; Crane & Sample, 1994; DeRose, et al., 2000; Dwyer, 1988; Ernst, et al., 1986; Essed, 1992; Esselstyn, 1999; Fisher, et al., 1986; Ornish, 1996; Koertge, et al., 2003; Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 1996; Rajaram & Sabate, 2000; Robbins, 2001; Weaver & Plawecki, 1994; Weisburger, 2000; Nicholson, et al., 1999; McCarty, 2002; Hanninen, et al., 2000; Donaldson, et al., 2001; Hafstrom, et al., 2001; McDougall, et al., 2002). In fact, the American Dietetic Association (ADA), registered dietitian's certifying organization, states "Scientific data suggest positive relationships between a vegetarian diet and reduced risk for several chronic degenerative diseases and conditions, including obesity, coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and some types of cancer" (Messina & Burke, 1997, p. 1317). Furthermore, the ADA's position statement states, "appropriately planned vegetarian diets are healthful, are nutritionally adequate, and

provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases” (Messina & Burke, 1997, p. 1317). The American Cancer Society (ACS) recognizes that “Vegetarian diets include many health-promoting features; they tend to be low in saturated fats and high in fiber, vitamins, and phytochemicals (e.g., flavonoids).” According to the ACS:

In the majority of population studies, greater consumption of vegetables, fruits, or both together has been associated with a lower risk of lung, oral, esophageal and colon cancer... the best advice is to eat 5 or more servings of an assortment of colorful vegetables and fruits each day.

The organization cautions that “some research suggests that frying, broiling, or grilling meats at very high temperatures creates chemicals that might increase cancer risk.” Despite these statements they pronounce that “It is not possible to conclude at this time, however, that a vegetarian diet has any special benefits for the prevention of cancer.” They caution that “strict vegetarian diets that avoid all animal products, including milk and eggs, should be supplemented with vitamin B, zinc, and iron (especially for children and premenopausal women)” (American Cancer Society). However, vegan diets are appropriate and supportive of health throughout life, including childhood and infancy (Messina & Mangels, 2001; Mangels, Fada, & Messina, 2001; Messina & Burke, 1997).

Well-planned vegan, lacto-vegetarian, and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy and lactation. Appropriately planned vegan, lacto-vegetarian, and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets satisfy nutrient needs of infants, children, and

adolescents and promote normal growth. Vegetarian diets in childhood and adolescence can aid in the establishment of lifelong healthy eating patterns and can offer some important nutritional advantages.

Vegetarian children and adolescents have lower intakes of cholesterol, saturated fat, and total fat and higher intakes of fruits, vegetables, and fiber than nonvegetarians. Vegetarian children have also been reported to be leaner and to have lower serum cholesterol levels (Messina & Burke, 1997, p. 1317).

The Vegan Research Panel survey showed that 82% of respondents felt better since becoming vegan (or vegetarian if still vegetarian) while only 15% did not (The Vegan Research Panel, 2003). Even those who eat meat recognize vegetarian diets as being healthy, though they have less favorable beliefs regarding vegan diets (Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001).

Despite the numerous debates, such as high-protein diets versus low-fat diets, among purveyors of nutrition advice there are many constants in the field of nutrition. The major constant is that a primarily plant-based diet has a myriad of advantageous aspects, a role in reducing cardiovascular disease, stroke, some cancers, and obesity among them (Ornish, 1996). It should be noted that lifestyle factors that go beyond diet alone may influence these findings in light of the generally recognized pattern of healthier living (e.g. not smoking, intentional exercise, etc.) by vegetarians. However, one study of 1,350 women found higher rates of smoking and higher body weights among vegetarian females than non-vegetarian females and the researchers

hypothesized this finding, might be explained in part by the fact “this study did not intentionally recruit vegetarian women, which suggests that those included may be more representative of young vegetarian women than study volunteers described in other studies” in which vegetarian individuals tend to practice other health-promoting practices such as not smoking (McLean & Barr, 2003, p. 191).

Focusing on the scientific data related to nutrition, two highly regarded nutrition researchers, Willett of Harvard and Nestle of New York University, discuss the reasons behind the public’s confusion and include the USDA pyramid as part of the cause (Nestle, 2002; Willett, 2001). The pyramid, a food guide and educational tool produced by the government, is a political construction that acquiesces to the dairy and beef industry, among others. Willett says “the USDA Pyramid got its structure – yanked this way and that by competing powerful interests, few of which had your health as a central goal” (Willett, 2001, p. 21). Willett ( 2001, p. 25) also discusses the Nurses’ Health Study which revealed that women who most closely followed the USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion’s Healthy Eating Index “were no less likely to develop a major illness or die than those with the lowest scores over a twelve-year period...” He states that the results were similar for the 50,000 men in the male Health Professionals Follow-up Study (Willett, 2001). Willett and Nestle both agree that the overwhelmingly consistent scientific evidence shows that Americans need to consume less animal products and more plant-based foods, especially vegetables, fruits, and fiber-containing foods, yet this message has been subverted by special interest groups.



Willett (2001) places some of the blame for lay person confusion about diet to media sources that “turn the baby steps of scientific research into ‘major advances,’ ‘breakthroughs,’ and ‘possible cures’” (p. 27). Willett suggests that when assessing nutrition advice it is useful to consider the analogy of stones (studies) being placed on a scale – the weight of evidence is crucial, and eventually “tips in favor of one idea over another” (p. 29). Of course, the weight of the stone or size of the study matters; some studies are like “pebbles” while others, like the Nurses’ Health Study, are “boulders” (Willett, 2001, p. 29). Mark Twain has been quoted as saying, “Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint” (Willett, 2001, p. 34). His advice points to the importance of not relying on one source of health information, or one study.

Willett recommends emphasis be placed on studies that focus on: people instead of non-human animals, studies done in the real world, real disease endpoints, large studies, and consistency of evidence. Real disease endpoints, such as heart attacks or broken bones, should be the focus more so than markers of disease like cholesterol or low calcium intakes. Important to realize when evaluating research is that people’s diets change over time, for many reasons. Many studies rely on participant’s recall of their food intake and one’s memory is not exact. The type of study is important too. Randomized trials, in which the experimental group receives the “treatment” and the control group does not, are considered the “gold standard,” but these are expensive, and problematic because “getting people to fix and eat special meals for a long time is difficult” (Willett, 2001, p. 30). Large, prospective cohort studies are the next best, and sometimes better alternatives, to randomized trials. The Physicians Health Study

(n=22,071) and the Nurses' Health Study (n=121,700) are two examples of large studies which have examined diet and other health related factors since 1982 and 1976 respectively (Willett, 2001).

Marcus (2005, p. 72), an animal rights advocate, believes vegetarian advocates give about equal coverage to the health, environmental and animal rights/welfare issues and that greater emphasis should be placed upon animal issues, in part, because "many of the health and environmental arguments presented in the movement's literature are of questionable accuracy." While Marcus does not totally discount the credibility of the health claims of vegetarian diets he believes the animal issues will compel more people to vegetarianism.

Ball (2004), co-founder of Vegan Outreach, also notes problems (for the animals) with advocating the health arguments for vegetarianism. He points out that this approach, with the message of the dangers of consuming saturated fat and cholesterol, has "led to an absolutely staggering increase in the number of chicken (and fish) killed for food every year during the past decades." According to the USDA, chicken consumption per person, per year has risen steadily from about 10 pounds in 1909 to 27 pounds in 1970 and 57.5 pounds in 2003 (USDA, 2003). Ball (2004) doubts "that the billions of chickens would appreciate vegetarian advocates using their time encouraging people to eat less cholesterol and saturated fat." According to the USDA:

In 2002, total meat consumption (red meat, poultry, and fish) amounted to 200 pounds per person, 23 pounds above the level in 1970. Americans consumed, on

average, 18 pounds less red meat (mostly less beef) than in 1970, 37 pounds more poultry, and 4 pounds more fish (USDA, 2004).

In 1996, total meat consumption (red meat, poultry, and fish) was 191 pounds (boneless, trimmed equivalent) per person, only 2 pounds below 1994's record high and 12 pounds above the 1980-84 annual average. Half-pound hamburgers and "value-priced" buckets of fried chicken draw slews of customers to foodservice outlets. Rotisserie chicken and Buffalo wings have become so popular that they have made inroads across the country, even in pizzerias (USDA, 1997).

Ball (2002) also believes "one cannot honestly argue that an animal-free diet is inherently healthier than a well-planned omnivorous diet." Vegan Outreach's other co-founder, Jack Norris, a registered dietitian, cites extensive health-related research and cautions, "Few long-term, scientific studies have looked at true vegans. The research has not overwhelmingly supported the idea that a vegan diet is vastly superior to a diet that includes meat or a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet" (Norris, 2003). Norris points to a study by Key et al. (2003) which examined three prospective studies (those which follow a cohort over time), The Health Food Shoppers Study, Oxford Vegetarian Study (both included about 11,000 participants), and the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition-Oxford (Epic-Oxford) which included about 56,000 participants. Each study attempted to attract "as many vegetarians as possible" and the studies contained 43%, 42%, and 32% vegetarians respectively (p. 536S). The three studies contained a disproportionate number of "health conscious" individuals, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, and in each study, mortality from ischemic heart disease was lower, but not

significantly lower in vegetarians. Key, et al. (2003, 538S) concluded that both the vegetarians and non-vegetarians in the three British studies had lower mortality rates than the national average; vegetarians appear to “have a moderately lower mortality from IHD than the nonvegetarians but that there is little difference in mortality from other major causes of death.”

An in-depth examination of the relationship between diet and health as it relates to heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, food-borne illness (listeria, salmonella, BSE/ Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease), and contaminants (dioxin) follows. While many of these studies are the product of work from respected researchers and institutions, include thousands of participants, and years of tracking it is important to recognize the complexity involved in attempting to parcel out the effects of one’s lifetime eating patterns versus other variables (social, psychological, environmental, spiritual, and occupational); the numerous confounders present in diet studies make definitive claims open to debate. Data will continue to pour in and will add to our knowledgebase. This information is probably more likely to lead to minor revisions than major revision in our thoughts about the diet-health connection since basic nutrition advice had remained mostly the same for decades (Nestle, 2002).

With Willett’s advice in mind, studies with relatively small numbers of participants were mostly excluded, even if they might seem to indicate beneficial outcomes based on vegan or vegetarians diets. For example, while one study (Donaldson, 2001) investigating the Hallelujah diet (nearly a vegan diet with an emphasis on raw food) indicated favorable outcomes for those following the diet, there

were only 141 participants and it is not mentioned in this dissertation except here, as an example. Another study not included indicates lower levels of serum cholesterol (circulating blood cholesterol) among those consuming plant-based diets but it is excluded, except here, because the study involved only 31 vegans (Resnicow, et al., 1991).

Generally it is large, prospective studies, meta-analysis studies (those which combine the results of many studies to better identify trends) that are included. The researcher's voices play a prominent role; their conclusions, in their words, are often cited.

An overview of the health findings related to animal product consumption is written by Hu and Willett (1998, p. 15) in *A Report for the World Bank*:

The effects of animal products on risk of chronic diseases are an area of considerable controversy. Ecological studies tend to suggest positive associations between higher consumption of animal products and risk of heart disease and various cancers across different countries. However, international correlations between per capita food consumption and disease rates are seriously confounded by other lifestyle factors associated with economic affluence.

Hu and Willett (1998, p. 17) focused on heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes and prospective cohort studies because these studies "of individuals, in which diet is assessed prior to the occurrence of disease, are typically considered as the strongest nonrandomized design." Hu and Willett (1998, p. 18), concluded that:

Higher red meat consumption probably increases risk of CHD, colon cancer, and prostate cancer, and possibly breast cancer. However, very low red meat consumption may increase risk of hemorrhagic stroke. Poultry consumption does not appear to be a risk factor for CHD or any forms of cancer. Substitution of poultry for red meat may lower risk of CHD and colon cancer.

### ***Obesity***

Obesity and overweight prevalence is increasing globally in children and adults and there is a general recognition that modification of diet and exercise are important in addressing the epidemic (WHO, 1997). The CDC lists numerous conditions associated with overweight and obesity (Hypertension, dyslipidemia, type II diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, certain cancers such as endometrial, breast, and colon). According to the CDC (2005):

During the past 20 years, obesity among adults has risen significantly in the United States. The latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics show that 30 percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older—over 60 million people—are obese. This increase is not limited to adults. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980. Among children and teens aged 6–19 years, 16 percent (over 9 million young people) are considered overweight.

The young have not been unaffected by the rise in obesity. Various reports show that 11 to 24% of U.S. youth between the ages of 6 and 17 are classified as overweight (Gortmaker, et al., 1987; Troiano & Flegal, 1999). In light of the findings that obese children are more likely to become obese adults (Parsons, et al., 1999) and adult weight loss is largely unsuccessful, 95% of dieters regain lost weight within five years (Leibel, et al., 1995), it is imperative children learn and practice proper nutrition.

It is distressing that children consume about one-third of their calories from “junk food,” including fast-food (Wahl, 1999). Other studies have found that more than one-third of calories come from fat, mostly saturated fat, and 25% of vegetables consumed are in the form of French fries, known to be high in fat, transfatty acids, and to rapidly elevate blood-glucose levels (Krebs-Smith, et al., 1996; Munoz et al., 1997). Meanwhile, about one third of adolescents in a Minnesota study (n=36,284) consumed inadequate amounts of fruits and vegetables (Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 1996). Dietary inadequacies of this sort have been linked with elevated risks for cancers, diabetes, obesity, and other persistent maladies in later life (Temple & Burkitt, 1994).

The potential to reduce the surge in adolescent obesity and the subsequent health perils is possibly the most important topic related to vegetarianism and health. Development of cardiovascular disease due, in part, to the typical adolescent diet is of great concern (Sargent, Kemper, & Schulken, 1994). As reported in *Progress in Pediatric Cardiology* (Berenson and Srinivasan, 2003) 5-15% of children in the U.S. have cholesterol  $\geq 200$  ml/dl. Furthermore, one national study (Strong, et al., 1999) “of post-mortem examinations of 212 adolescents who died between the age of 15 and 19

showed that all of them had aortic lesions. More than half of them had right coronary arteries with lesions that would lead to atherosclerosis” (Schneider, 2000, p. 958).

Heart disease, diabetes, and other physical disorders are not the only problems overweight children face. According to one study (Grantham-McGregor, 2002), “Absenteeism, delayed enrollment, lowered cognitive capacity, and reduced academic achievement are all associated with either an over or under supply of important nutrients” (Galal & Hulett, 2003). Common symptoms of childhood obesity include tiredness, sleep apnea, and attention deficits that hamper academic success (Pinhas-Hamiel & Zeitler, 2000). Any of these problems is cause to reevaluate our nutritional policies and practices; taken together, the need is urgent.

### ***Heart Disease***

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2006) list grim statistics in regards to heart disease:

Heart disease and stroke are the most common cardiovascular diseases.

They are the first and third leading causes of death for both men and women in the United States, accounting for nearly 40% of all annual deaths. More than 910,000 Americans die of cardiovascular diseases each year, which is 1 death every 35 seconds.

“The lifetime risk [of developing coronary heart disease] at age 40 is one in two for men and one in three for women” (Lloyd-Jones, et al., 1999, p. 89). In addition to the premature mortality toll, CVD is a primary cause of disability. “The cost of heart disease



and stroke in the United States is projected to be \$403 billion in 2006, including health care expenditures and lost productivity from death and disability” (CDC, 2006).

And health care costs directly “attributable to meat consumption are estimated to be \$2.8-\$8.5 billion for hypertension, \$9.5 billion for heart disease” and are estimated to total between \$28.6 to \$61.4 billion dollars (Barnard, et al., 1995, p. 646). Between 500,000 and 600,000 bypass surgeries are performed each year in the U.S. (American Heart Association) and this procedure often impairs cognitive function.

Newman, et al. (2001, p. 395) showed that of 261 patients who had coronary-artery bypass grafting (CABG) “the incidence of cognitive decline was 53 percent at discharge, 36 percent at six weeks, 24 percent at six months, and 42 percent at five years.” Cognitive decline was defined as a lessening of 1 standard deviation on at least one of four domains of cognitive function which translates to about a 20% decline in functioning. While heart disease is associated with cognitive decline there is also a relationship between heart disease and sexual dysfunction.

Numerous studies have found a relationship between heart disease and sexual dysfunction (Feldman, et al., 2000; Benet & Melman, 1995; Laumann, et al., 1999; Derby, et al., 2000; Wabrek & Burchell, 1980). Millions of men are affected by erectile dysfunction (ED) (Derby, et al., 2000). The Massachusetts Male Aging Study found that of 513 men with no ED at baseline (1987-1989), men who smoked were nearly twice as likely as non-smokers to suffer moderate or complete ED when interviewed 9-years later (1995-1997) and the authors concluded, “the present analysis produced prospective evidence that ED shares some atherogenic risk factors with coronary heart

disease, including active and passive smoking, overweight, hypertension, and diet” (Feldman, et al., 2000, p. 336). Unsaturated fats in one’s diet showed a slight protective effect while dietary cholesterol and saturated fat increase the risk. While millions are on lipid lowering drugs to reduce their cholesterol level, a systematic review found “both statins and fibrates may cause ED” (Rizvi, et al., 2002, p. 95). Therefore, “Early adoption of healthy lifestyles [not smoking, frequent and vigorous exercise, and lowering cholesterol levels] may be the best approach to reducing the burden of erectile dysfunction on the health and well-being of older men” (Derby, et al., 2000, p. 302).

Cardiologists “know coronary artery disease does not magically appear at age 40, 50, 60, or beyond” (Attwood, 1998, p. 77T). During the Korean War, autopsies of 300 combat casualties or “accidental deaths in front line areas” revealed that “in 77.3% of the hearts, some gross evidence of coronary arteriosclerosis was found” (Enos, et al., 1953, p. 1090). Autopsies of 105 American soldiers killed in Vietnam, with the same mean age of 22.1 years as those examined in Korea, found 45% of those killed to have “some evidence of atherosclerosis”; a significantly lower incidence than found in Korea (McNamara, et al., 1971, p. 1185).

The Bogalusa Heart Study which has followed over 16,000 individuals for over 25 years has shown that “autopsy studies in youth from Bogalusa have provided the most compelling evidence that an unusually high prevalence (90%) of coronary atherosclerosis occurs by the third decade of life” (Berenson, 2002, p. 4L). Greater than seventy percent of adults in the United States have coronary atherosclerosis (Berenson, et al., 1998). Results from Bogalusa also showed that based upon 24-hour dietary recalls

from 504 youth, ages 19 to 28, those in the lowest 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of meat consumption ate closest to dietary recommendations for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, protein, and carbohydrate. However, even among this relatively low meat-consuming group, close to 60% exceeded the current total fat recommendation of less than 30% of calories (Nicklas, et al., 1995).

Despite the fact that “the disease has a natural history in this country beginning during early childhood and progressing unrecognized for several decades to its often final and unexpected endpoint of chest pain, disability, or premature death,” low-fat diets for children are not promoted by most pediatricians and dietitians (Attwood, 1998, p. 77T). Attwood (1998) believes at least 12 persistent myths explain why a low-fat, plant-based diet is not more enthusiastically promoted to youth. The first myth is that controlling cholesterol can wait until adulthood. Attwood believes controlling obesity cannot wait, and that the taste/preference for fat can be diminished or abolished by abstinence. In addition, Attwood posits advice to consume  $\leq 30\%$  of calories from fat as not providing sufficient protection against atherogenesis. The promotion of low-fat diets should not be avoided “for fear of ‘discouraging’ the public,” and the evidence is overwhelming that “a low-fat, high fiber diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes is the natural diet and healthy diet for the human race” and represents “the Gold Standard Diet, by which all others must be measured” (Attwood, 1998, p. 77T-79T). He takes issue with government and non-profit organizations which take an approach that amounts to: “We don’t think highly of your ability to make radical, but effective changes; try to improve a little bit.”

While medicine examines three types of risk (relative, absolute, and attributable), Castelli (1998), former director of The Framingham Heart Study, believes attributable risk (the percentage of events in a population group) is the most important. He points out that The Framingham Heart Study showed that 90 out of 100 individuals with total cholesterol levels above 300 would develop coronary artery disease within 26 years. It might, therefore, seem logical to focus attention on this high (absolute) risk group. However, those with cholesterol levels above 300 represent only 3% of the population. So, while the relative risk is great for this group, they do not contribute nearly as much to the overall attributable risk. Those with cholesterol levels between 150 and 200 mg/dl, in the so called “normal” range, have a 20 out of 100 absolute risk. However, because this group accounts for 45% of the population they represent 35% of coronary artery disease cases. In terms of attributable risk, 225 mg/dl is the worst due to the convergence of a high proportion of the population having this level of cholesterol and the 40/100 absolute rate (Castelli, 1988; Castelli, 1998).

It is interesting that in the American Heart Association (AHA) 63-page document titled, “Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2005 Update” the words *vegetarian*, *vegan*, and *plant* (based diet) do not appear. However, “transplant” occurred 12-times. While at the 2005 Vegetarian Summer Festival I overheard someone refer to the AHA as the American Heart Attack Association apparently because they do not promote plant-based diets strongly enough, nor are their cholesterol recommendations in line with our knowledge of attributable risk. The AHA indicates as “desirable” cholesterol levels less than 200 mg/dl – a level at which attributable risk is high (Castelli, 1998).

Castelli stated that in central China 125 mg/dl is “the average cholesterol level, and the rate of coronary heart disease is zero, the rate of diabetes is zero. There is no obesity because the people can’t eat high-fat meats and dairy that get us into trouble in this country” (Voelker, 1998, p.1241). Castelli (1998, p. 64T) believes management of a patient’s LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels can be done “with diet plus drug therapy, but if you can do it with a vegetarian diet, it works even better” and “it won’t be long before patients with symptoms tell you how much better they feel.”

Esselstyn (1999, p. 341), retired surgeon from the Cleveland Clinic wrote, “Despite the benefits of a low-fat diet and of low lipid levels, the American Heart Association, the National Research Council, and the National Cholesterol Education Program recommend a 30% threshold for fat calories in the diet and a total cholesterol not >200 mg/dl. But coronary artery disease develops and progresses with these guidelines, condemning millions of Americans to this epidemic.”

In a previous paper in *The American Journal of Cardiology*, Esselstyn and Favaloro wrote “Only through preventive strategies can we eliminate and delay chronic diseases” (Esselstyn, 1998, p. 7T). He blamed the U.S. diet for “the bitter harvest” of myriad diseases and noted that “the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a great step backward in nutrition. Millions of years of evolution have not designed our species to consume the modern Western diet” (p. 7T).

The China Study, a comprehensive study that examined the relationship between diet and over 50 diseases and included data from 65 counties and 130 villages (50 adults per village) in China, found that the consumption of fat was less than half the

U.S. intake while fiber was 300% greater. For participants ages 20-74, mean serum cholesterol among rural Chinese was about 63% of the U.S. average (127 mg/dl versus 203 mg/dl). “Animal protein intake was very low, only about 10% of the US intake.... Coronary artery disease mortality was 16.7-fold greater for US men and 5.6-fold greater for US women than for their Chinese counterparts” (Campbell, et al, 1998, p. 18T). They concluded that

A diet comprising a variety of good-quality plant-based foods yields the lowest disease rates. Second, there is no evidence of a threshold beyond which further benefits do not accrue with increasing proportions of plant-based foods in the diet. Our study results have convinced us that consumption of a low-fat, plant-based diet can prevent and reverse a wide variety of chronic degenerative diseases (Campbell, et al., 1998, p. 21T).

Esselstyn has shown that a low-fat, nearly vegan diet alone can reverse heart disease. He wrote, “In this study, patients become virtually heart-attack proof. We achieved these excellent results without structured exercise, meditation, stress management, and other lifestyle changes” (Esselstyn, 1999, p. 339). And Ornish (1998, p. 74T) found that after 3 years, 150 out of 194 patients “were able to avoid revascularization” and of those who reported angina at the start of the study “61% had no chest pain during the prior 30 days after 3 years.”

Does one need to adopt a vegan diet in order to be achieve optimal vascular protection? Due to the complexities involved in nutrition research, the answer is not

entirely clear. It may be true that a well-planned, omnivorous diet offers similar cardio-protective benefits, but when one considers the Western dietary pattern which includes consumption of large amounts of fat, saturated fat, meat, and refined carbohydrates and the “overwhelming evidence” that this diet “plays a major role in atherogenesis” a shift towards a plant-based diet would be beneficial (Gaziano & Manso, 1996). For many Americans who eat the standard American diet, eating a well-planned, omnivorous diet low in saturated fat would almost necessitate this very shift towards a more plant-based diet. My conclusions are in line with an editorial in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition in which Spiller and Bruce (1998) wrote, “as the risks of protein and B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can be easily prevented with minimal knowledge, there appears to be a clear advantage in moving toward a vegan diet or at least a diet based on plant food” (p. 407).

Hu and Willett (2002) examined 147 original studies and reviews of metabolic studies, epidemiologic studies, and dietary intervention trials of diet and coronary heart disease and concluded,

...evidence is now clear that diets including non-hydrogenated unsaturated fats as the predominant form of dietary fat, whole grains as the main form of carbohydrate, and abundance of fruits and vegetables, and adequate omega-3 fatty acids (from fish or plant sources) can offer significant protection against CHD (p. 2575)

The Healthy Eating Pyramid (2001) can be found on the Internet or in Willett's *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy* (2001) book. Willett states that one advantage he had over the creators of the USDA Pyramid is that he didn't have to contend with special

interest groups and therefore he asserts the Healthy Eating Pyramid is less biased; based more on science, less on politics.

The literature review on heart disease is intentionally more extensive than other health-related sections because heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, and because of all the health-related claims made about plant-based diets reducing the incidence of disease (heart disease, obesity, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and cancer) the evidence is strongest for a the cardio-protective effect of a plant-based diet (Hu & Willett, 1998; Hu & Willett, 2002; Campbell, T., et al., 1998).

### ***Cancer***

Cancer, the second leading cause of death in the United States, represents another set of diseases that frightens many people. However, there is evidence that diet can play a role in reducing the risk for this dreaded disease. Studies have shown that vegetarians have lower cancer mortality rates than non-vegetarians (Key, et al., 1999; Fraser, 1999). However, as was noted in the discussion about heart disease, some large studies investigating mortality rates have not found an increase in cancer mortality rates due to consuming animal products; one study showed that among healthy participants, vegetarians actually had slightly higher cancer mortality rates, but lower circulatory-related mortality rates (Key, et al., 2003).

When a person is not gaining or losing weight they are in “energy balance” and “energy balance may be the most important nutritional predictor for cancer development” (Michels, 2005a, p. 665). Michels points out that “the generally small or



modest associations between diet and cancer... could be the result of confounding by other lifestyle factors" (p. 665). Michels notes that

Individuals who consume an abundance of fruit and vegetables, choose whole grains and avoid animal products likely follow a healthy lifestyle in general and thus differ in many other aspects from individuals whose diet consists largely of meat, saturated and trans fats, refined carbohydrates and sugars (p. 665).

Studies have found that cooking meat at high temperatures produces carcinogenic compounds such as heterocyclic amines or HAA's (Sinha, et al., 2001; Klassen, 2002; Ferguson, 2002; Sinha, 2002) and is associated with an increased risk of colorectal adenomas and cancer risk (Sinha, et al., 2001; Navarro, 2004). HAA's have been shown to be potent mutagens and are found in cooked food. High levels are produced "during high temperature cooking of protein-rich foods such as meats and fish" (Klassen, et al., p. 837, 2002). Commonly, frying, oven broiling, grilling, and barbecuing create very high levels of HAA's while microwave oven or boiling in water creates none. "The main precursors for HAA's in foods are creatinine, which is present in meats and fish in high concentrations, and various amino acids and sugars" (Klassen, et al., p. 837, 2002). Anderson, et al. concluded "grilled red meat intake is a risk factor for pancreatic cancer and the method of meat preparation in addition to total intake is important in assessing the effects of meat consumption" (2002, p. 225). Pancreatic cancer appears to be influenced by diet, but due to the lack of studies that accurately

measure food intake throughout life definitive statements about risk related to diet cannot be made (Lowenfels & Maisonneuve, 2005).

Many studies and researchers implicate meat in the development of breast, colon, and prostate cancer (Gronberg, H., 2003; Slattery, et al., 2002; Donaldson, 2004) and numerous studies suggest certain plant foods reduce the risk of certain cancers (Hodge, et al., 2004; Bosetti, et al., 2004; Fowke, et al., 2000; Frazier, et al., 2003; Frazier, et al., 2004; Jansen, M., et al., 2004). In a review of 206 human epidemiologic studies and 22 animal studies Steinmetz and Potter found “evidence for a protective effect of greater vegetable and fruit consumption is consistent for cancers of the stomach, esophagus, lung, oral cavity, and pharynx, endometrium, pancreas, and colon” (1996, p. 1027). Another review of epidemiological studies revealed “a statistically significant protective effect of fruit and vegetable consumption... in 128 of 156 dietary studies in which results were expressed in terms of relative risk” and those in the lowest quarter of fruit and vegetable intake “experience about twice the risk of cancer compared with those with high intake, even after controlling for confounding factors” (Block, Patterson, and Subar, 1992, p. 18). The authors conclude, “It would appear that major public health benefits could be achieved by substantially increasing consumption of these foods” (p. 1).

Other studies indicate dairy products increase the risk of prostate cancer (Qin, et al., 2004; Bosetti, et al., 2004) and may play a role breast cancer development (Michels & Willett, 2004). Dagnelie, et al. (2004), in a review of 37 prospective cohort studies, found animal products had little impact on prostate cancer risk, but high calcium intake

was positively correlated with an increased risk. Michels and Willett note that “milk has been hypothesized to be a factor in the rapid changes in growth among Japanese girls, in part because of its protein content, but also because of its high content of anabolic hormones” (2004, p. 1681), and insulin-like growth factor 1 is raised by milk consumption and has been associated with high stature (Hope, et al., 2004). Michels and Willett (2004) point out that high stature is a risk factor for breast cancer along with rapid growth during the ages of 8 and 14. Vegetarianism has also been associated with a decreased risk of breast cancer (Dos Santo-Silva, et al., 2002).

Fung, et al. (2005 p. 120) did not find an overall increased risk of breast cancer associated with a Western dietary pattern. “However, a Western dietary pattern may increase breast cancer risk among smokers.” Stoll (1998, p. 190) argues that a “Western diet favours earlier onset of menarche and also earlier manifestation of hyperinsulinaemic insulin resistance” both of which “are risk markers for breast cancer in women.”

Mazhar and Waxman (2004, p. 921) recognize that in regards to prostate cancer, “some of the data are conflicting” and “we are not at a stage where we can justifiably advise patients to reduce their fat intake and thus reduce their the chances of them developing prostate cancer,” but they assert that changes that might reduce prostate cancer risk, such as reducing animal fat, may also help in reducing CVD risk. Assessing the impact of animal products, Hu and Willett (1998) in their report to the World Bank wrote:

It is inappropriate to equate the health effects of livestock products to those of tobacco products. Tobacco use is an established cause of many chronic diseases and it has no counterbalancing beneficial effects. But animal products can provide many beneficial nutrients when consumed in small to moderate quantity (p. 21).

Cancer development is influenced by many variables and not all are completely understood at this time. However, a vegetarian diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, grain, legumes, and nuts provides the essential micronutrients and phytochemicals that bestow cancer protection (Levin, 1999). In other words, it provides a positive, life-extending quality to a person's diet while it eliminates the negative, life-taking quality associated with high-fat, low nutrient-density fare.

### ***Pollution***

According to a late 2006 United Nations (FAO, 2006) news release titled *Livestock a major threat to environment*, urgent action is needed to avert a global warming crisis. The article begins with a question and answer:

Which causes more greenhouse gas emissions, rearing cattle or driving cars? Surprise! According to a new report published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent – 18 percent – than transport. It is also a major source of land and water degradation.

The news release conveniently summarizes the 408-page UN report titled, *Livestock's long shadow: Environmental issues and options*. Unfortunately, the summary reveals that the situation will likely worsen before it improves (FAO, 2006). The rate of growth of the animal agriculture industry is enormous, but this growth comes at the expense of the environment. According to the actual FAO report:

Growing populations and incomes, along with changing food preferences, are rapidly increasing the demand for livestock products....Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tonnes in 1999/2001 to 465 million tonnes in 2050, and that of milk to grow from 580 to 1043 million tonnes. The environmental costs per unit of livestock production must be cut by one half, just to avoid the level of damage worsening beyond its present level (Steinfeld, et al., 2006, p. xx).

The report warns that, "The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global.... The impact is so significant that it needs to be addressed with urgency" (Steinfeld, et al., 2006, p. xx).

Included in the summary is truly troubling news: emissions from the livestock sector while only accounting for nine percent of CO<sub>2</sub> deriving from human-related activities, the emissions produce "a much larger share of even more harmful greenhouse gases. It generates 65 percent of human-related nitrous oxide, which has 296 times the Global Warming Potential (GWP) of CO<sub>2</sub>. Most of this comes from manure" (FAO, 2006). The emissions also account for "respectively 37 percent of all

human-induced methane (23 times as warming as CO<sub>2</sub>), which is largely produced by the digestive system of ruminants, and 64 percent of ammonia, which contributes significantly to acid rain.” The summary contains more troubling news:

Livestock now use 30 percent of the earth’s entire land surface, mostly permanent pasture but also including 33 percent of the global arable land used to producing feed for livestock, the report notes. As forests are cleared to create new pastures, it is a major driver of deforestation, especially in Latin America where, for example, some 70 percent of former forests in the Amazon have been turned over to grazing.

And the environmental hits keep coming:

The livestock business is among the most damaging sectors to the earth’s increasingly scarce water resources, contributing among other things to water pollution, eutrophication and the degeneration of coral reefs. The major polluting agents are animal wastes, antibiotics and hormones, chemicals from tanneries, fertilizers and the pesticides used to spray feed crops. Widespread overgrazing disturbs water cycles, reducing replenishment of above and below ground water resources. Significant amounts of water are withdrawn for the production of feed. Meat and dairy animals now account for about 20 percent of all terrestrial animal biomass. Livestock’s presence in vast tracts of land and its demand for feed crops also contribute to biodiversity loss; 15 out of 24 important

ecosystem services are assessed as in decline, with livestock identified as a culprit.

The report suggests the need for policy makers to see to it that producers incur the real costs of production so that the negative externalities associated with animal agriculture are paid for. Why this is not happening can partially be explained by ignorance. The report states, "Civil society seems to have an inadequate understanding of the scope of the problem. Perhaps even among the majority of the environmentalists and environmental policy-makers, the truly enormous impact of the livestock sector on climate, biodiversity, and water is not fully appreciated." (Steinfeld, et al., 2006, p. 282)

Although the extent of environmental damage may be seriously underappreciated, it is widely recognized that animal production practices create environmental pollution problems in the United States and globally (Novotny, 1999; Williams, 1995; Schlosser, 2001). But there is another problem associated with animal agriculture that has only recently been identified.

The concept that animal excreta is a pollutant has arisen only in the past 20 years. Previously the term manure was used to describe excreta which was predominantly used to fertilize the land. The change from fertilizer to pollutant occurred as systems of animal production intensified and the composition of animal feedstuffs has diversified (Williams, 1995, p. 135).

A U.S. News and World Report article, *Going to waste?* noted:

America has a manure problem. No, no, real manure. "Production" of the inevitable byproduct of meat, eggs, and milk runs to about 160 million

tons per year. And as the family farm has given way to industrial agriculture, the humble dung heap has morphed into vast manure lagoons, lake-size impoundments of excreta that can threaten the environment and offend suburban neighbors (Hayden, 2003, p. 50).

Williams notes that the consumer's perception of farmers changed between 1985 and 1995 "from being the guardian of the countryside and the supplier of quality food to a person they distrust and hold in suspicion" in part because of news stories related to "saturated fats and coronary heart disease, mad cow syndrome, salmonellae contamination of feed, abuse of growth promoters and also a concern of the consumer for animal welfare" and the fact that pollution is often related to agriculture (Williams, 1995, p. 142).

Diffuse pollution is a harmful, unintended consequence of production, also known as a negative externality. Other costs included loss of resources, such as top soil and the "overuse and misuse of land" and these outcomes provide the rationale for viewing sustainable agricultural practices that limit diffuse pollution as "an urgent goal" (Novotny, 1999, p.10).

Despite the overpowering odor that intensive feeding operations produce, in places such as southwestern Kansas "odor is an accepted aspect of cattle raising" and "the long history and importance of cattle in the area has counteracted any local problems with the 'smell.' Locals sometimes refer to feedlot odors as 'the smell of money'" (Harrington & Lu, 2002, p. 273).



Hopefully, developing countries will hear and heed the warnings that industrial agriculture is not the answer to their growing need for food, and not come to associate manure with money. In the journal *Livestock Production Science*, Hodges (2005, p. 1) cautions developing countries against attempting to duplicate the Western model of food production:

Feeding the world requires local, national, and global solutions in view of the expected world population of 10 billion by 2050.... Today almost half the world population lives on two dollars a day or less and although poor, most are not hungry.... However, the current paradigm of producing ever cheaper food in the West is found to be increasingly unsustainable and, if introduced globally, will create a variety of instabilities. A policy of feeding the growing cities of the developing world with imported Western food would remove domestic markets from poor farmers and would risk large-scale famine when global food trade breaks down. The only sustainable alternative is to empower poor farmers.... To achieve this aim the Western concept of cheap food needs replacement by a new paradigm emphasizing quality of life.

### ***Contrary Evidence***

The low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet is often thought of as largely a plant-based diet and one which has the potential to curb heart disease rates. Ravnskov (2002, p. 1060), after reviewing epidemiologic and experimental studies of diet and heart disease, concluded that “almost all studies were inconclusive or, indeed, flatly contradictory”

and, he believes, “high cholesterol has been found to be predictive of CHD in many studies” because “the true causes of CHD” such as stress, physical inactivity, and smoking “may also raise cholesterol.” Weinberg (2004) has also questioned the “diet-heart hypothesis” and attempted to raise doubt about the merits of a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet, arguing that the trend in obesity turned upward about the time low-fat foods started to proliferate and that a study (Westman, Yancy, & Guyton, 2002) which showed that a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet led to (short-term) improvement in serum cholesterol, body weight, and low-density lipoproteins was largely dismissed by the medical community. However, Baschetti (2004, p. 1934) responded by pointing out that for most (99%) of human history humans have evolved subsisting on a diet of mainly fruits and vegetables and with little fat “because game was very lean and cattle-breeding, chicken farming, butter, dairy products, margarines, and oils did not exist.” Furthermore, Baschetti writes “Weinberg fails to note that coronary heart disease and type II diabetes were virtually absent in some traditional populations that ate mainly carbohydrates and consumed two to three or even five times less fat than Westerners” (p. 1935). He makes two additional important points. First, “As evidence that the diet-heart hypothesis is correct, those populations, after their switch to Western diets, are currently facing epidemics of cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, and obesity” and second, most of the studies Weinberg referred to “investigated the effects of diets that were called ‘low-fat’ inappropriately” considering some defined low-fat as a diet containing 31% fat whereas the “evolutionarily defined low-fat diet provided only 10% of calories from fat” (p. 1935). What both authors failed

to note is that while the “eat low-fat” message has been advanced during the time in which obesity rates have increased dramatically, the actual consumption of fat has not decreased in accord with the recommendations. Americans, consume, on average 33% of calories from fat, with 11 percent of calories coming from saturated fat – one percent above the maximum recommended percent for saturated fat (CDC). This is not a low-fat diet. Additionally, since the 1970’s the number of calories Americans consume has increased (Nestle, 2002). American males average about 2,475 calories daily and females 1,833 (CDC, 2000).

So, while nutrition surveys showed fat as a percentage of calories has been decreasing – fat contributed 40 percent of calories in the 1977-78 survey, 36 percent in the 1987-88 survey, 34 percent in the 1989-91 survey and indicate “we're making progress, our diets are still higher in fat than the 30 percent or less recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, issued by USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services” (USDA, 1995). The United States Department of Agriculture (2005), in their Dietary Guidelines for Americans, condones higher levels of fat consumption than do those whose main focus is prevention of heart disease (Esselstyn, 1999; Esselstyn & Favaloro, 1998; Ornish, 1996; Ornish, 1998). The executive summary of the Dietary Guidelines states:

Total fat intake of 20 to 35 percent of calories is recommended for all Americans age 18 years or older. Intakes of fat outside of this range are not recommended for most Americans because of potential adverse effects on achieving recommended nutrient intakes and on risk factors

for chronic diseases. The *lower* limit of fat intake is higher for children: 30 percent of calories from fat for children age 2 and 3 years, and 25 percent of calories from fat for those age 4 to 18 years.

An area of potential concern for vegetarians is homocysteine levels. The relationship between homocysteine and cobalamin status in German vegans was investigated because cobalamin, a vitamin, is essentially absent in plant foods and cobalamin is one risk factor involved in hyperhomocysteinaemia. Elevated homocysteine “is considered to be an independent risk factor for vascular diseases of the coronary, cerebral, and peripheral arteries” (Waldmann, et al., 2003, p. 467). One study of 45 vegetarian subjects (31 who were vegan) found a greater prevalence of hyperhomocysteinemia among vegetarians than in the non-vegetarian control group (53.3% vs. 10.3%) which may have been due, in part, to having lower levels of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (Bissoli, L., et al., 2002). In the German Vegan Study (n=131), the researchers found that 28% of the participants had inadequate cobalamin status and 38% had hyperhomocysteinaemia. Strict vegans were affected more than “moderate” vegans (those who consumed a maximum of 5% of daily calories from dairy or eggs). The authors conclude that “even a small amount of food of animal origin can improve cobalamin and homocysteine status. In order to minimize the risk of cobalamin deficiency and hyperhomocysteinaemia, regular supplementation of cobalamin in the nationally recommended amount should be considered by strict and moderate vegans” (Waldmann, et al., 2003, p. 470). However, it is important to note that DeRose, et al.

(2000) found that a vegan diet-based lifestyle program rapidly lowered homocysteine levels after only one week.

Disordered eating is another area of concern related to consuming a vegetarian diet (Martins & Pliner, 1999; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1997; Gildody, et al., 1998; McLean & Barr, 2003). Worsley and Skrzypiec (1997, p. 402) wrote that “Vegetarianism among teenage women.... is largely a female phenomenon, and highly self oriented.... [and] appears to be linked to... eating disorders.” According to the National Eating Disorders Association (2007).

Nearly 10 million women and up to 1 million boys and men in the United States suffer from anorexia or bulimia. But, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Many millions more suffer from sub-clinical forms of the diseases.

Given that there is evidence of disordered eating among those eating a vegetarian diet, with some using a vegetarian diet to conceal eating disorders, it would be wise to at least consider the possibility that one consuming a vegetarian diet, especially if the person is a teenage female, may be eating in a way that is not supportive of health. For others, though they are pursuing health, they take a path that ultimately has unintended or unrecognized consequences.

Orthorexia nervosa, a fixation on eating healthy food, is a recently coined term by Bratman (2000) who posits that for some individuals, healthy eating crosses a line which detracts from a quality life, and is itself a form of disordered eating. He writes that “life is too short to spend it all thinking about how to live longer.... You can throw

away your life trying to save it” (p. 19). Bratman did it for years while feeling “full of self-congratulation, full of superiority for those wretches out there eating the wrong food, all the while making [his] own life empty and meaningless” (p. 19). He notes that it is “the quality of obsession that defines orthorexia”; it is “the absence of moderation, the loss of perspective and balance, the transfer of too much of life’s meaning onto food” (p. 23).

Schaler (2000) believes addictions reflect choices people make about what they are committed or devoted to and that nearly any behavior could become an “addiction” in the sense that individuals will pursue the addictive behavior to the detriment of other aspects of their life. Addictions are what one is committed to and passionate about – it may involve a lover, a profession, a hobby, or drug. Which passion one pursues makes all the difference.

Addictions are indispensable. Addictions - and only addictions - can open us up to all that makes life rich and fulfilling. Yet addictions can also have appalling consequences. The conclusion is clear: choose your addictions very carefully! Nothing is more vital for a young person than to select the right addictions. Addictions we approve of are called ‘virtues’. Addictions we disapprove of are called ‘vices.’ (Schaler, 2000, p. xiv).

There are other reasons for pursuing vegetarianism; controlling one’s weight is one of them. Perry and McGuire (2001) sought to investigate the characteristics of vegetarian adolescents in a multiethnic population. The researchers concluded that semi-vegetarians may be experimenting with vegetarianism as a means of weight

control. An adolescent who adopts a semi-vegetarian diet, especially as a means of weight control, the authors note, should probably receive nutritional counseling to help insure unhealthy practices are not occurring.

The bone status of vegans has been questioned due to the low bioavailability of calcium from certain plant foods (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000). Because of the low bioavailability of calcium it is considered difficult for an individual to obtain the recommended intake of calcium without taking a supplement or consuming fortified foods. However, the consumption of low amounts of protein and the intake of soy products may be conducive to bone health (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000). Fracture and bone-mineral density studies will need to be conducted that compare vegans to lacto-ovo vegetarians and omnivores (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000).

Protein and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiencies are two nutritional problems that are often mentioned in relation to a vegetarian diet. Protein derived from plant sources must be combined in order to form a complete protein (i.e. whole grains combined with beans or nuts) whereas meat products do not have to be combined. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is found mostly in animal products and a deficiency can pose a risk to an uninformed vegan. However, eating a well-balanced, whole-foods diet, taking a vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplement along with minimal dietary knowledge will eliminate these potential problems (Editorial, 1998).

One of the most prevalent nutritional deficiencies among children (and women of reproductive age) is iron deficiency. Severe anemia increases the risk of childhood mortality, while mild to moderate anemia is linked to cognitive difficulties and impaired immune function (Neumann et al., 2002). In a study of nearly 400 British adolescents

between 12 and 14 years old, vegetarians had a greater incidence of anemia than the general population (Nelson, 1996). Anemia may affect mental and physical ability. One study of almost 600 eleven to eighteen year old females, found those who had poor iron status scored significantly lower on IQ tests than those with borderline or good levels of iron. Consultation with a physician or nutritionist regarding eating iron-fortified foods or taking iron-containing vitamin pills should be encouraged.

Omega-3 fatty acids (eicosapentaenoic acid, docosahexaenoic acid, and  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid) are recognized to be important for human health, especially in the prevention of heart disease and diabetes, due to their “anti-inflammatory, anti-thrombotic, antiarrhythmic, hypolipidemic, and vasodilatory properties” (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000, p. 532). The authors note that “A vegetarian diet does not have a direct source of eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid and relies on the ability of the desaturase enzyme system to convert  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA) to the long chain  $\omega$ -3 polyunsaturated fatty acids” (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000, p. 532). While plant-derived ALA (i.e. nuts), has been shown to have hypolipidemic effects (Kris-Etherton, et al., 1999) “it is not clear whether ALA can bring about other cardioprotective effects” (Rajaram & Sabate, 2000, p. 532). Further research is needed to determine the efficacy of plant-derived sources of omega-3 fatty acids as compared to marine sources. It may turn out that any increased benefit conferred by the consumption of marine sources over plant-based sources is outweighed by the risk of mercury and other toxins found in many marine sources.



### ***Health Conclusion***

A shift towards a diet consisting mostly or exclusively of plant-foods is in accord with an article examining optimal diets for the prevention and treatment of heart disease in which the authors wrote, “we believe it is prudent to consume a Satvik diet [a plant-based diet mentioned in the ancient Indian scriptures which “is peaceful and most optimal for optimal health”], which emphasizes fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals, and nuts” (Chahoud, Aude, and Mehta, 2004, p. 1265). A study of nearly 35,000 Seventh-day Adventists, about half of whom ate little or no meat, found that “vegetarians are healthier than nonvegetarians but this cannot be ascribed to only the absence of meat” because although “vegetarians had lower risks of obesity, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, colon cancer, prostate cancer, fatal IHD in males, and death from all causes” it is “important to note that vegetarians may have lower disease risk because of their lack of meat consumption, but it is equally possible that this protection could be due to increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, or nut” (Fraser, 1999. p. 532S; 536S). Considering many individuals consume small quantities of fruits and vegetables, especially adolescents (Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 1996), promoting greater fruit and vegetable consumption is warranted.

While the current evidence may not clearly indicate that consuming a plant-based diet is superior in terms of health or longevity when compared to a well-planned, omnivorous diet which is low in saturated fat and high in fiber, Americans are consuming more animal products and this amounts to an ongoing experiment in which the results of this dietary pattern may not be fully recognized for decades. An example

of how recent changes in diet could impact health can be found in an article examining arsenic concentrations in chicken that reports, “arsenic is an approved animal dietary supplement” and is a frequently used additive used in the feed of broiler chickens “to control coccidial intestinal parasites” (Lasky, Sun, Kadry, & Hoffman, 2004, p. 18). The authors point out that human exposure to arsenic is associated with numerous cancers, hypertension, and fetal mortality among other ailments. The results of their study lead them to conclude that since chicken consumption has nearly tripled since 1966 and “arsenic concentrations in young chickens may be approximately 3-fold greater than in other meat and poultry products” it may be important to “review assumptions regarding overall ingested arsenic intake” (Lasky, et al., 2004, p. 20). This article and another detailing the chemical applications that are used to deal with the numerous infestations that plague modern poultry production, such as “mites, lice, bedbugs, fleas, and soft ticks” along with “darkling beetles, (‘litter beetles’), flies, moths, cockroaches, and rodents (mice and rats)” (Axtel, 1999, p. 53) would seem to justify concern regarding the standard practices used in producing factory farmed chickens and their implications for health. One example might illustrate the concern induced by these chemical applications, especially if it is viewed from a holistic health perspective:

Fowl mites are common on chickens, turkeys, and all kinds of wild birds....

When an infestation is found, chemical spraying with high pressure is the common practice. However, it is difficult to achieve control due to poor penetration of the feathers and a second application is necessary (Axtell, 1999, p. 57).

Considering the often stomach-turning details of factory farming practices and the wealth of information that indicates Americans need to consume more fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, and nuts, and less saturated fat (which is mostly found in animal products), it seems there are compelling reasons for movement in the direction of a vegetarian or vegan diet when simply considering the nutrient-based arguments for a plant-based diet. However, when one considers the other health-related reasons involved in eating animal products (worker safety, food poisoning and contamination, sustainability issues, environmental destruction, mad cow disease, and antibiotic resistance) and combines them with the animal welfare, animal rights, and moral or philosophical arguments for avoiding the consumption of animal sources of food, the case for this shift towards an animal-product-free diet is strengthened.

### **Psychology of Animal Product Consumption**

What explains why people eat animal flesh? Why do most Americans consume chickens, turkeys, pigs and cows, but not dogs, cats, or monkeys each of whom are eaten in other parts of the world? Are individuals aware that an animal was sacrificed for their meal, or do they somehow suppress this knowledge? Do humans think of meat as the flesh of an animal? If not, why not? Is a slab of cow muscle, packaged in cellophane and sold as steak, thought of as something not much different than an apple or a slice of bread? When a person eats the wings from chickens, do they consider and visualize the live bird from which it came, the life it led, and the murder that took place to place it on their plate, or is it simply “food?” What psychological processes allow

humans to eat something that was a former sentient, emotion-possessing being? What are the psychic consequences, if any, of consuming animal's bodies?

Dissonance theory may have explanatory powers equal to the difficulty of these questions. Harmon-Jones and Mills (1999, p. 3) explain Festinger's dissonance theory (1957): If cognitions ("elements of knowledge") "are relevant to one another, they are either consonant or dissonant. Two cognitions are consonant if one follows from the other, and they are dissonant if the obverse (opposite) of one cognition follows from the other." When one's cognitions are dissonant, psychological discomfort is produced and "motivates the person to reduce the dissonance and leads to avoidance of information likely to increase dissonance. The greater the magnitude of the dissonance, the greater is the pressure to reduce dissonance" (p. 3).

Dissonance may be reduced in three ways: "By changing one or more of the elements involved in dissonant relations. By adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with already existing cognition. By decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relations" (Festinger, 1957, p. 264). In real situations:

Postdecision dissonance may be reduced by increasing the attractiveness of the chosen alternative, decreasing the attractiveness of the unchosen alternatives, or both.... Postdecision dissonance may be reduced by decreasing the importance of various aspects of the decision.... The presence of dissonance leads to seeking new information which will provide cognitions consonant with existing cognitive elements and to avoiding those sources of new information which would be likely to

increase the existing dissonance.... Forced or accidental exposure to new information which tends to increase dissonance will frequently result in misinterpretation and misperception of the new information by the person thus exposed in an effort to avoid a dissonance increase.... The existence of dissonance will lead to seeking out others who already agree with a cognition that one wants to establish or maintain and will also lead to the initiation of communication and influence processes in an effort to obtain more social support. (Festinger, 1957, p. 264-265)

Dissonance theory has been used to explain meat eating (Joy, 2002). According to Festinger's theory if two meat-eating individuals watched a film about factory farming practices during which they learned about the suffering endured by animals raised for food, yet simultaneously, if they found the beliefs "I need meat to survive" and "I love the taste of meat" difficult to give up then they would be driven to find social support to minimize the magnitude of the dissonance they were experiencing. The dissonance in this case might be created by the polarity of the cognitions: "I'm a good person" and "eating meat supports a cruel practice."

According to Aronson (1999, p. 180), "Most people are motivated to justify their own actions, beliefs, and feelings. When they do something, they will try, if at all possible, to convince themselves (and others) that it was a logical, reasonable, thing to do." Aronson uses the example of smoking. He postulates that if someone smokes, and hence has the cognition, "I smoke cigarettes" and then reads a report that indicates smoking causes cancer and respiratory diseases, leading to the cognition, "cigarette

smoking causes cancer” the “most efficient way for this person to reduce dissonance... is to give up smoking. The cognition ‘cigarette smoking produces cancer’ is consonant with the cognition ‘I do not smoke’” (p. 183). But what, if like many people, the person is “unable” to quit smoking? In this case “Sally” might:

try to work on the other cognition.... She might try to convince herself that the experimental evidence is inconclusive. In addition, she might seek out intelligent people who smoke and, by so doing, convince herself that if Debbie, Nicole, and Larry smoke, it can’t be all that dangerous. Sally might switch to a filter-tipped brand and delude herself into believing that the filter traps the cancer-producing materials. Finally, she might add cognitions that are consonant with smoking in an attempt to make the behavior less absurd in spite of its danger. Thus, Sally might enhance the value placed on smoking; that is, she might come to believe smoking is an important and highly enjoyable activity that is essential for relaxation: “I may lead a shorter life, but it will be a more enjoyable one.” Similarly, she might try to make a virtue out of smoking by developing a romantic, devil-may-care self-image, flouting danger by smoking cigarettes. All such behavior reduces dissonance by reducing the absurdity of the notion of going out of one’s way to contract cancer (Aronson, 1999, p. 183).

Aronson also discusses the importance of self-consistency as it relates to dissonance. Individuals want to see themselves as being good people who do not cause

harm. Additionally, Aronson states that people strive to be right and this “motivates people to pay close attention to what other people are doing and to heed the advice of expert, trustworthy communicators. This is extremely rational behavior” (p. 185).

However:

The theory of cognitive dissonance does not picture people as rational beings; rather it pictures them as rationalizing beings. According to the underlying assumptions of the theory, we humans are motivated not so much to be right as to believe we are right (and wise, and decent, and good). Sometimes, our motivation to be right and our motivation to believe we are right work in the same direction.... Occasionally, however, the need to reduce dissonance (the need to convince oneself that one is right or good) leads to behavior that is maladaptive and therefore irrational (p. 185).

“If people are committed to an attitude” and if “the information the communicator presents arouses dissonance; frequently, the best way to reduce dissonance is to reject or distort the evidence” (p. 188). Dissonance-reducing behavior allows one experiencing cognitive dissonance to maintain a positive image of themselves – one that “depicts us as good, smart, or worthwhile” (p. 190). As Scully (2002) states, “we tend to judge ourselves by motive and intention rather than by means and result” (p. 316).

Additionally, the “foot-in-the-door” theory may explain why people are willing to continue to engage in a behavior they might find morally unacceptable had they not had

their foot-in-the-door. Aronson cites Milgram's (1963; 1965; 1974) classic experiments on obedience in which study participants thought they were giving increasingly more powerful shocks, up to 450 volts as an example of how difficult it can be to stop a behavior once one's foot is in the door.

In Milgram's experiment volunteer participants were given the role of "teacher" (they were the real participants) – and were instructed to give electric shocks to "learners" (actors who never receive any shocks, but only act as though they have) to supposedly study learning. The teacher witnesses the learner being strapped in, sees a massive "shock generator", 30 switches "ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts, in 15-volt increments...[with] verbal designations which range from SLIGHT SHOCK to DANGER – SEVERE SHOCK" (Milgram, 1974, p. 3).

The initial shock was 15-volts, but soon became agonizing. "At 75 volts, the 'learner' grunts. At 120 volts he complains verbally; at 150 he demands to be released from the experiment.... At 285 volts his response can only be described as an agonized scream." (p. 3) In four experiments, each containing 40-subjects, 26, 25, 16, and 12 participants continued administering shocks all the way up to 450 volts. The declining obedience to authority was a result of bringing the learner in closer proximity to the teacher. Aronson wrote:

By the time you get to 450 volts, well, heck, that's not much different from 435 volts, is it? In other words, once individuals start down that slippery slope of self-justification, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw the line in the sand-because in effect, they end up asking



themselves, “Why draw it here if I didn’t draw it 15 volts ago?” (Aronson, 1999, p. 198).

How is it possible that people could do this? In a section on “the justification of cruelty” Aronson states he has “repeatedly made the point that we need to convince ourselves that we are decent, reasonable people” and if one finds themselves in a situation where they have a dissonant thought (“I have hurt another person”) “the most effective way to reduce dissonance would be to maximize the culpability of the victim of your action – to convince yourself that the victim deserved what he got” (p. 223). He points out “it is precisely because I think I am a nice person that, if I do something that causes you pain, I must convince myself you are a rat” (Aronson, 1999, p. 226).

Aronson (1999, p. 228) uses war as an example of this blame-the-victim situation that is used as a means of reducing dissonance:

When we are engaged in a war in which, through our actions, a great number of innocent people are being killed, we might try to derogate the victims in order to justify our complicity in the outcome. We might poke fun at them, refer to them as “gooks,” and dehumanize them; but, once we have succeeded in doing that, watch out – because it becomes easier to hurt and kill “subhumans” than to hurt and kill fellow human beings. Thus, reducing dissonance in this way has terrible future consequences; it increases the likelihood that the atrocities we are willing to commit will become greater and greater.

“It is based on the idea that situations that evoke dissonance do so because they create inconsistency between the self-concept and a behavior. Because most persons have a positive self-concept, persons are likely to experience dissonance when they behave in a way that they view as incompetent, immoral, or irrational” (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999, p. 13).

Therefore, if an individual learns that eating meat necessitates violence that leads to the harm and death of animals and this initiates feelings of dissonance, one will attempt to decrease dissonance. A person may think, “I’m a good person” (positive self-concept), “I’ve been eating animals my entire life” (their foot is in the door), “they’re just animals” (blame the victim), “everyone eats meat” (conformity), “obviously there is nothing wrong with eating meat.” They will likely seek support for their beliefs and find it easily. Additionally, prejudice against animals appears to contribute to the abuse they experience and their lives being taken for human consumption.

In the case of eating meat, the long history of this practice is indicative of its social acceptability:

Wide-scale meat production and consumption, in which meat eating is a choice rather than a physiological necessity, may reflect an ideology.

However, the dominant culture has neglected to recognize or name this belief system since its very prevalence makes it a social norm, concealing the underlying assumptions on which it is based. The belief in the moral justification of meat eating rests upon the anthropocentric assumption that the killing of other animals for the human palate is ethical and

legitimate. For these reasons, I have applied the terms carnism and carnist to the ideology of meat production and consumption and its practitioners (Joy, 2002, p. 7).

The ideology of carnism is supported by the inclination to respond to dissonance by blaming the victim and other responses previously discussed that allow the behavior to continue while simultaneously decreasing dissonance. Another psychological mechanism that appears to allow individuals to consume animal products, despite this practice causing some emotional disturbance, is psychic numbing. This psychological process allows an individual to not fully experience what one is doing; it involves “a diminished capacity or inclination to feel” and involves defense mechanisms that protect the ego (Lifton, 1986). These defense mechanisms include the ego defense mechanisms of denial, dissociation, justification, rationalization, and avoidance as well as the use of objectification, dichotomization, and overgeneralization (Lifton, 1986; Lifton & Markusen, 1990; Joy, 2002).

Patterson (2002), in his book *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, discusses the attitudes, practices, and beliefs that enabled the holocaust, slavery, and the institutionalization of mass animal killings to occur. One notable difference between the Holocaust and factory farming is the goal of each: Nazi’s were attempting to exterminate Jews whereas animals must endure a never-ending cycle of slavery, confinement, brutalization, rape, and murder (Patterson, 2002).

Lifton and Markusen wrote:

The Auschwitz atmosphere of dissociation was maintained by its always euphemistic language: “Final Solution” for mass murder; “evacuation,” “transfer,” or “resettlement” for taking people off to be murdered; and “medical ramp duty” for conducting selections for the gas chamber. The language contributed to the disavowal, which in turn permitted the doctors, in terms of psychological experience, to engage in “killing without killing,” without feeling themselves to be engaged in killing (Lifton & Markusen, 1990, p. 198).

Another factor involved in the abuse of others is empathy, or a lack thereof.

Lifton & Markusen write about the role of a withdrawal of empathy:

Empathy can be defined as the capacity for “resonating with the other’s unconscious affect [feeling tone] and experiencing his experience with him. While that capacity varies with individuals, the collective withdrawal of empathy from an alien group, or from one toward whom there has been long-standing historical denigration, is all too easily accomplished, especially when supported by a “scientific” official ideology. But since empathy is part of being human, any such radical withdrawal represents at least the beginnings of dissociation. When that withdrawal is accompanied by systematic brutality, the dissociation, in the form of cessation of feeling or psychic numbing, must become ubiquitous....

Numbing, denial, and doubling may all have been involved in ways that helped one hold on to many of these beliefs in the face of powerful

evidence to the contrary, and even to act on them in a place like Auschwitz (p. 195).

The withdrawal of empathy, combined with a “blame-the victim” approach to both animals and humans is captured by a quote from Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), a philosopher and German Jew forced into exile by the Nazis: “Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they’re only animals” (Patterson, 2002, p. 53).

Psychic numbing was also employed by German citizens. The psychic numbing of bystanders had “adaptive advantages” and at least two factors contributed to this phenomenon: “the truth of mass murder was deeply disturbing” and mass killing was so far removed from one’s own life that it “made it difficult to imagine such behavior on the part of any group, least of all one’s own. These factors could contribute to a ‘need not to know...’” (Patterson, 2002, p. 199).

One form of psychic numbing “derives from the inability of the mind to take in what it cannot connect with prior experience or prior imagination” (Patterson, 2002, p. 234). During the holocaust “Jews could simultaneously believe and not believe that the Nazis were murdering very large numbers of fellow Jews” (p. 234).

It is conceivable that the enormity of the slaughter industry that “processes” about 10 billion animals each year in the United States is inconceivable to most people. Nearly all adults deal with currency on a daily basis. Yet, ten billion dollars is an amount that an average person would have a difficult time comprehending. To consider 10 billion lives being ended in a violent manner may be even more difficult to fathom. One

reason for the difficulty may have to do with the manner in which language conceals; speciesist language offers a soft blanket to cover the cold steel, hot blood, and screams emanating from slaughter facilities.

Plous (1993) examines the literature related to the use of animals for human purposes, namely food consumption, scientific research, recreation (e.g. zoos, hunting), and clothing products and writes about the use of language that enables these uses. Plous notes that despite the plethora of writings on animal rights, a dearth of information exists regarding how people think about their use of animals.

Attitude research has shown that while individuals may disapprove of a particular practice, such as force feeding geese in order to produce foie gras – a fattened, diseased liver - they often do not disapprove of those who consume a product that is produced using an undesirable method (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 1982). One reason for this dissociation is the use of language, appearance of animal products, the remote location of animal industries, and the socialization process found in Westernized countries. The terms harvest, bagging, managing, resources, and renewable resources are used by hunters and discourage the making of a connection between their actions and the animal's suffering. In the realm of food consumption, cows, calves, and pigs are referred to as beef, veal, and pork which functions to obscure the source of the product (Sahlins, 1976). "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... people do not eat chickens; they eat chicken" (Plous, 1993, p. 17).

Dunayer (2001) poses the question, “How do we justify our treatment of nonhumans? We lie-to ourselves and to each other, about our species and about others” (p. 1). Dunayer continues:

Deceptive language perpetuates speciesism, the failure to accord nonhuman animals equal consideration and respect. Like sexism or racism, speciesism is a form of self-aggrandizing prejudice. Bigotry requires self-deception. Speciesism can’t survive without lies. Standard English usage supplies these lies in abundance. Linguistically the lies take many forms, from euphemism to false definition. We lie with our word choices. We lie with our syntax. We even lie with our punctuation. (p. 1)

“Our pronoun choices reflect and influence our attitudes towards others. Standard English pronoun use perpetuates disregard of nonhuman beings by characterizing them as genderless, insentient things. Politically loaded, English pronouns have special power to promote or undermine speciesism” (Dunayer, 2001, p. 137). The common use of the word “it” to describe animals acts to mask their gender and obliterate their individuality.

Dunayer writes:

What if an animal has been “neutered”? The word *neutered* misleads. A dog, cat, or other nonhuman whose ovaries and uterus have been removed still is female; one whose testicles have been removed still is male. I once objected when a woman called a steer “it” rather than “he.”

“A steer has been castrated,” she responded. “Would you refer to a castrated man as ‘it’?” I asked. She wouldn’t (Dunayer , 2001, p.150).

Adams (2000, p. 14; 75) speaks of the “absent referent”:

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The “absent referent” is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our “meat” separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the “moo” or “cluck” or “baa” away from the meat, to keep something from being seen as having been someone. Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that “meat,” meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image, used often to reflect (animal’s status)....

With the word “meat” the truth about this death is absent.

Dunayer provides a section with “terms to avoid” and “alternatives” which respect animal’s individuality and might also be considered more accurate in their description, at least from an animal protectionist perspective. Some of the alternative words Dunayer (2001, p. 194) recommends are:

cattle enslaver, cattle exploiter, bird enslaver, and calf enslaver instead of beef producer, dairy farmer, egg producer, and veal farmer; cattle abuser or cow abuser (cowboy); flesh, muscle (cutlet, fillet, meat); chicken remains, turkey remains, bird remains (chicken, turkey); captive cow, cow



enslaved for her milk, cow exploited for her milk (dairy cow, milk cow);  
hen confinement facility, hen enslavement facility, enslavement  
operation (egg farm); cow-milk industry (dairy industry); slaughter  
(humane slaughter); non-flesh eater (lacto-ovo vegetarian - a vegetarian  
who consumes eggs and dairy); slaughterer, butcher, nonhuman animal  
killer, flesh purveyor (meat-packer); flesheater (pesco-vegetarian,  
vegetarian who eats fish).

The language that is used to describe the slaughter business is intentionally deceptive. “Those who slaughter pigs are ‘processors who convert the live animal into pork products’” (Dunayer, 2001, p. 137). Dunayer documents the use of explicitly stated directives by animal slaughter industry personnel to avoid using terms that will arouse concern for animals among the animal-consuming public or that would otherwise negatively affect the meat (animal flesh) industry. The animal slaughter industry is obviously aware of the tenuous nature of their business and believes it is beneficial to promote pastoral images of happy, well-cared for “farm” animals rather than make any reference to confined, upset, and despondent animals who meet their untimely death in a bloody, violent fashion.

What is interesting is how many Americans show great affection and concern for animals who they consider pets. Again, language plays a role. “By caring for pets, tending them, giving them proper names, we endow them with semi-human status.” (Fiddes, 1991, p. 133) Fiddes describes an advertisement: “Rabbits for sale: as pets, or for the freezer” and recognizes that “to suggest both possibilities in tandem is too direct

a reminder of an anomaly in our classification system, and stimulates howls of protest from an outraged public” (p. 132).

Fiddes concluded that “the ad upset readers because it placed rabbits in two conflicting categories: pet and ‘food animal.’ The clash showed that such categories are artificially imposed.” (p. 147)

### ***Carnism***

Joy (2002) believes psychology “might play an important role in exploring and bridging the inconsistencies that mark the human-nonhuman relationship” (p. 161). Joy’s dissertation, *Psychic numbing and meat consumption: The psychology of carnism*, included interviews with 20 carnists (meat-eaters) and four butchers/meat-cutters and sought to test her hypothesis “that adults who eat meat employ carnistic numbing” (Joy, 2002, p. 97). Joy believes “carnistic numbing is expressed through ego defense mechanisms” and “carnists employ one or more carnistic defenses” that enable them to eat meat while protecting their ego (p. 97).

Joy found that denial, justification, avoidance, dissociation, dichotomization, objectification, overgeneralization, rationalization, and routinization were all used and often occurred simultaneously. Joy concluded that, “The data clearly indicated that participants were deeply conflicted about their choice to consume or prepare meat, and that they employed significant unconscious defenses to mitigate this inconsistency” (p. 142). Joy’s study showed that “All participants seemed to show a radical discrepancy between their choice to consume meat and their beliefs about nonhuman animals and

the treatment they deserve” (p. 146). Additionally, participants were aware of internal processes that enabled them to consume meat:

Many participants recognized this process in themselves, pointing out, for example, that they needed to justify or avoid their choice to consume meat or “numb” themselves to the reality of what their meat once was....

The necessity of using psychic numbing in order to consume meat is worthy of discussion since this study defines psychic numbing as indicating “unhealthy” psychological processes (p. 148).

Joy asserts that “psychic numbing becomes detrimental-or pathological-when it is used to facilitate, or tacitly support, rather than respond to, violence” (p. 148).

All participants experienced cognitive moral dissonance around their beliefs and behaviors concerning their treatment of nonhuman animals. All were averse to violence toward nonhuman animals and were deeply disturbed about meat production practices and yet regularly consumed meat. This discrepancy between participants’ beliefs and behaviors regarding nonhuman animals was significant, yet they largely kept it out of their awareness. Most participants began the interviews talking about what they enjoyed about consuming meat. However, once I asked them to reflect on situations that might engender disgust (e.g., an experience in which they had been uncomfortable consuming meat or consuming atypical cuts or types of meat), participants became disturbed.... Many participants verbalized their realization of this incongruity and said they felt “hypocritical,” “ashamed,” or “conflicted” (p. 147).

Joy (2002, p. 152) speculated that vegetarians might use defenses similar to those employed by omnivores which allow the meat-eater to feast on flesh and the vegetarian to consume dairy and eggs:

It may be that ethical vegetarians have diminished dissociation so that, for them, meat from any animal is no longer synonymous with food. The ethical vegetarians in the pilot studies tended to view meat not as food but as dead animals, and often responded to it with sadness, revulsion, and horror. However, one might wonder whether vegetarians who are informed that there is violence in the production of all mass-marketed animal products employ some degree of dissociation and perhaps dichotomization, if they continue to consume eggs and dairy products.

### ***Psychology Conclusion***

It is apparent that psychological mechanisms (denial, justification, avoidance, dissociation, dichotomization, objectification, overgeneralization, rationalization, and routinization) are at work, which omnivores and animal-using individuals employ, that protect the consumer and exploiter from experiencing dissonance and anxiety. Dunayer (2001) writes: "Complicit in enslavement and mass murder, consumers who eat products from the bodies of nonhuman animals feed on lies. When more humans confront the truth, 'animal agriculture's' demise will begin" (p.147).

Scully (2002, p. 321) points out that those who are concerned about animal suffering are considered "mawkish and weak" while those who disregard "the details of

animal suffering” are considered “strong and sensible.” But Scully makes clear who is being sentimental:

A realist is someone who wants to know the realities, the facts of the case, what is actually taking place and how it feels to the victim. A sentimental person is one who follows desire, emotion, and impulse, often in disregard of the facts. For my part, it has always seemed a good rule never to support or advocate any moral act that I would not be prepared to witness in person.... When we shrink from the sight of something, when we shroud it in euphemism, that is usually a sign of inner conflict, of unsettled hearts, a sign that something has gone wrong in our moral reasoning (p. 321).

Are Dunayer, Scully, and Joy correct? What conclusions should be drawn from the fact that so many Americans engage in mental gymnastics in order to allow themselves to consume animal products? Will the truth set the animals free and spell the end of modern agricultural practices as Dunayer suggests?

The “confrontation” with the truth may lead to animal agriculture’s demise if individuals are aware (or are made aware) of the powerful psychological processes that they, and society at large, employ to nullify the effects of the emotional and cognitive turmoil that results from exposure to the violent, suffering-filled world of animal agriculture. Once one realizes their animal product purchases make them complicit in the suffering and death of animals, the extent of the inherent cruelty of intensive animal production, and the numerous ways people tend to numb themselves in an effort to

continue their consumptive behaviors that they have a natural inclination to avoid, they may be far less inclined to be served an egg, a cup of milk, a “filet mignon,” or chicken’s wing.

It is appropriate to conclude this section with a quote from Festinger (1957):

...it is clear that this dissonance can be reduced by changing the behavior.

Actually, cognitions that represent knowledge of a person’s own actions are, in a sense, the easiest kinds of cognitive elements to change since this can be accomplished by merely changing the behavior involved. This may be contrasted with the great difficulty of changing cognitive elements that correspond to knowledge about the environment that has impinged on the person directly through his senses. Consequently, it is clear that one would expect appropriate modification of behavior to be a frequent reaction to the existence of dissonance” (p. 276).

## **Occupations**

### ***Farmers***

This section addresses information about industrial animal production (IAP), often referred to as factory farming and small farms and those who work to raise and/or slaughter animals for food. This review will provide a glimpse into the work that is involved in bringing animals to the plate.

### ***Industrial Animal Production (IAP)/ Factory Farming***

An enormous change has occurred in agricultural practices within the last century. For example, everyone used to eat “organic” produce because that’s the only

kind of produce that was grown. It has been within just the past 60 years that widespread chemical application to crops has made purchasing organic produce seem like a yuppie extravagance - one which is unavailable to millions of financially strapped Americans.

Agriculture developed over 10,000 years ago. Since World War II, traditional food production has been replaced by a system of industrial agriculture that relies on synthetic inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides, extensive irrigation, fossil fuels, monocropping, harvest mechanization and the development of high-yielding plant varieties (Walker, et al., 2005, p. 350).

Modern methods have fueled “an increased yield of nearly 350%” per acre from 1920 to 1999, but this altered output “comes at a great cost to the health of the environment, workers, and the public” (p. 350). These externalities, costs not reflected in the price of a product nor generally accounted for in industry productivity analysis, “include depletion of resources such as fossil fuels, water, soil, and biodiversity; pollution of the environment by the products of fuel combustion, pesticides and fertilizers; and economic costs to communities” (p. 350).

Farmed animals have also been greatly impacted by changes in agricultural practices. “The industrial system of growing and processing large numbers of animals in heavy concentrations was first used in the 1930s and 1940s in the poultry industry. The beef cattle, pig, dairy and some aquaculture industries have now adopted industrial procedures (p. 351).” Today, animals spend their short lives growing “to market weight in facilities known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)” (p. 351)

The general public is becoming increasingly removed from having direct knowledge of farm practices. They have essentially no contact with agriculture and therefore have little or no direct knowledge of animal production and processing. As a result, members of the general public are more familiar with and susceptible to media and other sources of information, which likewise do not have expertise in agriculture and are oriented more towards reporting controversies (Zimbelman, Wilson, Bennett, & Curtis, 1995, p. 153).

The implicit message is that, according to the authors, if the general public was better informed about the realities of farming they would be less susceptible to activist's influence and reassured as to the quality and safety of the food produced and the methods used to procure it. However, in an age when industrial animal production (IAP), also known as factory farming, is the norm this seems a questionable conclusion. In fact, Marcus (2005, p. 2) believes that "most farmed animal suffering is rooted in the fact that the general public remains uninformed about how modern animal agriculture operates."

Within the past 100 years there has been a major shift in the work Americans do. Many no longer work and live on a farm, nor do they have intimate knowledge of the workings of farms. Farms might more aptly be referred to as agribusinesses. "In 1900, 40% of the population lived on farms, but today no more than 2% do. Just since 1960, the number of farms has declined from about 3.2 million to 1.9 million, but their average size has increased by 40% and their productivity by 82%" (Nestle, 2002, p. 11). Fifty years ago "chickens were raised in small flocks by many farmers; today, most are



‘factory-farmed’ in massive numbers under contract to a few large companies” (Nestle, 2002, p. 11). According to another source, in 2003 less than 1% (.7%) of Americans worked as full-time farmers compared to 100 years ago when about 50% of Americans lived and worked on farms (Midkiff, 2004). One reason for the demographic change has been the philosophy promoted at land-grant universities.

According to Midkiff (2004), the USDA and ...the schools of agriculture at land–grant state universities, which have done the research and lobbied in the state legislatures and U.S. Congress to ensure that the ‘Get Big or Get Out’ agricultural system pioneered by President Dwight Eisenhower’s secretary of agriculture, became a reality. Since the 1950’s, ‘Get Big or Get Out’ has been the mantra repeated endlessly by agricultural economists (p. 2).

Dunayer (2001) addresses the language used to describe “farming” in a chapter titled “Feeding on flesh, milk, eggs, and lies” in her text *Animal equality: Language and Liberation*). She writes, “Divorced from the land, numerous ‘animal agriculture’ operations have no farming component. Yet, the exploitation of captive nonhumans for food retains the name agriculture, evoking pastoral images of cows grazing, pigs rooting, and chickens pecking in the spacious outdoors.” She believes that the term “factory farm” is more truthful than the term “family farm.” “Factory accurately conveys the flesh, egg, and milk production methods that now predominate in industrialized nations: (p.125).

Three issues seem especially relevant to questions of how “bad” it is. What are the living conditions like for the billions of individual animals who are factory-farmed each year? How do they meet their death? And, what are the conditions like for those employees who work in slaughter facilities?

According to the Humane Farming Association (HFA, 2005):

Agribusiness corporations claim that animals in factory farms are “as well cared for as their own pet dog or cat.” Nothing could be further from the truth. The life of an animal in a factory farm is characterized by acute deprivation, stress, and disease. Industrialized agriculture has made the determination that it is more “cost effective” to accept some loss (of animal life) in inventory than to spend money on treating animals humanely.

Farm animals, by the millions, are forced to live in cages or crates just barely larger than their own bodies. While some species, like hogs and veal calves, may be caged alone without any social contact, others, like egg-laying hens and chickens, may be crowded so tightly together that they fall prey to stress-induced cannibalism. Unable to groom, stretch their legs, or even turn around, the victims of factory farms exist in a constant state of distress.

Weary, et al. (2006) enumerate a host of painful procedures routinely performed on animals such as tail docking, castration, and dehorning. It is suggested that many of

these procedures are unnecessary and it has only been recently that the pain experienced by animals has been considered.

Marcus (2005, p. 16) describes the cruelties that await chickens bred to be layer hens or meat chickens: “Within 24 hours of hatching, layer chicks are put into trays, and the males are separated out. These males grow too slowly to be worth raising for meat, so they are immediately put to death.” Many are put into a grinder while still alive, while others are thrown into a dumpster. Those who will be kept for meat or egg production are confined to cages with wire flooring, provided insufficient space to spread their wings, are kept in the dark, and subjected to fowl smelling air, laden with ammonia and other gases due to the number of birds kept in an enclosed, poorly ventilated environment (Marcus, 2005).

One example of the harsh treatment birds face is “debeaking.” The standard practice of debeaking is done so that “egg producers are able to stock birds at densities at which they would otherwise kill each other” although “in natural settings, this pecking is usually harmless, because the birds have plenty of room to back away from conflicts” (Marcus, 2005, p. 17). Marcus believes the term industry uses (“beak trimming”) and the term animal rights activists tend to use (“debeaking”) are both misleading because a procedure “this painful and dangerous” ought not be referred to something as “trivial as a manicure,” and in the latter case is inaccurate “since about two-thirds of the beak is normally left intact” (p. 16).

Marcus prefers the term “beak searing” because during this procedure “a worker picks up an unanesthetized chick and inserts the bird’s beak into a clipping device. A hot

blade snips off the end of the beak, and simultaneously cauterizes the exposed blood vessels to minimize bleeding” (p.17). Marcus summarizes his assessment of chicken’s lives by writing, “compared to chicken, no other food choice demands so much suffering and killing per pound of meat.... For people moving away from meat due to ethical considerations, chickens ought to be the first animal spared rather than the last” (p. 27).

Mackus illustrates how male pigs “are nearly always castrated [without the benefit of anesthesia], since meat from noncastrated males has a pungent odor” (Marcus, 2005, p. 30). The same fate awaits male cows, along with branding and dehorning in which “the horns are either sawed off or dissolved in a caustic paste. Unlike branding, the degree of pain felt during dehorning is not subject to much debate” because horns “have plenty of nerve endings” (p. 41).

The Humane Farming Association (HFA, 2005) points out that:

If a private citizen confined a dog or cat in a manner common in factory farms, or subjected an animal to surgical procedures without anesthesia, the individual could be charged with cruelty to animals. Farming is an area, however, that federal and state laws protecting animals barely touch.

Pollan (2006), author of *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, investigated how food, including meat, gets to our plates. To find out, he purchased a steer and observed parts of his brief life. Pollan’s “first impression” of where his steer, number 534, would spend the last five months getting fattened was “not a bad little piece of real estate” given that it “has a water view of what [he] thought was a pond or reservoir” until he noticed the

“brown scum” indicating it was a “manure lagoon” filled with “nitrogen and phosphorous levels” so high that it would kill crops if sprayed on them as a fertilizer. Observing steer 534, Pollan noticed his eyes looked bloodshot. The doctor told him that it was due to the feedlot dust that was irritating his eyes. “I had to remind myself that this is not ordinary dirt dust, inasmuch as the dirt in a feedyard is not ordinary dirt; no, this is fecal dust.” He wondered how his steer was faring in the feedlot. He concluded, “I don’t know enough about the emotional life of a steer to say with confidence that 534 was miserable, bored, or indifferent, but I would not say he looked happy” (p. 80).

Pollan (2006), wrote at length about how raising cows has become an industrialized process that uses great quantities of oil to produce corn which is then fed to the cows. This unnatural diet causes intestinal disorders, and along with their confinement in feedlots laden with fecal matter combine to make it likely the cow will get sick, hence low-doses of antibiotics in their daily diet of corn. Reflecting on his experience in the feedlot he wrote:

Standing there in the pen alongside my steer, I couldn’t imagine ever wanting to eat the flesh of one of these protein machines. Hungry was the last thing I felt. Yet I’m sure that after enough time goes by, and the stink of this place is gone from my nostrils, I will eat feedlot beef again. Eating industrial meat takes an almost heroic act of not knowing or, now, forgetting (p. 84).

In the Frontline/PBS documentary *Modern Meat* (Hamilton, 2002) which examines food safety issues related to meat production and consumption, Bill Haw, who

“runs one of the country’s largest feedlot operations” believes that if given a choice “the vast majority of steers would vote to be in the feedlot.” Yet he conceded, “The slaughterhouse is a necessary process. It’s a highly efficient process, but it’s not now, nor never will be a very pretty thing. Animals come there to die, to be eviscerated, to be decapitated, to be de-hided, and those are violent, bloody, and difficult things to watch.”

Not only is their “biography” ended prematurely but they often die in unimaginable ways (Regan, 2004). Chicken’s often bleed to death, fully conscious. Many chicken slaughterhouses are automated; “the stunning, throat cutting, and even plucking are all done mechanically” (Marcus, 2005, p. 24). Most employ a “stunning” method that dips the chicken’s head into electrified water. The stunning is often not entirely effective and the birds may “regain awareness, bleeding to death from a gashed throat” (Marcus, 2005, p. 25).

Cattle and pigs often do not fare any better. Cows and pigs killed during ritual slaughter for Muslims and Jews are generally not stunned; rather their throat is slit so that they die from blood loss and not the stunning procedure (Bonne, Verbeke, 2008).

The inside workings of cattle slaughter facilities were the focus of a Washington Post investigation titled *Modern Meat: A Brutal Harvest* (Warrick, 2001). Moreno, a slaughter employee explained the animals were not supposed to be alive when they reached him. However, “On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. ‘They die,’ said Moreno, ‘piece by piece.’”

Warrick (2001, p. A01), notes:

“While a few plants have been forced to halt production for a few hours because of alleged animal cruelty, such sanctions are rare. For example, the government took no action against a Texas beef company that was cited 22 times in 1998 for violations that included chopping hooves off live cattle. "I complained to everyone - I said, 'Lookit, they're skinning live cows in there,' "Walker said, "Always it was the same answer: 'We know it's true. But there's nothing we can do about it.'"

Fish, although generally not a species that receives much animal welfare attention, suffer also. Regarding the handling of fish, “many present commercial methods of slaughtering fish for food cause stress and aversive behavior, which could be considered inhumane” (Robb, et al., 2002, p. 359). Those operating fishing businesses often consider the fish who are caught to be too small for it to be economical to kill them individually.

Therefore, most trout are killed either by immersion in ice slurry, by leaving them in air, or by immersion in a water bath saturated with carbon dioxide gas. The first two methods result in death by anoxia. When the fish are removed from the water, their gills collapse largely preventing oxygen exchange with the environment.... On removal from the water, the fish show great aversion and attempt to escape, highlighting the impact of the slaughter method on the welfare of the fish. (Robb, et al., 2002, p. 360)

The authors recommend electrical stunning as a method to address animal welfare concerns. Stunning is used for other animals, such as cows, pigs, and birds, but they often are not properly stunned. McKinstry and Anil (2004) discuss situations that may result in pigs being stunned more than once:

Some animals were re-stunned due to the failure of the first application to successfully stun the pig. This failure could be attributed to short stun duration, poor tong position and insufficient current. Additionally, some slaughtermen apply a repeat application to suppress spontaneous kicking, aid the shackling and hoisting process, thus helping to reduce the stunning-to-sticking interval and also help prevent the incidence of inadequate sticking as it is more difficult for a slaughterman to accurately stick a kicking or convulsing animal. Finally, where a repeat application may be applied to a pig which has, or is about to, recover from the first stun because sticking has been delayed (e.g., a pig which has fallen from the hoist or equipment failure) (p. 121).

McKinstry and Anil (2004) recommend sticking begin no more than 15 seconds after stunning, teams of two complete the stunning and shackling, or a captive bolt gun be used as a backup method in the event the stunning is ineffective. Recommendations made to improve the welfare of animals leads one to question, have conditions improved for animals?

In an interview, Eisnitz was asked, “Are you aware of any noticeable differences/improvements for animals since the publication of your own book



"Slaughterhouse?" Eisnitz said, "Everybody is scurrying around to make it look as if they are doing something but the fact is they are not....Everything they do is a voluntary program. Nothing is mandated by USDA. No, I see everybody scurrying but that is only because they are in damage control mode" (*Animal Liberation*, 2002).

It comes down to line speeds – how fast animals move through the plant. How quickly plant employees are forced to disassemble animals has a direct bearing on animal welfare in their final moments. It makes the difference between a swift death and a torturous, gruesome death. Line speeds in the U.S. are significantly faster than in the European nations, and it is this speed of production that raises food safety issues, animal welfare concerns, and causes injuries to workers (Marcus, 2005; Schlosser, 2001; Eisnitz, 1997; Hennessy, 2005).

### ***Slaughterhouse Workers***

Eisnitz (1997, inside back cover), chief investigator for the Humane Farming Association interviewed slaughter facility workers who "have spent a combined total of more than two million hours on the kill floor." Their testimony is graphic. While some of the quotes I include in this section might be thought to be better suited to fall under the animal welfare category, I place them here because I believe they expose the psychological and physical toll this industry inflicts upon its workers.

One slaughter house employee, Ed Van Winkle, who had, since the 1960's, "worked just about every kill-floor job at ten different plants" explained that:

The preferred method of handling a cripple is to beat him to death with a lead pipe before he gets into the chute... If you get a hog in a chute that's

had the shit prodded out of him, and has a heart attack or refuses to move, you take a meat hook and hook it into his bunghole (anus)...and a lot of times the meat hook rips out of the bunghole. I've seen hams-thighs-completely ripped open. I've also seen intestines come out. If the hog collapses near the front of the chute, you shove the meat hook into his cheek and drag him forward. (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 82)

Van Winkle's assessment is that "Today, management doesn't care how the hog gets up on that line. Management doesn't care whether the hog is stunned or conscious, or whether the sticker [employee who kills the pig by sticking him or her] is injured in the process. All Morrell cares about is getting those hogs killed" (p. 80). He said "that at some point.... production took precedence over employee welfare. If someone got hurt, you weren't supposed to shut the chain off; you were supposed to drag him off the floor and keep the chain [line] going. The chain became the most important thing" (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 80).

He also told of pigs who, after having their throat slit, try to "hold onto their blood by constricting its muscles" and in the process would arrive, fully conscious at the scalding tank, hit the water, and start kicking and screaming... There's a rotating arm that pushes them under. No chance for them to get out. I am not sure if they burn to death before they drown, but it takes them a couple of minutes to stop thrashing (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 84).

Van Winkle spoke of difficulties employees have dealing with their emotions and how common it is for these workers to commit assault, have alcohol and drug problems,

and abuse their spouse. He said, "The worst thing, worse than the physical danger, is the emotional toll" (p. 87). He spoke of how at times, while on the kill floor, he would find himself thinking that the pigs are not "a bad-looking animal" and considered petting them; "Pigs on the kill floor have come up to me and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two-minutes later I had to kill them-beat them to death with a pipe. I can't care" (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 87).

Another employee, a day-shift worker named Donny Tice, said, "I've taken out my job pressure and frustration on the animals, on my wife... and on myself, with heavy drinking" (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 91). In a "confessional trace" Tice disclosed that

... with an animal who pisses you off, you don't just kill it. You ... blow the windpipe, make it drown in its own blood, split its nose... I would cut its eye out... and this hog would just scream. One time I ... sliced off the end of a hog's nose, just like a piece of bologna. The hog went crazy for a few seconds. Then it just sat there looking kind of stupid. So I took a handful of salt brine and ground it into his nose. Now that hog really went nuts.... [then] I stuck the salt right up the hog's ass. The poor hog didn't know whether to shit or go blind (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 93).

Tice, who once was "scared shitless" when he was kicked by a pig which nearly drove the 6-inch dagger he used to torture and kill pigs into his own forehead, spoke of workers who would chase pigs into the scalding tank and how management was aware of these abuses, but their only concerns revolved around line speeds and making "sure everything is by the book when anybody official visits" (p. 94). One "foreman said,

'Donny, do me a favor. Please don't stick any of them in the eye today. I don't want to lose my job'" (p. 94).

Near the end of the interview Tice said,

People go into Morrell expecting respect and good working conditions. They come out with carpal tunnel, tendonitis, alcoholism, you name it, because they're put under incredible pressure and they're expected to perform under intolerable conditions. Or they develop a sadistic sense of reality (Eisnitz, 1997, p. 94).

In an interview, years after the release of *Slaughterhouse*, Eisnitz, when asked why she places the blame, not on individual workers, but on a "morally corrupt system whose prime motive is profits over sentient creatures" Eisnitz replied, "The workers that I have been working with these past two years are mostly Hispanic and they are truly some of the bravest people in the world.... [They do] what they have been required to do in the name of profits for their plant. These poor people, you know a lot of them are maimed and suffer repetitive motion illnesses for life (Animal Liberation, 2002).

Grandin (2006, p. 129), has noted improvements in animal handling and slaughter in some U.S. slaughter facilities due to McDonald's Corporation audits of plants using five objective measures, such as "the percentage of animals stunned on the first attempt" and the "percentage rendered insensible prior to hoisting." She attributes the improvement to better maintained equipment and better training of personnel and noted that most of the 50 plants improved the welfare of animals going to slaughter. However, "A major remaining problem area is in plants that are not in a program of

yearly audits by restaurants. Serious animal abuse has occurred in some of the non-audited plants” (p. 129).

### ***IAP/Factory Farming Conclusion***

Clearly, factory farming methods practiced by today’s mostly corporate agribusinesses inflict suffering upon frightened animals who are caged, mutilated, and die violent deaths. However, since awareness of what goes on inside factory farms and slaughter facilities is so limited, the majority of people are in the dark about the animals who are forced to live in darkness and breathe noxious fumes. While some consumers may have a vague notion that animals must die to produce the flesh that appears on their plate, they probably do not wonder about the individual animal’s lives and deaths, nor about those who “cared” for them or the physical or mental toll that killing exacts on the slaughterer. A comprehensive review of the animal slaughter industry reveals that factory farming presents a clear and present danger to the animals, the workers, and the environment.

### ***Small Family Farms***

Small, family-owned farms may seem to be a solution, or at least an exception, to factory farming. Yet, when one examines the distribution of farms by size it is clear that small farms do not hold the key to addressing animal welfare issues for the vast majority of animals being raised for food production. The number of farms has decreased dramatically in the past 70 years and there has been a corresponding boom in the size of the largest farms. There were 6.8 million farms in 1935, but only 2.1 million in 2002 (Hoppe & Banker, 2005). “Most farms in the United States – 98 percent in 2003

– are family farms” and “even the largest farms tend to be family farms.... Small family farms account for most of the farms in the United States but produce a modest share of farm output” (Hoppe & Banker, 2005, p. i). Given the size of some family farms, the term “family farm” might be deceiving. Small farms are those with sales between \$10,000 and \$249,999. While small family farms account for 91 percent of farms, “large-scale family farms account for 59 percent of production” (Hoppe & Banker, 2005, p. 6). Small family farms (comprising 91% of all farms) account for only 27% of all farm production. Specifically, small farms only “account for 8 percent of the value of production for hogs and 4 percent for poultry” while 63% of hay, 58% of tobacco, 37% of dairy, and 33% of beef come from these small farms (Hoppe & Banker, 2005). Therefore, “large” farms (sales between \$250,000 and \$499,000) and “very large” farms (sales of \$500,000 or more) account for 9% of farms, but 73% of production. It is important to note that the vast majority of animals killed for food are “poultry,” and small farms raise only four percent of these animals.

Small, family farms probably more closely resemble the image the average person has of the typical farm. This image, typified in children’s books, such as *Moo moo, brown cow* (Wood & Bonner, 1991), *Cows in the kitchen* (Crebbin & McEwen, 1998), *When cows come home* (Harrison, & Demarest, 1994), *Cock-a-doodle-moo* (Most, 1996), *Giggle, giggle, quack* (Cronin & Lewin, 2002), *We keep a pig in the parlor* (Bloom, 1988), *Kiss the cow* (Root & Hillenbrand, 2000), *Click, clack, moo: Cows that type* (Cronin & Lewin, 2000), and *Cows can’t fly* (Milgrim, 1998) show happy animals, living a life of leisure. Factory farming does not exist in children’s books, nor does beak searing or

other common practices that inflict serious pain upon the animals which are associated with industrialized animal production. Individuals with no connection to rural, farming communities or industrialized agricultural production may only have limited or inaccurate conceptions about what most food animals encounter during their lives. Small family farmers themselves are often dismayed at the wholesale lack of concern towards animal welfare and the brutality visited upon animals warehoused in factory farms. Jim Mason, who grew up on a family farm, talks about the change from family farming to factory farming: “I was born and raised in rural Missouri and it seems amazing that it happened within my lifetime. I don’t feel that old, but when I was kid we farmed with a team of horses for God’s sake.” (Peaceable Kingdom, 2004). He called the 1940’s, “the last decade and a half of that old-fashioned family farming, where the neighbors pitched in, and shock the wheat and did the threshing, and did everything together.” But with “post-war affluence” came technology and machines that decreased the reliance on labor-intensive practices “and neighbors didn’t come over and help with the harvest anymore – it was like every man for himself.” Despite being a tough country farmer, the sadness was clear, “So, in my youth, as a young kid and teenager, I witnessed this tremendous revolution on the farm – the end of a way of farming and the onset of factory farming.” (Peaceable Kingdom, 2004).

For some, small family farms are the polar opposite of intensive confinement operations. Pollan visited a truly unique family farm, Polyface Farm, located in Virginia, where Joel Salatin and his family raise “chicken, beef, turkeys, eggs, rabbits, and pigs, plus tomatoes, sweet corn, and berries on one hundred acres of pasture patch-worked

into another 450 acres of forest” (Pollan, 2006, p. 125). However, Salatin considers himself a “grass farmer”; the grasses produced on his farm allow him to produce “40,000 pounds of beef, 30,000 pounds of pork, 10,000 broilers, 1,200 turkeys, 1,000 rabbits, and 35,000 dozen eggs” annually (p. 126). Noting the ability of cows to convert grass to meat, Salatin says, “All flesh is grass” (Pollan, 2006, p. 127).

What is unique about Salatin’s farming methods is that he works with nature instead of trying to fight it. He created an “Eggmobile” which houses 400 laying hens which follows, three days later, the path of cows and their manure. The protein-rich fly larvae, ideally fattened during those three days spent incubating in the cow’s excrement, are eaten before they fly away. This low-cost feed is a treat for the hens, improves the taste of their eggs, and benefits the land as well. Salatin says, “I call these gals our sanitation crew” (Pollan, 2006, p. 211). Joel considers himself an “orchestra conductor” and likes to point out the difference between his “biological system” and “industrial systems”:

In an ecological system like this everything’s connected to everything else, so you can’t change one thing without changing ten other things. Take the issue of scale. I could sell a whole lot more chickens and eggs than I do. They’re my most profitable items, and the market is telling me to produce more of them. Operating under the industrial paradigm, I could boost production however much I wanted – just buy more chicks and more feed, crank up that machine. But in a biological system you can never do just one thing, and I couldn’t add many more chickens without



messing something else up.... It's all connected. This farm is more like an organism than a machine, and like any organism it has a proper scale" (Pollan, 2006, p. 213).

Pollan (2006) clearly respects the intelligent farming practices Salatin employs. Polyface Farm, Pollan writes, "is built on the efficiencies that come from mimicking relationships found in nature" (p. 215). As a result the animals are allowed to express their natural behaviors. For example,

What distinguishes Salatin's system is that it is designed around the natural predilections of the pig rather than around the requirements of a production system to which the pigs are then conformed. Pig happiness is simply the by-product of treating pigs as pigs rather than as 'a protein machine with flaws'... (Pollan, 2006, p. 219).

Inevitably, it was time for slaughter, something "most of us, including most farmers who raise food animals, do our very best to avoid thinking about" (p. 226).

Pollan, believing that a person should take "direct responsibility," at least once in their life, and participate in the slaughter of animals that he eats, wrote about his moral grappling after his experience grabbing chickens, pulling their head back and slitting their throat:

After a while the rhythm of the work took over from my misgivings, and I could kill without a thought to anything but my technique. I wasn't at it long enough for slaughtering chickens to become routine, but the work did begin to feel mechanical, and that feeling, perhaps more than any

other, was disconcerting: how quickly you can get used to anything, especially when the people around you think nothing of it. In a way the most morally troubling thing about killing chickens is that after a while it is no longer morally troubling (Pollan, 2006, p. 232).

After just describing the atrocities inflicted upon animals caught up in factory farming operations, in a chapter about the “ethics of eating animals” and a subsection about “animal happiness” Pollan states, “vegetarianism doesn’t seem an unreasonable response to the existence of such evil. Who would want to be complicit in the misery of these animals by eating them” (Pollan, 2006, p. 319). However, he believes that farms like Polyface, which allow animals to live more naturally, offer a stark contrast to the “nightmare ones” which have flourished. While he admits “many animal people” would still view farms such as Polyface as a “death camp” he has far fewer reservations about this type of farm. Yet, “it is true that farms like this are but a spec on the monolith of modern animal agriculture, yet their very existence, and the possibility that implies, throws the whole argument for animal rights into a different light” (Pollan, 2006, p. 319).

A study of “hobby-farmers” in England and Wales, Holloway (2001) revealed that being a good stockman, which included looking after and caring for the animals, was important to them and “a key facet” of the identity they constructed for themselves was “as people adopting a more ethical approach to food production than commercial farmers” (p. 300). However, the author points out that this identity was “problematic, as many of the routine practices associated with commercial agriculture are also employed

on many 'hobby-farms' such as dehorning and castration, without the benefit of anesthesia" (Holloway, 2001, p. 300). Despite this, her interviews clearly showed that the hobby farmers cared about the animals under their care. Some described thinking about how the animals would feel, being interested in whether they were happy, the time spent with the animals (pleasure walks, happily observing the animals, sitting with them, "loving" them, and "making friends"), being committed to "ethical" farming practices, and being enchanted with the birth experience and deeply disturbed by their deaths.

"Despite the deep attachments felt by most interviewees towards their animals, most livestock animals on hobby-farms are there, ultimately, to be consumed as food" (Holloway, 2001, p. 303). The interviewees tended to be upset by the idea of slaughter, "the saddest job," and found it "traumatic": one interviewee said that after taking a goat to slaughter, "I... wept buckets – because I bottle-fed him" (p. 304).

The study of hobby-farmers and the example of Polyface Farm provide a glimpse into small-scale farming and the commitment to a certain type of ethic that is clearly different than factory farming. It would seem likely that many, maybe even the majority of small farmers care about the animals on their farm, thoughtfully contemplate their welfare, and are committed to what they believe are ethical practices. In terms of what is owed to the animals, the conclusion drawn by those in small farming communities and the average American, is probably, "nothing more" than this type of care. An animal-welfarist might find a great deal of common ground among those operating small farms. However, an animal-rights perspective would still hold that the animals are

being exploited, suffer physically, emotionally, and socially from common agricultural practices, and eventually meet their death, in an often horrific manner, for they may meet up with “sadistic” killers at slaughterhouses who have been numbed by the repetition involved in “disassembly line” slaughter. Animals raised with a degree of compassion often do not die at the hands of those who raised them; they are killed by slaughterhouse employees who are paid to keep the line moving.

Raising farm animals, such as dairy cows, often means an unenviable fate for their offspring, even on small farms, which is often not counted in the welfare equation by either dairy farmers or the consumers of those dairy products. Harold Brown, a former farmer turned animal advocate, expounds on the dairy cow-veal calf connection:

You’ve got to keep a dairy cow pregnant to have her produce milk; she can’t lactate unless she’s pregnant. So, as soon as she has her calf, you take the calf away because you need the milk for production, but the calf ends up a part of veal. The veal industry exists because of all the dairy industry – it’s a byproduct of it. And there are some cases where those mothers will go dry for awhile, they will quit producing milk, because they are in mourning for their calf” (Peaceable Kingdom, 2004).

In a critique of the book, *“Portrait of a burger as a young calf: The true story of one man, two cows and the feeding of a nation”* written by Lovenheim (2002), Tsovel (2005, p. 252) questions his approach to knowing cows:

It seems that Lovenheim fails to see that agricultural workers and scientists, in spite of their intimate proximity to cows, in many ways are

the least appropriate people to testify about the animals as subjects of feelings and will. Maybe Lovenheim even is naïve enough to believe that dairy farming is the proper way to learn all there is to know about cows. This view is not mentioned explicitly, but Lovenheim presents farmers as, “the people who raise and care for these animals” – not as, “the people who exploit these animals to death for money.”

Tsovel (2005, p. 252) writes, “The exploiter is not a credible source of information about the circumstances and experiences of the exploited.” Therefore, whether a person believes small, family farms or organic free-range farms are the solution to the “problems” associated with raising animals for food depends on one’s values, beliefs, knowledge, experience, and the attitudes of those in their community and social circles. It also depends upon whether one benefits from those animals through the production and/or consumption of them.

In a discussion of welfare issues related to organic farming versus conventional farming, Alroe, Vaarst, and Kristensen (2001, p. 296), summarize the ethics of the situation succinctly:

There is no value-free yardstick for saying whether livestock welfare in organic farming is better or worse than in conventional agriculture, or for saying whether some aspects of organic farming systems lead to better or worse welfare – such questions necessarily entail discussions, inquiries, and decisions concerning the values and ethics involved.

### ***Medical Doctors***

Medical doctors are health professionals many Americans visit for acute or chronic conditions, and they are generally recognized as medical experts. Since health is a topic that comes up often in relation to being vegan, the inclusion of vegan medical doctors in this study was an easy decision.

However, according to Halsted (1998), winner of the National Dairy Council Award for Excellence in Medical/Dental Nutrition Education, “American physicians are, by and large, ignorant of the importance of diet to health, despite the abundance of epidemiologic evidence and the near obsession of the American public with this relation” (Halsted, 1998, p. 194). Yet, medical doctors provide nutrition counseling to their patients (Eaton, Goodwin, & Stange, 2002), despite the fact that they often lack extensive nutrition knowledge.

In a study of 138 family physicians in northeast Ohio, 98% of doctors provided nutritional counseling, but only 6% provided nutrition counseling in over 50 percent of patient visits. The researchers found that the average time spent counseling a patient about nutrition was 55 seconds. They concluded that “Despite considerable variability from physician to physician, nutrition counseling occurs approximately one fourth of all office visits to family physicians” (Eaton, et al., 2002, p. 174).

In another study, surveys were sent to a random sample of 4,000 licensed physicians in the U.S. to assess their knowledge on the basic effects of diet on blood lipids and lipoproteins (cholesterol). Only 16% or 639 physicians responded. The authors concede that “the response rate of 16% raises the possibility of a significant response

bias” (Flynn, Sciamanna, & Vigilante, 2003, p. 21). In other words, it may be that those who completed the survey were those who felt the most confident about their nutrition knowledge. And yet the results showed that 50% of physicians were unaware that canola oil is a good source of monounsaturated fat. Twenty-six percent did not know olive oil is a good source. Seventy percent of cardiologists did not realize that a low-fat diet would lower HDL levels.

This raises an important question: do physicians receive enough nutrition training in medical school? According to a survey of recent medical school graduates, 51% believed the nutrition training they received was inadequate (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2005). Therefore it is not surprising that Walker (2003, p. 541S)) calls for additional emphasis on nutrition training in medical school: “Probably the most compelling reason in 2002 is the worldwide epidemic of obesity that has affected both pediatric and adult patients.”

Yet patients do seek nutrition advice from doctors. A recent Dutch study found that consumers cited the following sources of nutrition information in order of importance: family doctor, social environment, magazines, Internet, dietitian, television (van Dillen, et al., 2003). The study by Eaton (2002) which showed 25% of office visits included nutrition counseling lends further support to the conclusion that doctors are perceived to be providers of competent nutrition education.

Given the important position doctors have in our health care system, the trust patients place in doctors, the growing recognition of the importance of nutrition and doctor’s lack of nutrition education, a change seems in order. Should doctors who have

little nutrition education even attempt to offer nutrition education, or should they simply refer clients to nutrition specialists, such as registered dietitians?

### ***Registered Dietitians***

There are approximately 67,000 members in the American Dietetic Association (ADA); about 75% are registered dietitians. The ADA is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals (American Dietetic Association, 2007).

Registered dietitians, having extensive knowledge of nutrition, represent an important group for which questions about animal product consumption are especially relevant. Yet Duncan and Bergman's research (1999) has shown that registered dietitians knowledge and attitudes about plant-based diets varies significantly depending upon place of residence and personal experiences with plant-based diets. Duncan and Bergman (1999, p. 1741) concluded that "average overall knowledge and attitude scores suggested that RD's are not up-to-date with current research in the field of vegetarian nutrition.

This section will discuss issues related to registered dietitian's education, position papers produced by their certifying organization (The American Dietetic Association or ADA), and the future roles and responsibilities some experts suggest ought to be addressed by registered dietitians. These recommendations would have the effect of expanding RD's role in the prevention of chronic diseases and would require a more expansive view of nutrition advice.

About two-thirds of the more than 60,000 American Dietetic Association members work in clinical services (Kane, Cohen, Smith, Lewis, & Reidy, 1996) and more



than 50% have advanced degrees (Erickson-Weerts, 1999). The ADA also holds nutrition conferences and publishes a professional journal. The ADA presently has over 30 position papers on topics that include weight management, vegetarian diets, and the role of dietitians in health promotion and disease prevention (American Dietetic Association, 2007). The ADA endorses the view that there are no “good” or “bad” foods; all foods can be part of a health-promoting diet. In a position paper titled, *Total diet approach to communicating food and nutrition information*, Freeland-Graves and Nitzke (2002) write:

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that all foods can fit into a healthful eating style. The ADA strives to communicate healthful eating messages to the public that emphasize the total diet, or overall pattern of food eaten, rather than any one food or meal. If consumed in moderation with appropriate portion size and combined with regular physical activity, all foods can fit into a healthful diet. Public policies that support the total diet approach include Reference Dietary Intakes, Food Guide Pyramid, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Nutrition Labeling and Healthy People 2010. The value of a food should be determined within the context of the total diet because classifying foods as “good” or “bad” may foster unhealthy eating behaviors. Eating practices are influenced by taste and food preferences, concerns about nutrition and weight control, physiology, lifestyle, environment, and food product safety (p. 100).

In an ADA position paper titled, *The role of dietetics professionals in health promotion and disease prevention* Hampl, Anderson, and Mullis (2002) acknowledge the impact on lifestyle choices, such as diet, physical activity, and tobacco and alcohol consumption and discuss the important role dietitians can play in prevention of chronic illness as opposed to the typical focus on treatment or “sick care.” The authors write:

By facilitating behavior change as a community approach to promoting health and preventing chronic disease, the services of dietetics professionals are indispensable. When communities involve dietetics professionals in the design, delivery, and evaluation of health programs and services, behavior change strategies are more effective. Dietetics professionals can take the lead in prevention programming because their training as counselors and educators provide skills that make them versatile members of coalitions....Training dietitians concerned with health promotion and disease prevention will require shifting from a clinical focus to an emphasis on population-based public health practice.

(p. 1684)

One hundred seventy five registered dietitians were surveyed to assess their personal compliance with the USDA food guide pyramid recommendations. About 70% of RD's consumed the recommended number of servings of meat, dairy, and fruit, but only 45% of those with greater than 3-years of experience and 33% with less than 3-years experience consumed the recommended servings of vegetables. The authors concluded:

These results indicate that registered dietitians are not forgetting the importance of proper nutrition and its effects on good health as they continue in the profession. This data also suggests that registered dietitians are continuing to model positive dietary behaviors to improve the respect, credibility and effectiveness of the dietetic profession (Seawell & Kandiah, p. A78, 1999).

O'Sullivan-Maillet, Stivers-Rops, and Small (1999) discuss the importance of environmental scanning, the practice that allows RD's to look for cues in the social, political, economic, technological, and food and nutrition management environments that indicate change is occurring and how best to adapt to those changes:

As dietetics professionals we are unique in our masterful synthesis of the art of food with the science of nutrition. Yet complementing this uniqueness is our broad base of expertise in areas such as management, technology, education, counseling, and research. It is both our uniqueness and our broad base of expertise that provide strength to the profession (p. 350).

However, despite the numerous details included in the article the authors do not address the ethical questions Nestle (2000, p. 627) believes ought to be asked in relation to food production practices, such as, "Do they respect animals 'rights'? Do they protect and preserve natural resources? Do they avoid pollution of air, land and water? Do they ensure food safety? Do they ensure worker safety?"

As previously mentioned, Duncan and Bergman (1999) found that RD's were lacking in knowledge regarding vegetarian diets, especially when they had not previously had personal experience with that diet. They found that less than a third "felt they were adequately prepared to deal with vegetarian diet questions" and concluded that registered dietitians "may require updating in the area of vegetarian dietary practice" (p. 1747). This updating could include the numerous arguments in favor of "voting with your fork" (Nestle, 2000, p. 619) by choosing foods that cause the least harm to the environment, workers, animals, and consumers.

In an ADA position paper concerned with conserving natural resources and protecting the environment Shanklin, Hackes, Shanklin, and Hackes, (2001) wrote:

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association to encourage environmentally responsible practices that conserve natural resources, minimize the quantity of waste that is generated, and have the least adverse affect on the health of human beings, animals, and plant life and the environment (p. 1221).

Several authors have commented on the future roles and responsibilities dietetic professionals should pursue. "Public health professionals – especially those with expertise in nutrition – should lead in making the connection between food and the health of the public, the health of the food system, and the health of the ecosystem" (Walker, et al., 2005, p. 354).

Commenting on the work by Walker, et al. (2005), McMichael and Bambrick (2005) insist that we must take into account the negative externalities generated by

present day factory farming methods and suggest raising the cost of meat “because the full costs of production and consumption are not accounted for.” Furthermore, they warn researchers:

The paper by Polly Walker and colleagues invites us to widen our field of vision as researchers. For the rising levels of meat consumption, as on other fronts, the formal study of connections between production, consumption, social and environmental consequences and human biological health should be incorporated into the modern public health agenda (McMichael & Bambrick, 2005, p. 343).

Cannon (2004b, p. 825) remarked, “with industrialization, food systems go wrong from many points of view, including public health. But the wise change here is not forward into an ever more novel biotechnological world, but change back; a move to “retro-nutrition.” Cannon (2004b, p. 827) stated, “We know that intensive farming of animals for human consumption has profound public health implications.” In a discussion of obesity and sustainability, Cannon (2005a, p. 114-115) wrote, “And anybody about to recommend eating more fish to protect human health needs to know... the sea is being mined at an unsustainable rate....There is more to nutrition than nutrients. This is not where our responsibilities as professionals, citizens or consumers end; this is where they begin.”

Rather, it is time for nutrition to be defined according to new principles, as a broad-based, multi-disciplinary social as well as biological science. Nutrition scientists should pay at least as much attention to the history, tradition and

culture of food, nutrition and health, and also to the impact of nutrition and food policies on living and natural resources, as they do to studies within biochemical and other corrals (Cannon, 2005c, p. 989).

Cannon (2005d, p. 3) notes that due to specialization, nutrition professionals are seeing less of the big picture since the “trend in science is to know more and more about less and less (and eventually everything about nothing). Facts can be the enemy of thought; knowledge can drive out wisdom.”

### ***Philosophy Professors and Animal Rights***

This section will deal with animal rights arguments made by philosophy professors and those who have philosophized about the rights of animals. It seems more appropriate, and beneficial, to provide animal rights arguments that have been made by philosophy professors rather than to cite statistics about how many professors there are or other such information.

Animal rights issues, the concern for animals (beyond their utility to humans) and philosophical arguments regarding their use and abuse go back thousands of years and fill volumes of texts. The quantity and quality of literature devoted to the topic should, at the very least, give one pause to consider the genesis, validity, and personal implications of this field of thought. I concur with Bailey (2005), discussed later, who questions whether it is right to engage in detached philosophizing when discussing such emotionally charged issues as the suffering imposed upon animals and the morality of using animals, and therefore some language that conveys a sense of partiality is included. This bias, and empathy, originates from knowing the types of horrors that

billions of individual animals are subjected to each day. However, given the magnitude of the suffering involved, the treatment of this topic is sorely deficient.

Nicola Taylor (2004) writes that “The generic term ‘animal protectionism’ perhaps is a more apt and relevant” term than animal rights or animal welfare when considering those who work on behalf of animals because in each case there is a general concern for animals ( p. 319). However, when the focus is on the fate of the animals themselves, there is an important distinction to be made. Believers in animal rights accept as true that (some) animals have rights that can be, and are, violated by humans while “the welfare position maintains that animal interests may be ignored if the consequences for humans justify it” (Francione, 1996, p. 42). However, as Taylor (2004) notes, both those interested in animal rights and animal welfare are motivated by a concern to protect animals.

This section will address a “rights” perspective. The rationale for a rights approach is exquisitely advanced by Regan, author of over 20 books and professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina. Regan is widely considered to be a leading voice for animal rights; he has had an enormous impact on furthering the arguments in favor of the rights of animals. Regan (2004) writes that the:

animals humans eat, use in science, hunt, trap, and exploit in a variety of ways, have a life of their own that is of importance to them apart from their utility to us. They are not only in the world, they are aware of it. What happens to them, matters to them. Each has a life that fares better or worse for the one whose life it is (p. 1).

Regan believes that the value of the individual should be respected, irrespective of species and the utility of that being. Animals are often considered for what human interest they may satisfy, such as taste, experiments, or clothing. However, “the moral worth of any one human being is not to be measured by how useful that person is in advancing the interests of other human beings” (Regan, 2004, p. 1). Yet humans often consider animals solely based upon what they can provide humans, irrespective of the animal’s interests. Companion animals, dogs and cats for example, are an exception to this rule and their interests often supersede that of their caretaker. Expense, time, and effort are freely given by humans to accommodate the needs and desires of dogs and cats under their care. But simply because we think differently of dogs, cats, chickens, and cows does not change their nature.

Scully (2002), author of *Dominion: The power of man, the suffering of animals, and the call to mercy*, writes:

The moral value of any creature belongs to that creature, acknowledged or not.... Just as our own individual moral worth does not hinge on the opinion of others, their moral worth does not hinge upon our estimation of them. Whatever it is, it is ( p. 304).

Similarly, simply because a person has physical and mental deficiencies that do not allow that person to contribute in a significant and readily apparent fashion does not provide justification for other humans to disregard this person’s rights. Likewise, Regan believes animals should not be thought of in terms of their utility to humans.



In the text *Empty cages*, Regan (2004) emphasizes that “Whether any animals have rights depends on the true answer to one question: Are any animals subjects-of-a-life?” (p. 53). In regards to the billions of nonhuman animals who exist, Regan asks:

Are there any who are aware of the world and aware of what happens to them? If there are, does what happens to them matter to them, whether anyone else cares about this or not? If any animals satisfy these requirements, they are subjects-of-a-life. And if they are subjects-of-a-life, then they have rights just as we do (p. 53).

Regan (2004, p. 54) believes the crucial point in comparing human and animal lives is that “there is a sameness amid the differences” and “when it comes to being subjects-of-a-life” we are the same. He believes that most people, especially those who share their home with a dog or cat, would recognize this similarity.

If someone told us that we are mistaken, that cats and dogs really are not aware of the world, or that they really do not care about what happens to them, we would think... he must have something wrong in the head.... It's just plain common sense to recognize that, behind their eyes, our animal companions are complicated psychological creatures who are no less subjects-of-a-life than we are. (p. 54)

Scully (2002, p. 306) suggests that someone may ask, for example, “‘what is so special about whales?’- as if a whale, to achieve significance, has to do something for us, to serve little man, and just being a glorious and innocent creature is not sufficient” (p. 306).

Scully (2002, p. 287) addresses animal rights in some detail in *Dominion*, but he admits:

Turning to the question of animal rights, I confess that I could hardly care less whether any formal doctrine or theory can be adduced for these creatures. There are moments when you do not need doctrines, when even rights become irrelevant, when life demands some basic response of fellow-feeling and mercy and love.

This moment occurred for Scully (2002, p. 287) while surveying a factory farm.

Walking around a place like Farm 2149, I do not need some utilitarian philosopher to do the moral math for me, adding up and subtracting the suffering of the world to determine which lives have value and which do not. I do not need a contractualist philosopher to define for me an 'appropriate object of sympathy.' I do not need behavioral scientists or cognitive theorists to distinguish which pains are 'real' pains and which are not.... I require no advice from theologians on where mercy may be granted and where withheld. Confronted with this wholesale disregard and destruction of life, all attempts to justify it strike me as vain talk, miserable excuses that cannot cover the iniquity, the ungodly presumption of it, the scale and sorrow of it." Factory farming isn't just killing: It is negation, a complete denial of the animal as a living being with his or her own needs and nature. It is not the worst evil we can do, but it is the worst evil we can do to them. It confronts us with the animal

equivalent of Abraham Lincoln's condemnation of human slavery: "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong" (p. 289).

DeGrazia (2003), in a "moral evaluation of factory farms," observes that factory farms "cause massive harm to animals" and "consumers do not need the products of factory farms" and these two "crucial insights" lead to the moral rule that individuals should "make every reasonable effort not to provide financial support to institutions that cause extensive unnecessary harm" (p. 180).

DeGrazia (2003) then asks, "What about the consumer? She isn't harming animals; she's just eating the products of factory farming. Well imagine someone who says, 'I'm not kicking dogs to death. I'm just paying someone else to do it'" (p. 180). For the sake of the animals DeGrazia calls for the boycott of factory farm products. However, the moral case to boycott could also be made on behalf of slaughterhouse workers who suffer physically and psychologically from their work (Eisnitz, 1997). But there are other good reasons for considering animals and our relationship with them.

Scully (2002) believes the "mirror test" is an important indicator of animal's inherent value. He writes, "It should tell us something important all by itself that animals have this way of constantly confronting us with ultimate questions-about truth and falsehood, guilt and innocence, God and sanctity and the soul..."(p. 305). He asks, "Does any creature have any place and purpose beyond its usefulness to us, any inherent value or claim to existence that we are bound to honor and respect" (p. 305). He believes that this is the question that "the rights matter comes down to" (p. 305). And, he believes that no human can answer this question.

Scully (2002) writes, "Many people when they examine their beliefs about animals will find, I think, that they hold radically contradictory views, allowing for benevolence one moment and disregard the next" (p. 309). He notes that the law allows individuals to act with disregard, but wonders which choice, benevolence or disregard, leaves the actor feeling "better or worthier." Scully insists that:

We must apply the basic demands of common decency... not only to the cruelties we see but to the ones we don't see. We cannot bestow our kindness on the animals we name and know while viewing as nothing the nameless, faceless beasts we condemn in our farms and labs to lives of ceaseless misery (p. 309).

On Sunday, January 15, 2006 I attended a vegan potluck sponsored by the Rochester Area Vegetarian Society which included a presentation titled, "Rescuing Animals in the Aftermath of Katrina: A Firsthand Account." Alex Chernavsky, assistant volunteer coordinator at the Humane Society at Lollypop Farm, was one of the three presenters who had voluntarily traveled to New Orleans to rescue animals who had been left behind in the rush to avoid the hurricane and the flood waters that filled the city when the levees broke. With projected images of rescued dogs and cats and photos of others buried and baked in mud, they shared heart-felt stories that inspired and saddened. The last slide in Chernavsky's portion of the presentation asked, "Is there a morally relevant difference between a cat and a cow?" The slide also noted that during the 3-months following Katrina about 10,000 animals were rescued, yet during that same span of time 2 billion animals had been killed in the United States for food. Alex

spoke of the irony of the animal rescue efforts that cost vast sums, required tireless effort and emotional resolve and the provision of meals containing meat. I emailed Alex to learn more about his perspective on this subject, and in his reply he wrote:

Some of my fellow rescuers apparently saw no contradiction between working hard all day long to save dogs and cats - only to return at night and eat cheeseburgers for dinner. I found this behavior both puzzling and disturbing. "Irrational" is the most charitable characterization that I can ascribe to such people (Alex Chernavsky, personal communication, January 16, 2006).

Ironically, there may be a place for irrationality in the fight for animal rights. In a feminist critique of animal rights supporters who depend on logic over emotion, Bailey (2005), author of *On the back of animals: The valorization of reason in contemporary animal ethics*, indicts philosophers who fail to recognize the "continuity between reason and emotion" (p. 2) and takes issue with dispassionate moral philosophy when applied to animal ethics. She notes that "it sometimes seems as if the contemporary philosophical approach to animal ethics serves as much to define and legitimize reason as to help animals, a kind of legitimacy that could only be wrought on the backs of animals" (p. 3)

Bailey (2005) writes, "'Reason promises to take the messy disturbing reality and carve it into a manageable, debatable issue" (p. 5). But "In choosing language that fails to condemn" torture inflicted upon animals, "somehow one seems to be assenting to the torture" (p. 6). It is for this failure to recognize and passionately describe the fear,

terror, pain, and dread animals are forced to endure that she criticizes much of contemporary philosophy as “a kind of mental masturbation” that fails to provide prominence to the very real horrors that individual animals experience while philosophers play with their arguments (p. 5).

The use of reason also subverts the success of animal rights in other ways. Reason, as applied to animal ethics, inherently places animals in a position of inferiority since the “separation of rationality from a lower nature is precisely what has been used to define animals as inferior” and this “hierarchy,” reason dominating emotion, “is played out on the animals themselves” (Bailey, 2005, p. 7).

If it is reason that must ultimately speak and be heard, then what of the animal? According to the history and dictates of Reason, animal “silence” is an indication of *their* lack and so it becomes the philosopher’s paternalistic duty to speak for the animal. Rarely is it appreciated by philosophers, that the assumption of this as a lack is already an assertion of superiority (Bailey, 2005, p. 8).

“To continue to treat emotion and reason as elements that can and should be distinguished in the process of doing moral philosophy ignores the fact that reason and emotion are intertwined in ways that are not always obvious” (Bailey, 2005, p. 13). Therefore, to arrive at a moral verdict without the inclusion of emotion or without recognizing the role emotion plays positions animals in an inferior position, given their inability to speak our language, devalues the atrocities inflicted upon animals, and

leaves animals vulnerable to the “whims of an autocrat” who may draw and redraw “the theoretical line between who should live and who should die” (p. 15).

### **Arguments in Opposition to Morally Compulsory Vegetarianism**

It is important to recognize that a vegan or vegetarian diet is not a “blood-free” diet. According to Steven Davis of Oregon State University millions of animals each year are killed in the process of cultivating the land in preparation for crops such as corn, soybeans, wheat, and barley. Because these animals of the field (opossum, rock dove, house sparrow, mice, vole, and a variety of other birds and animals) are less visible they are often not considered, but as Davis notes even vegans contribute to the death of some animals in the preparation of their plant-based, staple foods (Davis, 2003). Davis suggests a means to reduce the number of animals killed in the process of feeding humans; concentrate on raising cattle instead of pigs and chickens since, per animal, cows produce more calories. Additionally, cows are able to forage and so do not require the cultivation of fields to feed them (although the current predominate practice is to feed cattle grain).

Davis (2003) calculates that if all crop land that is used for food production in the United States were used to support vegan diets approximately “1.8 billion animals would be killed annually to produce a vegan diet for the USA” (p. 390). However, “if half of the total harvested land in the US was used to produce plant products for human consumption and half was used for pasture-forage production, how many animals would die annually so that humans may eat?” (p. 390). This model results in 1.35 billion

animal deaths compared to the 1.8 billion animal deaths based upon the vegan model, as calculated by Davis.

According to the USDA numbers quoted by Francione (2000), of the 8.4 billion farm animals killed each year for food in the US, approximately 8 billion of those are for poultry and only 37 million are ruminants (cows, calves) the remainder includes pigs and other species. Even if the number of cows and calves killed for food each year was doubled to 74 million to replace the 8 billion poultry, the total number of animals that would need to be killed under this alternative method would still be only 1.424 billion, still clearly less than in the vegan model (Davis, 2003, p. 391).

Davis disputes Regan's conclusion that the "principle of least harm" morally obligates humans to consume a vegan diet. Davis questions the moral distinction between killing intentionally (cows, pigs, chickens, etc.) and killing unintentionally (mice, voles, etc.). He points out that utilitarian philosophy tends to consider the consequences and not the intentions in determining moral significance. Davis (2003, p. 392) writes, "perhaps I don't fully understand the nuances or moral significance of this difference, but it seems to me that the harm done to the animal is the same – dead is dead." However, it is not simply a matter of numbers; how does one calculate the suffering inflicted upon factory farmed animals due to confinement and general practices such as beak-searing, tail-docking, and castration without anesthesia? The lives led by the animals who are intentionally raised and killed on factory farms compares unfavorably to animals who have lived their lives in their natural environment and this



“consequence” (the disparity in their quality of life) must somehow be considered when making moral judgments.

Another criticism of the moral imperative to consume a vegetarian diet comes from George (2003). In *A feminist critique of ethical vegetarianism*, George (2003, p. 217) argues that the vegetarian ideal is based upon the physiology of males ages 20 to 50 living in industrialized countries who have the means to engage in this dietary practice “without significant risk or burdens” though “the same cannot be said for... infants, children, adolescents, gestating and lactating women.” George thinks “eating a small amount of meat and using dairy products is defensible for all” because, according to George (2003, p. 218), semi-vegetarian diets are healthy and “involve few, if any, of the risks in vegetarian diets... children need the calcium for bone development and iron to maintain health.” She elaborates further by stating that a parent who does not consume meat or dairy products may influence their child who needs these products, and this parental modeling will ultimately lead to nutritional deficiencies in their mimicking child, and a grandmother who does not obtain sufficient calcium could become dependent upon the family for care.

George (2003, p. 220) thinks “the ‘vegan ideal’ is not a moral ideal at all” because it would “idealize those of a particular age, sex, class, ethnicity, and culture; that is, adult (age 20-50), middle-class, mostly white males living in high-tech societies- the group with the most power in the world.” However, George’s position is at odds with the position of the American Dietetic Association (ADA) which states that “Well-planned vegan, lacto-vegetarian, and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets are appropriate for all

stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy and lactation” and are associated with numerous health benefits (Messina & Burke, 1997, p. 1317). Considering George’s argument relies on the premise that meat and dairy are essential for women and children, and in light of this position being refuted by the ADA, her philosophical foundation is tenuous.

Even if one were to accept her proposal, that women and children need minor amounts of animal products, it would result in a major decrease in the number of animals killed and the suffering experienced by animals. In an effort to make “ethics and equality functional” George (2003, p. 220) would permit the consumption of small amounts of animal products (“aesthetic semi-vegetarianism”) with the caveat that “animals are well treated and killed as painlessly as possible” and this “imperative against cruelty and violence limits how much one may consume; it would be “wrongful” to eat “excessive” amounts of meat. Despite her call for practical ethics, she does not address how animals would be treated or killed, nor how one would follow her prescription that “Each person must decide the divide between the aesthetic and the moral on the basis of her own conscience...” (p. 220)

Nor does she explain how a child who is bombarded with fast food advertisements from birth, and lives in an environment where animal products and the consumption of them are ubiquitous, would go about making moral decisions that hold sway over the lives of animals. How does a child walk the moral line between eating the supposed minimum required amount needed to maintain health and succumbing to

their more hedonistic, gluttonous desires while attempting to place some value on the lives and deaths of animals?

Let us assume these children are not fully capable of making these gustatory moral decisions and have established an eating pattern that is highly influenced by taste, habit, and convenience. Once these same children are adolescents and adults, how do they go about making the transition to a more ethically-influenced diet? Although, a better question might be, how likely are the vast majority of individuals to make this transition? It would seem that George's approach would be an excuse to perpetuate the present pattern of animal consumption.

Finally, Matheny and Chan (2005, p. 579), supporters of the animal rights position, note: "It may be a credit to vegetarian diets that ethical arguments against them are difficult to find. One of the few exceptions is an argument sometimes called 'The Logic of the Larder.'" They argue convincingly against this argument which states that animals benefit by being brought into existence who would not otherwise have lived without the demand for the products their bodies produce.

Deciding what makes a life worth living is no simple matter. Yet we do employ such difficult reasoning, for example, when deciding whether to euthanize pets who are hopelessly sick. If we knew that, because a dog's illness, he would have painful surgeries performed without anesthesia, be robbed of most of his natural behaviors, forced to live in his own excrement, and confined to a cage so restrictive that turning around or stretching his limbs was difficult, if not impossible, most of us would

probably believe euthanizing him to be the humane choice (Matheny & Chan, 2005, p. 581).

### **Animal Rights Conclusion**

In mainstream society, who contemplates the rights of animals? For those who engage in this contemplation, what spurred their deliberation? Did they stumble upon an article? Were they handed a leaflet? Did they take a class that broached the subject? While all students are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, animal rights is not a staple of K-12 curriculum, and of those who attend college, not all walk away having encountered this issue. So, without a formal system of education that addresses this important topic it would seem improbable that the average person would thoroughly examine their beliefs about the treatment animals receive and whether they want to support certain practices. If they do explore their beliefs, do they have the knowledge and reasoning ability to make informed, sound decisions? For those who pause to consider the lives and rights of animals raised for food, clothing, and experimentation how much time and mental effort is given to the task? Does “consideration” really mean a few sentences of “internal dialogue,” a mere passing thought?

Considering the conflict of interest, is it possible for someone to consider this topic objectively who benefits from animal exploitation, someone who eats meat, loves cheese and ice cream, and finds it unimaginable to do without leather couches, shoes, or coats? Just as slave-owners had a vested interest in perpetuating slavery, and may have been too blinded by self-interest to truly consider the rights of African Americans, so too might consumers of the products of animal exploitation have difficulty.

For those who consider animals rights and determine that animals deserve protection they will discover that they are swimming upstream, against the current of societal custom. This scenario was elegantly described by Regan (2005) who gave a lecture in Rochester, NY during which he spoke of the rights of non-human animals. Regan fashioned a metaphor to describe what the animals, and those who advocate for them, are up against.

There are two rivers, Regan explained: one river flowing for thousands of years that represents “dominionism through religious teachings.” And a second river symbolizing people who don’t take their “moral directives from religious texts,” but instead this river believes that animals are inferior. When these rivers combine – the power of custom – a massive waterfall is created and animals, who are at the bottom of the waterfall, receive the brunt of this powerful force.

Regan asked the group, made up largely of members of the local Rochester Area Vegetarian Society and Compassionate Consumers, “Who would dare step into those waters?” and he answered, “Everyone in this room does each day.” And for those who do, it may be that they have progressed in their ethical reasoning. For instance, Block (2003) found that:

Believers in animal rights appear to demonstrate equivalent or higher-level moral reasoning when compared to adult, education-matched members of the general public. The results of this study do not support the assumption that these individuals reserve their moral concern exclusively for animals” (p. 177).

Block (2003) provides support for Nibert's (1995, p. 122) study which found that "the way people regard animals is related to the way they regard people." Block's results suggest that "Believers in animal rights appear capable of utilizing higher-level moral reasoning for ethical dilemmas involving humans as well as animals." (p. 177)

While it would be ideal for everyone to thoughtfully consider the rights of animals, it is not reasonable to imagine this will ever happen. Not everyone is at an age or developmental level that will allow them to adequately tackle this higher ordered task. Our laws recognize decision-making ability based upon age. Laws regulate the age at which individuals may have sex (statutory rape laws), purchase and consume alcohol, drive a motor vehicle, fight in a war, and enter into binding contracts. So, rather than leaving the fate of billions of animals each year in the hands of those who, because of age, lack of education or mental capacities, are incapable of making informed ethical decisions, laws should be enacted that provide this protection.

Scully (2002, p. 302) writes:

You would think that in some very uncomplicated way we could acknowledge in our laws the right of creatures under our power to have their natures respected and their dignity as living creatures recognized.

While a discussion of the content of such laws, how they would develop, evolve, and be enforced is beyond the scope of this section, enacting laws that respect the rights of animals would have the effect of improving the fate of animals and would also improve our ethical practices since:

Cruelty is not only a denial of the animal's nature but a betrayal of our own. If we are defined by reason and morality, then reason and morality must define our choices, even where animals are concerned....When people say, for example, that they like their veal or hot dogs just too much to ever give them up, and yeah it's sad about the farms but that's just the way it is, reason hears in that the voice of gluttony. We can say that here what makes a human being human is precisely the ability to understand that the suffering of an animal is more important than the taste of a treat (Scully, 2002, p. 303).

Regan (2004, p. 63) compares the process of deciding upon the legitimacy of animal rights to "legal arguments in a courtroom" in that "it is rare that one and only one fact, one and only one argument, decides guilt or innocence." In most cases, "it is the accretion of a body of relevant facts and the cumulative strength of the accompanying arguments that tip the scales of justice, one way or the other." (p. 63) Likewise, Stevens (2003, p. 207) believes that the "cumulative case for vegetarianism succeeds in establishing that vegetarianism is... a virtuous dietary commitment" which "shifts the burden of proof to meat eaters who believe their dietary choice is without moral taint." Therefore, the default position should be veganism and not meat eating; individuals ought to explain and justify their meat eating. A reasonable and more common question should be, "Why do you eat meat?" and not "Why are you vegetarian?"

## Animal Activists

This section will explore two animal advocacy organizations, Vegan Outreach (VO) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and one study involving 23 animal activists (Herzog, 1993) and another which examined the effectiveness of PETA advertisements (Mika, 2006).

While there are numerous organizations that work for animal welfare improvements or animal's rights I include PETA and VO for fairly straightforward reasons. In the case of VO, I am a supporter, both financially and philosophically. I believe that this organization is doing more good per dollar invested than any other animal advocacy group, though I have not conducted any formal analysis. PETA is often considered the largest and most well-known animal advocacy group in the United States, although the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has a large support base and is well known also.

The roots of VO started in 1993 when Animal Liberation Action was formed by three directors including Matt Ball and Jack Norris. The organization's name changed to VO in 1995. VO has distributed over 5 million booklets since its founding. In 2006, VO sent out 1,167,236 booklets, such as *Why vegan?* and *Even if you like meat, you can help end this cruelty*. And through its Adopt-a-College program, 665 campuses had been leafleted with 1,003,862 booklets handed directly to individuals (Vegan Outreach, 2007).

Their organizational efforts are focused on leafleting college campuses in order to inform students about the realities of factory farming and the suffering of animals raised for food. They cite the following statistics:



The number of animals killed for fur in the U.S. each year is approximately equal to the human population of Illinois. The number of animals killed in experimentation in the U.S. each year is approximately equal to the human population of Texas. The number of mammals and birds farmed and slaughtered in the U.S. each year is approximately equal to one and two-thirds the entire human population of Earth. Over 99% of the animals killed in the U.S. each year die to be eaten (Vegan Outreach, 2007).

Unlike PETA, VO is wary of courting media attention. They write:

Trying to use the media has a number of drawbacks. There is rarely enough time to present a full and compelling case for veganism. Nor is there time enough to get into important nutritional aspects that need attention in order to follow a vegan diet successfully. Furthermore, the media makes opponents aware of our efforts. This enables animal exploiters to mobilize against us, as well as providing them with a free venue in which to disagree with us, since reports invariably give them equal or better airtime. Many in the media will only air something if they feel they are able to make us look silly, or like vandals and terrorists....All of the above drawbacks can be avoided by handing out detailed and accurate information about veganism in one-on-one situations. You might reach fewer people, but you will be providing them with thorough

information, versus a sound bite that is easy to dismiss or forget (Vegan Outreach, 2007).

Their approach centers on understanding, empathy, and gentle persuasion:

There is hope for animal liberation if and only if we learn how to help people get past their wall of denial and manifest their latent compassion.

To succeed, our interactions with others must be rooted in empathy and understanding—working with and from a person’s motivations, fears, desires, and shortcomings. Instead of approaching with a "fighting" mindset, which necessarily makes people defensive and closed to new ideas, we should provide people with information that they can digest on their own time and act upon at a sustainable pace. Only then will real progress be made (Vegan Outreach, 2007).

According to PETA’s website, PETA, “with more than 1.6 million members and supporters, is the largest animal rights organization in the world.” Their mission statement reads:

PETA focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: on factory farms, in laboratories, in the clothing trade, and in the entertainment industry. We also work on a variety of other issues, including the cruel killing of beavers, birds and other "pests," and the abuse of backyard dogs (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, 2007).

PETA is a polarizing force. Some, like the president and co-founder, Ingrid Newkirk, believe firmly in their tactics. Others wonder whether a change in approach, to one less combative and media-hungry, to one more similar to Vegan Outreach's, might be more effective. Does their approach turn away as many people, or more, as it attracts? There really is no way to know for certain. Maybe PETA reaches particular individuals with their approach where others would fail.

A recent study that investigated the reactions of the "uninitiated" (non-activist population) to a variety of PETA visual materials (billboard, print ads, buttons, stickers, and literature), posed the question: "Is it better to get noticed in a negative way or not at all?" and concluded, "The findings constitute a cautionary tale for social movement organizations that employ incendiary language or images in their recruitment efforts" (Mika, 2006, p. 915). The focus group was composed of fifty-two Sociology 101 students from a major university, averaging 20-years of age, the very target of many animal rights organizations such as PETA and Vegan Outreach.

While the use of moral shocks and condensing symbols such as the use of graphic images of bloodied animals may cause some to have an immediate shift in perception, to a view more sympathetic to animals, "it is equally plausible that such an approach may deeply offend, resulting in a backlash against the organization, undermining its credibility and tainting the movement as a whole" (Mika, 2006, p. 921). Mika (2006, p. 932) writes:

However, when one is confronted with personal and aggressive attacks condemning meat consumption, it is one's own behavior being

condemned: the enemy is thyself. The discussants took umbrage at both the content and the portrayal of themselves as culprits. Thus, it could be that moral shock campaigns are ineffective when promoting vegetarianism, because condemning meat consumption (as opposed to other violations of animal rights) inevitably forces people to confront their own behavior (as opposed to that of others), and they are less likely to join a cause that requires them to make fundamental changes in what is such a deeply ingrained lifestyle.

Conversely, as Mika (2006, p. 932) notes, it is not possible to determine from this focus group study the long-term affect of exposure to these messages:

Indeed, it is possible that a viewer may retain in one's mind a vague connection between, for example, Nazis and animal consumers, and over time forget that they initially rejected the association. Therefore, it may be premature to conclude that the ads that produced the most strongly negative reactions were ineffective recruitment devices.

Herzog (1993) interviewed 23 animal activists; his results focused on the cognitions involved in activist's conversion to an animal rights perspective, how it affected relationships, and their own sense of happiness and meaning. Herzog found many activists experienced "a major shift in thinking to a worldview in which there is a fundamental equality between humans and other species" (p. 106). Despite being accused of being overly emotional many of the activists made their decisions, as Jim did,

a participant in Herzog's study, by employing "cold rationality" (p. 107). Jim describes the research he did and how he is able to separate his emotions from his actions:

I did nutritional research and I did it really well.... But, at the end of each experiment you have to kill off all of the baby animals, and with baby chickens you usually break their necks. I would just break their necks, and often their heads would come off, and I did this to 300 chickens. I would just sit there pulling their heads off. I didn't even think about it – didn't think it was horrible.... I don't think of it as an emotional issue (Herzog (Herzog, 1993, p. 107).

Other activists Herzog (1993, p. 108) interviewed were emotional about the issue, but recognized they needed to "buttress their initial emotional responses with logic in order to adequately discuss their positions on animal issues with others." Herzog also found that "animal rights activists seriously consider moral dilemmas that most people conveniently ignore" which included such topics as having companion animals, wearing animal products purchased prior to their change, and the use of medicines that had been tested on animals (p. 109).

Herzog (1993) found that the activists felt a need to spread their message, encountered interpersonal difficulties (encountering more problems with family than friends), and had mixed results on their sense of happiness. For some, the cause "imbued their life with a sense of meaning that had been missing"; a retired police officer who had battled clinical depression said, "[It] makes you happy doing what you

are doing. It does affect your whole existence.... I'm just totally happy" (p. 115).

However, others were frustrated by public attitudes regarding the treatment of animals and felt guilty when their behaviors didn't conform to their ideology. Herzog noted that, "Many were laboring under a heavy moral burden that other people do not bear" (p. 115). Judy said, "I don't feel like a normal person anymore, I feel like there is always something to worry about" (Herzog, 1993, p. 116).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Critical theory is the frame that guided this qualitative approach to the study of vegans in five different professions (medical doctor, registered dietitian, “farmer” (a person formerly involved in the raising and/or slaughtering of animals), professional animal activist, and philosophy professor). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with three vegans in each of the five categories were conducted in order to explore and analyze the reasons they became vegan, why each continues with their choice, how this decision has affected them and their relationships, and their beliefs about omnivore’s choice to consume animal products. Little research exists that explores this topic (MacNair, 1998; McDonald, 2000; Larsson, et al., 2003). In addition to the interviews with participants, I conduct an autoethnography in which I answer the questions asked of participants.

Qualitative research is designed to develop knowledge (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003). There are numerous qualitative methodologies, which indicate to some degree the researcher’s presuppositions. By definition, “qualitative research is an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon.... The final

structure of the report is flexible, and it displays the researcher's biases and thoughts" (Creswell, 2002, p. 648).

### **Theoretical Frame**

Critical research and autoethnography are the two methods utilized in this study. Critical research was a motivation for the study, it informed the approach to the literature review, and inspired a number of interview questions (e.g. "What explains why more people are not vegan?").

Merriam, et al. (2002) wrote, "In critical inquiry the goal is to critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (p. 327). According to Ponterotto (2005) the researcher uses "interviews to help empower" (P. 131). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), write:

Inquiry that aspires to the name "critical" must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guardrail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world (p. 305).

This current study of 15 vegans sought to understand what motivated and sustained them and what their experience is like. It also looks to explore their transition from meat eater to vegan (implicit in this exploration is a discovery of their "before" and "after" beliefs) and to describe how their beliefs and practices might be useful in



extending the reader's circle of compassion to include "food" animals. Ozanne and Murray (1995, p. 524) write, "If critical theory and public policy have a future together, they must work hand-in-hand to embrace the idealism of a true democracy and to empower the consumer to become reflexively defiant." It might be said, that vegans are the ultimate reflexively defiant consumers. And therefore, the use of critical theory to examine vegan's beliefs and experiences may reveal a path for others to be reflexive consumers and question the power relationships they support with their dollars.

Merriam, et al (2002, p. 327) states:

Those who engage in critical research frame their research questions in terms of power – who has it, how it's negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on. It is also assumed that people unconsciously accept things the way they are, and in so doing reinforce the status quo.... Power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of those without power.

Vegans might argue that, those with "power" include all animal-product consuming humans, and the powerless, marginalized, and oppressed are those animals who are exploited and killed for their flesh, milk, eggs or other consumable properties. However, since it is not possible, at least in a traditional sense, to interview the animals who are raised for food and ask them about their experiences, this study focuses on the marginalization of vegans who have struggled and who are struggling against the meat-eating majority and the social structures supported by them. Vegans spoke of silencing

their voices, verbal attacks, the fear of a physical confrontation, and careers being threatened.

In order for the reader to have a clearer picture of the approach and philosophical underpinnings of this research, I explain my epistemological beliefs (How do I know what I claim to know?), my ontological perspective (What is the nature of existence?), and my thoughts about how my values influence this research (axiology).

The paradigm from which this research flows is critical or ideological. “The critical-ideological paradigm is one of emancipation and transformation, one in which the researcher’s proactive values are central to the task, purpose, and methods of research” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Yet, as Gearing (2004, p. 1433) notes, “most qualitative researchers state the theoretical method in their study’s title or introduction; however few qualitative researchers note plainly their epistemological position or ontological perspective.” This research shows how the reasoned actions of vegans, their beliefs and practices, can provide insights that may help animal product-consuming individuals to see a different path that may ultimately result in an improvement in their health and wellbeing. If this work contributes to the change (transformation) of a sufficient number of individuals then the health of the globe and its inhabitants will benefit, and this in turn this may provide a more accepting and supportive environment for vegans (emancipation).

My approach is consistent with that of a critical theorist, one who “acknowledges a reality shaped by ethnic, cultural, gender, social, and political values” and who focuses “on realities that are mediated by power relations that are socially and

historically constituted” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). The issue of ontology, a branch of metaphysics that examines the nature of being, is important to discuss since the focus of this study is an exploration of vegan’s reality: their lived experience, including the social difficulties they experience as a self-made minority. “Ontology concerns the nature of reality and being” and addresses the “form and nature of reality” and “what can be known about that reality” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). What is the nature of existence when one is vegan? This study provides the answer.

Epistemology, a branch of philosophy that explores the origin and nature of human knowledge, asks the question, “How do we know what we know?” I bring to this study extensive personal and academic knowledge, as a vegan and researcher in this field, which assisted me in providing a voice for vegans and helped them to share their story to powerful effect. Although “Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the ‘knower’ (the research participant) and the ‘would-be knower’ (the researcher)” – I play both roles; one as researcher and one as participant through autoethnography (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131).

Axiology is a study of the nature of values and value judgments. “Axiology concerns the role of researcher values in the scientific process” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). Does a researcher such as a positivist (one who focuses on observable facts to the exclusion of abstract speculation about origins or ultimate causes) believe her values should not enter into the research equation? Or, if a researcher is a post-positivist (one who maintains a belief in observable facts, but may subscribe to schools of inquiry such as phenomenology or critical theory that came after positivism) do they “admittedly

hope and expect their value biases to influence the research process and outcome,” as is the case in this present study? (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131) My values, however, have their greatest effect in the direction and extent of the literature review, some (but not all) of the questions asked, and my ability to see the world differently, through the eyes of an ethical vegan. Prior to conducting the interviews, I thought that someone without comparable values would likely be able to discover similar themes from the data. However, I believe my intimate, personal and professional knowledge of the subject, and the values I hold, enabled me to find and report details that are crucial to understanding the experience of being vegan that others may have overlooked.

The purpose of providing “narratives of experience” (Caelli, 2001) - the story derived from the transcripts - to participants, receiving their feedback, and conferring with faculty colleagues and dissertation committee members was done to moderate researcher influence. Nevertheless, the conclusions I draw and the recommendations I make are impacted to some degree by my values.

### **Research Design**

This critical and autoethnographical study uses a semi-structured interview design to explore vegan’s experience of being vegan in a predominately meat eating world. In-depth interviews and participant feedback are used to explore vegans in five different professions (registered dietitian, medical doctor, philosophy professor, farmer, and animal activist). In addition I participate in the study through autoethnography.

This investigation uncovers what participants’ life and thoughts were prior to their conversion to a vegan diet especially as each relates to food, animals, self-image,

and relationships with family, friends, significant others, and society in general. Additionally, an illumination of the events, literature, or thoughts which altered their beliefs and practices was sought. The challenges and rewards related to their change is a central feature of this investigation, as are their thoughts about why individuals and societies in general continue to eat animal products.

In the autoethnography section, I answer the same questions asked of participants. However, not every detail is included. For example, some details were omitted to protect family or friends. Medford (2006) discusses the difference between “Truth” and “truthfulness.” She writes,

There is slippage between Truth (our experience of reality) and truthfulness because sometimes it seems appropriate – even necessary – to abbreviate, edit, or otherwise modify our life stories in our writing.... The difference between what we know... and what we write is mindful slippage” (p. 853).

The details in the autoethnography are calculated so the Truth can be known. “Good autoethnographers are ethical, critical, reflexive, and thoughtful when making decisions in their writing.... They don’t throw around details haphazardly” (Medford, 2006, p. 857).

Autoethnography is used to provide the reader with a better understanding of the author’s experience so that they may decide what impact it might have on the direction and results of the study. Placing the demand for reflexivity on the researcher

helps to “locate the researcher at the center of the research and require him to be unreservedly responsible for the knowledge he creates” (Borochowitz, 2005, p. 348).

Interview questions were guided by the desire to understand the experience of being vegan, from the pre-transition stage through to a mature stage in which one has been a practicing vegan for years. Questions were heavily influenced by my six years experience as a vegetarian and six years as a vegan, the extensive review of literature, and lastly by a question that has perplexed me for years: “Why do so many people continue to consume animal products?” One research question originated during work on the autoethnography section. I wondered, “Is there something in my personality or how I approach the world that influenced my becoming vegan?”

Because vegans often cite health, nutritional, environmental, animal welfare, and animal rights reasons for their dietary change (MacNair, 1998; McDonald, 2000; Larsson, et al., 2003), this study included interviews with three vegan medical doctors, philosophy professors, animal activists (by occupation), registered dietitians, and farmers (those who have participated in the raising and/or slaughtering of animals). While a main focus of the study relates to what the experience is like being vegan, these individuals, because of their education, training, and profession are in a position to offer informed commentary about the most commonly cited reasons for becoming and remaining vegan. Interviews were expected to last between 25 to 45 minutes, but the range was actually 18 minutes (Luke) to about 70 minutes (Phillip and Jon). However, most took between about 30 to 45 minutes.

## **Rationale**

A qualitative research design with semi-structured interview questions was selected in order to allow the participants, vegans, freedom to share their thoughts related to food choices and animal product consumption while also making certain that participants addressed key questions the study sought to answer. Each interview began with an open-ended, intentionally non-directional question, "What is it like to be vegan?" This non-directional questioning approach was selected for two reasons: answers to the general questions might indicate replies least affected by researcher influence and might ease the transition to more specific questions.

## **Sample**

This study examined the experiences and beliefs of three vegans in each of the following five professions: philosophy professor, registered dietitian, farmer, medical doctor, and animal activist. Participants were selected based upon their status as a vegan, occupation (or former occupation as in the case of farmers), their stated availability and willingness to read through the transcript of the interview, and to explore the narratives of experience (themes I derived from the interview). I had originally intended to weigh factors such as education and publications in the selection process, but the reality is that there are a limited number of individuals who are vegan and education levels were partly determined by occupation; philosophy professors, medical doctors, and registered dietitian all needed, respectively, a Ph.D., M.D. and bachelor's degree to hold that position. The formal education level achieved by animal

activists or former farmers was not a concern. The average (mean) age of participants was 45.4 years of age with a range from 22 to 68 and a median age of 48. While this may seem to be a fairly older age than might be expected from a study of vegans, the occupational criteria for inclusion and the education required for three of these professions had some effect.

Participants were located using convenience (non-random selection) and snowball sampling (receiving a referral from a participant) techniques. I knew eleven of the participants prior to the start of the interview process. I was guided by the search for a quality interview, and based upon their informative lectures, publications, or films I had a sense that these eleven had valuable thoughts and experiences to share.

I was no doubt aided by having a fairly large national circle of contacts within the vegetarian and vegan community and through my attendance at Vegetarian Summerfest, a week long event in its third decade which draws some of the nation's top vegetarian and vegan speakers and hundreds of attendees. Additionally, being vegan may have led participants to more readily agree to participate and to be willing to disclose rather personal details.

This study was intentionally designed to include a small sample size. During the pilot study with eleven vegans it was obvious that a small sample size allowed me to think about each respondent's interview more deeply – to keep the interview, literally, in my mind and to reflect upon the details and meanings. Borochowitz (2005), who teaches a qualitative research seminar, writes that “we are all conditioned to” believe “size does matter” (p. 351). One of his students asked, “What can be learned from ten



battered women? They don't represent anything!" (p. 351). He believes students are "preoccupied" with how many participants are needed and "who they are is of secondary importance." (Borochowitz, 2005, p. 351)

In this present study emphasis was placed on a desire to know who each participant is, to think deeply about their thoughts and experience, and to explore their nuances. Readers should not "drown in data" (Morse, 2000, p. 3). "Narratives of experience" (Caelli, 2001), stories woven from the interviews, range from six to ten pages in length. There is richness in providing this kind of depth. Adding additional interviews would act to undermine the ability to include this kind of detail.

Crouch and McKenzie (2006, p. 493) believe that interview-based, qualitative research "positively calls for a collection of respondents' 'states,' the size of which can be kept in the researcher's mind as a totality under investigation at all stages of the research." This sample size achieves that goal.

McDonald (2000) conducted a qualitative study of 12 vegans that provides great insight into the process of becoming vegan. Her study contains memorable participant reflections and useful analysis; a small sample size does not appear to be a detriment. McDonald's sample used purposeful sampling techniques, along with snowball sampling.

Two studies unrelated to vegans provide evidence that small sample sizes may be used to powerful effect. Sinding (2003) interviewed 12 people who cared for a friend or family member who died of breast cancer. Sinding includes powerful quotes that enable a person to better imagine what it must be like to care for a dying person.

Another study, “HIV-infected mothers’ videotaped legacies for their children,” explores the videos made by 12 dying women; the tapes are “flowing with a combination of moods reflecting love and concern, interspersed with the painful certainty of a motherless future” (Barnes, Taylor-Brown, & Wiener, 1997, p. 15).

Each of these studies (one about becoming vegan and two related to dying), the pilot study of 11 vegans, this current study of 15 vegans, and arguments made by qualitative researchers (Safman, 2004; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) indicate that a small number of interviews can meet high standards of qualitative research, and demonstrate the depth of understanding that can be gained through examining a small number of individual’s experiences and beliefs. Morse (2000) states that determining sample size:

depends on a number of factors, including the quality of the data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design used” (p. 3).

The scope of this study is narrow, in that it examines vegan’s experiences and beliefs. After the interview I created narratives of experience (Caelli, 2001) and asked participants to reflect on them. Shadowed data was also used; participants were asked if they know anyone else who is vegan. Most participants knew a hundred or more vegans. They were then asked to share details related to their impression of other vegan’s experience.

Morse (2000) believes “more participants” means “the study is larger but not necessarily richer” (p.3). Morse states that 6 to 10 participants can be appropriate for a qualitative study, depending upon the factors previously mentioned. This study was small, but rich.

### **Methods/Philosophy**

The researcher is one element in qualitative research as it is they who conceptualize and initiate the study, interact with the participants, ask questions, clarify answers, and analyze interviewee responses. Due to the primacy of the researcher’s role it is important to locate the researcher in the research – to explicate their ideologies and practices, and how this may affect the research.

The methods employed in this qualitative inquiry into vegan’s beliefs and experiences are semi-structured interviews and autoethnography, guided by the philosophical underpinnings of critical theory (Merriam, et al., 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study utilizes triangulation in the form of interviews, participant feedback, dissertation committee review, shadowed data, and autoethnography. The methods employed and the questions asked were done in the spirit of critical inquiry in an attempt to provide a unique perspective in regards to our relationship with food and animals and those who have dietary habits that fall outside of mainstream society, namely vegans. What follows is a description of the philosophical beliefs that guided my choices, how my values impacted the collection and analysis of data, and commentary from qualitative researchers on the ingredients necessary for

quality work. A discussion of the central role of the researcher in the research process is paramount in interpreting qualitative studies.

Qualitative researchers have come to realize that they influence the process of research by what they bring to it and what they decide to research (Schatz & Walker, 1995). The belief in true objectivity may fade as a general recognition of the socially constructed nature of research blossoms. With this in mind, researchers may confess their point-of-views more readily and seek to be more reflexive (Schatz & Walker, 1995, p. 13). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write that “claiming to engage in value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over” (p. 22).

According to Schatz and Walker (1995), research is personally-motivated and “who the researcher is can no longer be left out of the account without jeopardizing the validity of the inquiry” (p. 5). Learning about the author – “We need to find a form that places the authors inside events, and allows the reader a sense of access to the writers” (Schatz & Walker, 1995, p. 16). Who the researcher is prior to selecting and engaging in research and who they become and how they are affected by the research are all important elements in truly understanding the process and product of the research.

Schatz and Walker (1995) caution against leaving methodology to the devices of researchers. “Methodology” they write, “is too important to be left to the researcher: ... researchers have the responsibility to participate in the discussions about the commissioning, use and application of research...” (p. 13). It is important, for ethical reasons and to insure validity, to engage in co-research with research participants. A primary advantage of qualitative methods is that it “encourages participants to

introduce the factors that they perceive to be important and relevant, allowing new constructs to emerge that are not constrained by the researcher” (Knight, Nunkoosing, Vrij, & Cherryman, 2003, p. 309).

Schratz and Walker (1995) believe that it is “necessary for research never to claim the last word and always be reflexive, to be about itself as well as about its focus of concern” (p. 15). They write:

social science may claim to have the keys to truth, or at least to an objectivity that makes truth realizable, but such claims neglect the fact that research is itself socially located, and its claims to truth are more likely than not to become part of the problem rather than a means of finding answers to it (p. 15).

When considering the underlying assumptions of qualitative research it is essential to identify and assess the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the work. There are a number of difficulties in assessing the quality and also the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of qualitative research. There are “few and disparate guidelines for the implementation or evaluation of generic qualitative research” (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003, p. 2). Additionally, many view generic qualitative research as “a less demanding option” (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003, p. 3). It is often not “guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003, p. 4). This form of research is often presented in a manner that reflects little “understanding of the importance of an epistemological or theoretical position” (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003, p.

4). Because of a noted lack of consensus on the essential quality criteria for qualitative research the reader may be at a disadvantage in determining the philosophical and methodological approach taken by the researcher(s).

Additionally, due to the multidisciplinary approach and continually evolving philosophic underpinnings, there is no one best way to assess qualitative research. Therefore, it is imperative that the researcher take “responsibility for laying out the merits of a particular study” and provide “enough detail about the study, the approach, and the methods... so that the reader can appropriately evaluate the research” (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003, p. 8). The researcher should make sure to include a detailed account of his or her theoretical position, the strategies utilized to establish rigor, and the analytic lens used to analyze the data, while making certain the methods used are congruent with methodology (Caelli, Ray, & Miller, 2003).

It is incumbent that a qualitative researcher considers and divulges his or her philosophical and methodological approach as well as any relevant biases that play a role in the research process. While this study is a critical inquiry which is not based in phenomenology, it nevertheless attempts to explore and explain the phenomenon of being vegan. Therefore, an explanation of my approach to phenomenological reduction or bracketing should supply the reader with useful information as they weigh the quality of this study.

Gearing (2004) writes:

Phenomenological reduction is the scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions,

biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon. Bracketing, as in a mathematical equation, suspends certain components by placing them outside the brackets, which then facilitates a focusing in on the phenomenon within the brackets (p. 1430).

There is often an expectation that qualitative researchers will “put aside their values in order to more accurately describe respondent’s life experiences” (Ahern, 1999, p. 407). “The ability to put aside personal feelings and preconceptions is more a function of how reflexive one is rather than how objective one is because it is not possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware” (Ahern, 1999, p. 408). I concur with Way (2005, p. 534) that:

Researchers should constantly evaluate and reevaluate their biases, assumptions, and expectations. It is when prejudices are not reflected on or, as far as possible, acknowledged in research that one is likely to end up with findings that do not accurately represent the research participants’ views or perspectives.

It is important to approach research with an awareness of one’s presuppositions, to seek answers that will address thoughtfully developed questions born from an extensive literature review, while at the same time being open to new and contradictory information. To attempt to completely set aside one’s knowledge and theories seems illogical and counterproductive. Therefore, the bracketing performed in this study could

liberally be called a mix between analytical bracketing and pragmatic bracketing.

Analytical bracketing involves the attempt to bracket, yet recognizes its limitations:

Although the researcher acknowledges the improbability of suspending internal suppositions, such as their personal knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, values, and viewpoints, he or she nonetheless endeavors to try.

However, theoretical orientations are not suspended, as they guide the stepping into and out of the bracketing process (Gearing, 2004, p. 1443).

Pragmatic bracketing allows the researcher greater freedom to construct “bracketing to fit their research questions, investigation, or analysis,” but can suffer from being “ill defined, conceptually nebulous, and scientifically questionable” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1446). Deciding upon a combination of these two approaches to bracketing led to my choice of a semi-structured interview format. Interviews would begin with open-ended, exploratory questions that theoretically set aside my internal suppositions, but then questions were asked that took advantage of the extensive review of literature.

Among many of her tips, Ahern suggests qualitative researchers begin a reflexive journal and include the personal issues which motivated the research, “the taken-for-granted assumptions associated with your gender, race, socioeconomic status, and the political milieu of your research” (1999, p. 408). Ahern (1999, p. 408) also advocates locating where the power is located among each of the players in the research project and clarifying “your personal values” and acknowledging “areas in which you know you are subjective.”



## **Ethics**

“The philosophical basis of research ethics is ultimately premised on the fact that our research requires that we locate people who, to serve our research objectives, are willing to share information about themselves” (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 149). Haverkamp (2005) points out the importance of virtue ethics which “holds that moral and ethical choice must focus on the character of the researcher” who should think of participants as “specific individuals, located in specific situations that require actions based in care, responsibility, and responsiveness to context” (p. 149). When contemplating ethical issues that arise in research, “consideration of many perspectives on ‘doing good’ and ‘avoiding harm’ can inform our choices” (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 150).

While thinking about this concept I realized that my commitment to ahimsa, Sanskrit for dynamic harmlessness (doing the most good and doing no harm), would assist my efforts to research in an ethical manner which respects individual participants. However, it is well to remember, as Haverkamp notes, that one should not assume that because “one is virtuous, if one is caring and well intentioned, then risk will be avoided” (p. 151). The use of participant feedback was incorporated to lessen the risk of doing harm since participants were allowed to provide editorial changes to accurately convey their ideas and to address conclusions they disagreed with or objected to.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of interviews with fifteen vegans in five different occupational fields, an additional “interview” with myself, feedback from participants, shadowed data (Morse, 2003) received during the interview, and “after the interview”

discussion (Warren, et al., 2003). I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with a semi-structured interview format in order to explore and analyze the experience of being vegan. Each interview was approached with a discovery-oriented disposition. Interviews lasted between 18 and 70 minutes and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. A second microcassette tape recorder was used in order to have a backup recording.

Participants were emailed the narrative (story) derived from their interview, along with the narratives from the two other participants in their occupational category, and were asked to reflect on all three narratives. They were asked, "Did I get it right?" They were also asked to provide any feedback they thought would be helpful. This feedback provided me with additional confidence that I was in fact *getting it right* (Wolcott, 1990). It also allowed participants a chance to give editorial remarks so that what was written matched their experience and intention. This procedure provides the reader assurance that they are not reliant on the beliefs and work of the researcher. It is for this reason that I embraced the concept of participatory research described by Finlay (2002), who wrote, "Recognizing research as a co-constituted account, adherents of participative research argue that the research participants also have the capacity to be reflexive beings: They can be co-opted into the research as co-researchers"(p. 535). Additional details regarding my approach to participative research can be found in the data analysis section.

I engaged in reflexive analysis and recorded my insights in a notebook. Regarding reflexive analysis, Finlay writes that "At a minimum..." reflexivity "means acknowledging the existence of research bias and explicitly locating the researcher within the research

process” and “at a more active level, it involves a more wholesale embracing of subjectivity, for example, by exploiting researcher’s/co-researcher’s reflective insights and by engaging in explicit, self-aware meta-analysis throughout the research process” (Finlay, 2002, p. 536).

Procedures for the data analysis centered on a mastery of the interview data, member checking, and feedback from my dissertation advisor and methodologist. I immersed myself in the interview data, listening to each interview three times. While transcribing the interview and creating the narrative, themes that emerged were noted.

After each interview, time was allotted for reflection upon the interview questions and after the eighth interview I recognized that the question, “Do you think it requires discipline to maintain a vegan diet?” was not specific enough and altered that question to the following two questions, “Does it require discipline for you to maintain a vegan diet?” and “Do you think it requires discipline for other people to follow a vegan diet?” This was the only question that necessitated alteration. Additionally, after conducting the interviews and creating the narratives the dissertation committee members received the narratives of experience and a section that included participant’s commentary.

### **Data Analysis**

I viewed the process of data analysis as more art than science. Had an omnivore, or even another vegan, interviewed the same 15 individuals there would have been some differences in their findings compared to mine, but there would have been far more similarities, especially if they relied as heavily on using participant’s words as I did.

An omnivore, and friend of mine, who listened to several interviews focused on what she perceived to be their anger and frustration. Although this information is included, she likely would have placed more emphasis on this. The reality is, the interview provided a forum for them to vent some of their frustrations and their responses were interpreted in the context of the rest of their story, my own experience, and the interview setting. They were not living their lives in constant anger and frustration, though that may have been her interpretation.

Mays and Pope (2000) argue that qualitative and quantitative research should be viewed as an attempt to represent reality rather than a means to achieve truth. They list several strategies to ensure validity. Triangulation, member checking, clear exposition of methods of data collection and analysis, reflexivity, and attention to negative cases are all strategies that can improve a qualitative study . Each of these strategies were employed.

Fade (2003) discusses the importance of researchers exposing their biases and personal perspectives as a means of improving credibility (Finlay, 2002; Hall & Callery, 2001). The act of taking into account one's predisposition during analysis, known as reflexivity, and openly discussing one's position is essential because "qualitative researchers interpret what study participants do and say and often ask further probing questions based upon the information they receive" (Fade, 2003, p. 141). By incorporating my autoethnography and clearly stating my position at the beginning of this document I am hopeful that readers are enabled to make better sense of the research process and findings.

Viewing participants as co-creators of research and incorporating their interpretations into the study worked to insure validity at the same time it provided an opportunity for participants to exert greater influence and moderate the effect of the researcher. Providing participants the opportunity to comment on the narratives gleaned from the interviews was a crucial step in member checking. Participant feedback added to the data and assisted me in clarifying their stories and ideas and also acted as a counter weight to researcher bias. Because of this, readers are better able to assess the level of consensus arrived between researcher and participants.

It is important to consider that, as Pyett writes, “as social researchers, we have access to other data, research findings, theories, and understandings of similar or contrasting situations, we have a capacity and an academic obligation to apply our critical understandings to the accounts given by participants,” however, “we must respect but not necessarily agree with the actors or research participants” (p. 1173). This does not “imply that the researcher’s interpretation is more valid than the participant’s; rather they are different and possibly both valid perspectives and understandings of the situation” (p. 1173).

This participative approach proved helpful in my remaining mindful of the demands inherent in virtue ethics. I was careful, however, to limit the attention paid to my own reflexivity. Finlay writes a balanced approach to reflexivity occurs when “the self is exploited only while to do so remains purposeful”; that “if the researcher is sincere in maintaining a primary focus on the participants or texts involved, returning to

the self only as part of increasing awareness and insight” then an overly self-indulgent analysis can be avoided (Finlay, 2002, p. 542).

Triangulation can enhance credibility by incorporating “the use of more than one method of data collection (e.g. semistructured interviews and field observations) or more than one analyst (e.g. peers or participants)” (Fade, 2003, p. 141). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) advise against the inclusion of the word triangulation due to its overuse and varied meaning and Richardson and St. Pierre believe that the crystal is the more accurate image to describe qualitative inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). To be clear, for the purposes of this study, triangulation meant obtaining feedback from dissertation committee members, participants, several faculty colleagues, and numerous friends and family members as I discussed the ongoing study. It also included shadowed data (participants were asked about other vegans they know), autoethnography, and illustrations by vegans.

Ahern (1999) advises researchers to consider:

Even after you have completed your analysis, reflect on how you write up your account. Are you quoting more from one respondent than another? If you are, ask yourself why. Do you agree with one person’s sentiment or turn of phrase more than those of another?.... Did you choose to write up the account in the first or third person? Why? (p. 409).

Caelli (2001) described the ineffectiveness of providing participants with transcripts, some of whom did not read them, questioned the value of receiving them, and “appeared unable to see the meaning in the data they had provided” (p. 277).

Transcripts were read numerous times while listening to the audio of the participant's interview in order to derive the narrative from the transcripts (Caelli, 2001). Interviewees were then provided the "narratives of experience" (Caelli, 2001, p. 277) and asked to comment. Caelli (2001, p. 277) notes that "narrative and transcript are not one in the same." She calls the process of locating the story from the interview and transcript "deriving narrative from transcripts" and finds that participants are more inclined and better able to provide meaningful feedback when they are given "narratives of experience" rather than transcripts (p. 278). The use of this strategy was a highly successful component of this study.

Kincheloe and McLaren, writing about the research approach taken by Paulo Freire note that "he insisted on involving, as partners in the research process, the people he studied as subjects" (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 305). In Freire's critical research "everyone learned to see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognize forces that subtly shape their lives" (p. 305). I think the vegans in this study benefited from thinking about their own and other's narratives. As Jon, the skateboarding philosopher wrote in this email after providing detailed feedback, "Thanks for the chance for such stimulating reflection!"

### **Procedures**

Participants were located via my professional and social network, snowball sampling techniques, and through emails and phone calls sent to philosophy departments at colleges and universities (See Sample section above). As previously

stated, in all but two interviews two recorders were used so that a backup existed in case there was a problem with one device or material was accidentally erased.

After the interview I took notes, concentrating on the before and after interview time period. Most interviews were transcribed within 24 hours, but some took several days. Narratives of experience (the story that emerged from the interview) were created within one or two days after transcription was complete. Immersion into the data occurred through reading the transcripts several times, looking for themes, descriptive quotes, contradictions, and questions that surfaced. Interestingly, the creation of the narrative actually began during interviews as I often thought, "That's a great quote!" and knew it captured an important point or transmitted an emotionally powerful idea.

Each participant received their own narrative and those of the other two participants in their occupational category. Once the three narratives for an occupational category were completed the narratives were emailed to the participants and to the dissertation chair.

In terms of triangulation, narratives were provided to faculty colleagues, vegan and omnivorous friends, the participants themselves, and to the dissertation committee. I kept a reflective diary which allowed me to track the progress of my thoughts about the data and my ongoing conclusions. The feedback received from the narratives communicated to me that I was getting it right.

The use of "quantitative" data is limited. For example, results include information about the number of participants who became vegan for ethical or health-related reasons, the average age of participants and the range of ages, and the average



and range for the number of years it took to transition from a vegetarian to a vegan diet. While the use of numbers has a place in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2001), emphasis is placed on the importance of ideas, beliefs, and experiences, and the quotes that capture their essence.

Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon, and Chandler (2002) discuss the meaning-making phase of qualitative research which takes place “at the interface of analysis and interpretation” (p. 389). They speak of “the ‘aha,’ where one makes meaning beyond the facts” which is the result of “living and breathing the data.” The meaning was searched for in each answer as was the essence of each interview.

Among their suggestions, Hunter et al. (2002) propose the use of metaphors to help clarify the meaning of the data. Two metaphors can be found in the discussion section.

Hunter et al. (2002) conclude:

...for the miracle to happen and the aha to occur, it is critical that incubation time be given and that creative skills to achieve illumination be provided. The aha is based upon the outcome of the incubation phase during which one is willing to take risks, tolerate ambiguity, and persevere (p. 397).

### **Data Reporting**

Too often the real players of qualitative research are the authors, for it is they who come across as the authority on the subject; it is their analysis that forms the final word (Jamison, Wenk, & Parker, 2000). Results are provided with extensive use of

participant's own words and the narratives derived are the result of thorough data analysis and participative research efforts.

A brief description of qualitative research that contrasts sharply with the approach taken in this dissertation follows. In the article *Stigma management among gay/bisexual men with HIV/AIDS* (Siegel, Lune, & Meyer, 1998) participant's voices do not play a prominent role. Participants were only *allowed* to speak briefly and their words were used to make the author's point. Their personalities were hidden and no context was given to allow for a better understanding of why a particular individual expressed themselves in a particular manner or felt the way they did. It is interesting and sad, that in a study involving 145 HIV-positive men who were "accrued" (p. 7), their contribution was not recognized.

Thick description was used for this current study; an explicit attempt was made to bring to light the vegans who contributed to this research. Qualitative research, even when it does contain a fair amount of first person accounts, may contain few subtle details that make for thick description; the "speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and – voila! – a gesture" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6).

Geertz argues that all human behavior is like this. He therefore distinguishes between a *thin description*, which (to extend our example) describes only the wink itself, and a *thick description*, which explains the context of the practices and discourse within a society so that one knows the meaning of the wink. Was it a flirtation? Did it communicate understanding? Without context, it is not possible to know.

According to Geertz, the task of the anthropologist is to give thick descriptions. In the pilot study on the “intrapersonal and interpersonal impact of being vegan” participant’s descriptions of their family’s eating habits during their youth was included in order to convey to the reader that they made a conscious choice that conflicts with their family’s desires for them and societal expectations. For example, a vegan philosophy professor from the pilot study described the social impact of being vegan:

When we became vegetarians, we didn’t know another vegetarian couple, and in fact, we didn’t know another vegetarian, so we were in our world, we were absolutely totally alone. I don’t think we had any knock-down, drag-out arguments with people, but at the same time it does make, it made a difference then, and still makes a difference now, in terms of social relations, because, I always have said that back then anyway we were like the ants at the picnic because everybody knew we were going to show up and nobody was happy to see us.

Laughing, I responded by saying, “That’s classic!” This exchange is the “wink” that Geertz refers to that illuminated the emic or insider perspective that, I, the researcher and fellow vegan, instantly understood. Explicit and subtle, telling quotes, were mined for in the transcripts and were included in the present study.

The detailed narratives were included in order to enable the reader to feel as if they know the participant. It is hard to imagine someone reading one or more narratives and not having a very strong sense of what it is to be vegan. Additionally, the selection of interesting quotes and stories goes a long way in making a work more readable.

However, beyond its entertainment value, it is the inclusion of important ideas, revolutionary ideas, or useful constructs that make a work most desirable for the reader. Does the reader believe they have received a gift of knowledge after reading the work? Answered in the affirmative, this indicates the work has succeeded in an important way.

### **Validity**

How does one know when they've gotten things right? Getting it right or at least "not getting it all wrong" is a concern detailed by Harry Wolcott (1990) in an article where he lays out nine points to consider when seeking validity. The following comprise his guide: talk little, listen a lot; record accurately; begin writing early; let readers "see" for themselves; report fully; be candid: seek feedback; try to achieve balance; and write accurately (Wolcott, 1990).

Wolcott's principles are used to assess validity in this study. During the participants did most of the talking. Clarifying questions were generally asked at the end of the interview so as to not disrupt or influence participant's responses. A listen-talk ratio of about 15:1 to 30:1 was expected. Participants were expected to talk for 15 to 30 minutes for every one minute of interviewer dialogue. An examination of transcribed interviews indicates with a fair degree of certainty that all interviews fell within this range.

Notes were taken immediately following the interview, and I continued to record my thoughts as they occurred. Most interviews were transcribed within 24 to 48 hours.

During the interview attention was paid to participant's body posture, expressions, and movements and how all of these corresponded to their words and tone.

Wolcott advises researchers to begin writing early and create a "preliminary draft of a descriptively oriented study" and to record "first impressions" once field work has begun in order to create a "baseline from which the work proceeds" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 129). The pilot study referred to earlier helped me to see what my thoughts were going into this study.

A commitment was made to the idea of letting readers see for themselves and was in agreement with Wolcott's statement that in the "delicate balance between providing too much detail and too little, I would rather err on the side of too much" (p. 130). His advice to report fully means that he is not "disconcerted by data that do not fit the developing account or my interpretation of it" (p. 130). He believes subjectivity is a strength of qualitative research, but cautions "To the extent that my feelings and personal reactions seem relevant to a case, I try to reveal them: The greater their possible influence, the more attention they receive and the earlier they appear in the account" (p. 131). My status as a vegan researcher is clearly stated as is my hope that this work has the effect of causing people to consider moving in the direction of a more plant-based diet.

Wolcott (1990) suggests seeking feedback. I received feedback from the dissertation committee, and vegan and animal-product-consuming friends and colleagues who received drafts. Wolcott thinks this feedback process is an important means "intended to not only help me get things right (or keep me from getting them all wrong)

but to convey ideas in such a way that the reader, who is also not quite getting it right, is not getting it all wrong, either” (p. 133).

During the prospectus hearing a committee member expressed concern that there was too much emphasis on registered dietitians. At the time seven additional questions for dietitians were included that were not designed to be asked of other participants (e.g. “What are your thoughts about meat eating colleague’s knowledge, practices, and beliefs related to vegetarian and vegan diets?”). The member asked, “Why not ask doctors that question?” Balance was improved by asking each member these questions. Balance was also sought in terms of data reporting, so that each participant would be heard. The narratives provide a great deal of that balance.

Lastly, Wolcott suggests the researcher write accurately. By this he means that one should examine the document for technical accuracy, but also look to see that there is a consistency throughout the text. However, he questions “consistency” and thinks it “as much an author’s trick as it is revealing of research acumen” and writes, “that our studies are so free of inner contradiction ought really to set us wondering how they can be describing human behavior” (p. 134). Coming back to a section several times, allowing for sufficient time for the material to become *new* again, allowed for more accurate writing.

As previously mentioned, validity or the trustworthiness of qualitative research depends upon the rigor applied to data collection and analysis, reflexivity, and triangulation, including member checking (Mays & Pope, 2000; Fade, 2003; Finlay, 2002; Hall & Callery, 2001). Including “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) and the deft use of

quotes sufficient enough to allow the reader to have a sense of the person and their ideas are both important factors that assist a reader in determining for themselves the quality of the work. This study incorporates the philosophy and approach to validity discussed in this section.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Autoethnography**

##### ***The Interviewer***

I was born Christopher Hirschler in 1968 in Rochester, NY. I was 35 years old when my mother died from glioblastoma multiforme (an aggressive brain cancer). My dad, presently 67, has smoked for over 50-years. I believe part of the reason I have been so interested in health has to do with witnessing my parents commit what I call “errors of commission” (i.e. smoking) and “errors of omission” (i.e. not exercising). I sought the opposite.

My professional experience includes teaching Health Education at Monroe Community College (NY), Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College (OH) and also managing Tri-C’s nationally recognized Health & Wellness Center at the Metro Campus. I became vegetarian in 1995 after conducting what could be called a lay person’s literature review of nutritional approaches to cancer-prevention.

In January of 2001, I became vegan after reading Food Revolution (Robbins, 2001). I was shocked to learn of the extent of the abuse inflicted upon sentient



creatures. I was previously unaware of the suffering experienced by milk-producing cows, egg-laying hens and all “farm” animals. I was amazed at the level of ignorance I had maintained for so long as a lacto-ovo vegetarian who was convinced, without having researched the topic, that consuming dairy products didn’t cause harm to the female cows.

I read feverishly on the subject and became more and more convinced of the health advantage of a vegan diet. More importantly, I felt a moral imperative to no longer contribute to animal suffering. Certainly my decision to become vegan was aided by my years of experience in preparing vegetarian meals and knowing how to adapt to dietary changes.

In June of 2004, at age 35 and weighing 175 pounds at 5’ 9” and having been vegan for over 3-years, I bench pressed 225 pounds twenty times. At 38 and having spent too much time working on my dissertation, I am presently bench pressing 225 pounds fifteen times. I feel very healthy and energetic. I had my cholesterol checked in October of 2006 and my total was 160 and my HDL was 49 for a ratio of total-to-HDL of 3.27, which is excellent by any measure. According to the American Heart Association “if a person has a total cholesterol of 200 mg/dL and an HDL cholesterol level of 50 mg/dL, the ratio would be stated as 4:1. The goal is to keep the ratio below 5:1; the optimum ratio is 3.5:1” ([www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org), 2005).

Spiritually, I have gained a greater sense of purpose and comfort knowing that I am working to help animals and humans, and because I do not intentionally contribute

to the suffering of animals. Aside from the social and relationship difficulties, which have been tough, it has been relatively easy to be vegan.

Although I have purchased three items that contained animal products during my vegan tenure (2 pair of Nike hiking boots with small amounts of leather and a leather catcher's glove), I have not knowingly ingested any animal products since the day I decided to become vegan. The few non-food animal products I did purchase were not easy purchases to make; I debated the decision for hours. In the case of the Nike hiking boots, which were on sale for about \$40 (regularly about \$90), I would save about \$80 per pair when compared to similar vegan hiking boots. This was the first animal-product I had considered since becoming a vegan about 2-years prior. Still unsure about what I should do, I happened to read an article by Ball (2004) of Vegan Outreach in which he discussed "practical vegans" and "symbolic vegans." He wrote,

Practical vegans avoid the specific products for which animals are bred, raised, and eventually slaughtered. Every product they choose to avoid can be directly and causally linked to animal suffering. Symbolic vegans, in addition to avoiding those products, go beyond this to some level (e.g., avoiding sugar but not water) so as to be able to make a statement (about solidarity with the animals, personal purity, etc.).... In dealing with others, practical vegans can explain: "I don't buy products that directly cause animal suffering—things for which animals are bred, raised, and slaughtered. A symbolic vegan could add: "Personally, I choose to go further and avoid film [sugar, etc.] as a symbolic gesture."

I read another pamphlet by Ball (2004), about advocacy, in which he stated the primary mission of Vegan Outreach was to reduce suffering. He inserted reality into the advocacy equation:

When we choose to do one thing, we are choosing not to do others. The people who want to create a better world, including those who make up Vegan Outreach, have extremely limited resources and time. So instead of choosing to “do *something*, do *anything*,” we pursue actions that we believe will lead to the greatest reduction in suffering .

The distinction between practical veganism and symbolic veganism, along with the principle of acting to effect the greatest reduction in suffering was liberating for me. I realized that not buying the Nike boots would do little if anything to reduce suffering. However, if I took some of the savings and contributed it to Vegan Outreach the outcome would be different. I purchased the 2 pair of boots and mailed \$50 to Vegan Outreach, enough to print 200 pamphlets at 25 cents each. I wondered how many of those 200 people who received a “*Why vegan?*” or “*Even if you like meat...*” pamphlet would become vegetarian or significantly reduce their meat intake. I felt good about my purchase and subsequent donation, and the feelings of guilt were lessened.

The catcher’s glove was a much more difficult decision, owing to the fact that the entire product was essentially a cow’s skin. How could I justify this purchase to a cow? And, I did feel the need to be able to explain myself to a cow. Actually, I felt like I would need to be able to defend this purchase to the individual cow from whom this glove came.

So, why don't I apply the same philosophy that enabled me to purchase the Nike boots to this current situation? The thought that prevents me from purchasing a less expensive leather glove and donating a portion of the savings is this: I wouldn't purchase a glove made of human skin under any conditions and therefore, I should apply the same principle to this decision.

### ***Interview Questions***

#### ***What Is It Like Being Vegan?***

Although being vegan has greatly shaped who I am, how I filter the world and impacted relationships, both positively and negatively, I don't move through the world reminding myself, "I'm vegan." So, when I am sitting watching TV, reading, biking, playing sports or engaged in some other activity, the experience is generally no different than it was when I wasn't vegan.

An imperfect analogy might help to clarify. A few days ago I spoke with a very nice guy in his fifties at the gym who told me that when he was an infant, doctors decided to use their "new toy," radiation, to remove a benign growth on the left side of his face. They "bombarded" it with radiation "instead of just leaving it alone." As a result he was blinded in his left eye. He told me people often ask, "What is it like to have only one eye?" His response is, "What would it be like to have two mouths? I don't know. I think, 'Why would you need two mouths?'"

I thought of the application to those who are vegan – they just "are," that is their life and they have adjusted to it. Occasionally there are things that affect you. In his case, the inability to hit a baseball, or in the case of being vegan, the inability to go to a

certain restaurant, but you work around it. It is not to say that I don't encounter some situation on a daily-basis that reminds me I am "different," but it is not a big deal.

A few years back I was talking with a 30-year health education professor at Cuyahoga Community College about how some people's first thought of me is as a vegan, and she said, "When I think about you, 'vegan' is far down the list." It is probably worth noting here that I have have spent more of my life as an omnivore (25 years) than as a vegetarian and vegan combined (13 years). I can therefore readily identify with the thoughts and practices associated with meat-eating. However, the majority of Americans cannot identify or easily understand the beliefs and practices of vegetarians or vegans. In the same way I can't easily identify with what it is like to be 70 years old, someone who is 20 can't know what its like to be 38. The 70-year old, however, can identity with what it is like to be 10, 20, 30, 40 and so on; he's experienced all of those ages. So, while some might question my ability to understand their position I believe the problem doesn't stem from my lack of understanding, but theirs.

***What Was My Experience Like With Food While Growing Up?***

I grew up in Fairport, NY, a fairly affluent suburb of Rochester, NY. Up until my teen years my mom was a stay-at-home mom who did all the cooking (except grilling) and just about all of our meals included meat. My strongest memories are of meatloaf, baked chicken, steaks on the grill, hot dogs, and hamburgers. My dad and I would sometimes have chicken liver. One of my favorite treats was going to Abbott's Frozen Custard to celebrate a Little League victory or soften the blow of a loss.

I remember going over to my aunt's house where there were always multiple meats, pastas, cakes, and pies. I used to be envious of my two female cousins; I wished I could have had access to that much food. However, both have endured a life-long battle with obesity, one recently undergoing surgery to combat the issue.

I also recall riding my bike up to McDonald's as a teen and ordering the Filet-O-Fish, thinking that this was a healthy choice. I would dab my fries on a napkin to get rid of the extra oil I thought might be causing my acne and would down a milkshake for fullness. I did enjoy the taste of meat, but I am amazed to this day that I never connected it to an individual animal.

### ***The Process That Led Me To Adopt A Vegan Diet***

Prior to reading *Food Revolution* (2001) the stage was already being set for my transformation. In 1983, when I was just 14 years old my grandpa Hirschler died from a massive hemorrhage, an assumed eventuality for someone who had his esophagus removed due to cancer. I had witnessed my grandfather go through a number of medical procedures and listened to him talk about how much he missed eating food the last couple of years, and saw the emotional toll it took on my dad who hated hospitals as a result. At 13, I knew I never wanted to go through what my grandpa had, and I was willing to do whatever it took. This foreshadowed my conversations with Tom Dillon, my dad's best friend, who instilled in me an interest in nutrition and how it could be used to combat cancer.

### ***What Difficulties Have I Encountered Since Adopting A Vegan Diet?***

The transition from vegetarian to vegan was relatively easy from a practical standpoint. A great deal of learning had already taken place over the preceding six years as a practicing vegetarian and I quickly came to love ethnic foods which opened new worlds of plant-based foods. However, my girlfriend of about two years was pleading with me not to go vegan. She said, "Ice cream is the only thing we can share. Please, don't give that up."

We were in San Juan, a poor province in Argentina, spending a couple of weeks with her family when I made the decision. I read *Food Revolution* (2001), shaded by the grape leaves that hung over the red, ceramic-tiled patio that made me feel like I was in Italy. It was here on the patio, in the pages, that I first began to make the connection, to understand what animals endure. I didn't want any role in their suffering. "No mas!" However, this decision was the beginning of the end of our relationship. Years later, towards the end of our relationship, she described ours as an impossible love; I wanted her to join me in veganism and she wanted me to accept her animal consumption.

### ***Positive Aspects To Adopting A Vegan Diet***

The most important changes relate to the personal growth, but my health has benefited as well. My total cholesterol level dropped about 50 points from my lacto-ovo days. It was around 200 and it has been around 150 the past few years. Considering my Grandpa Hirschler had open heart surgery and my dad has had a heart attack, this is a very important result.

It has caused me to be more informed. Ever since reading *Food Revolution* (2001) I have continued to read voraciously to confirm and expand up Robbins' (2001) work, and then to answer the question, "Why do people continue to eat the way they do?" I have also become more compassionate. Although I suspect age and maturity would have produced an increase in this area. I am contributing to a better, more caring world and my beliefs and actions are synchronized.

### ***Reactions From My Family Members To My Adopting A Vegetarian/Vegan Diet***

Turning vegetarian took place about 13 years ago so it is difficult to remember any initial reaction. My sense is that my parents wondered or may have asked, "Why would you want to do that?" Considering I was doing it to reduce my chances of getting cancer and my dad's best friend had died from cancer they may have vocalized fewer reservations. However, their reaction was not supportive; at best, it was begrudging acceptance with regular attempts made to have me "try" some meat. My dad, not one for dramatics, seemed to begin expressing his gustatory pleasure more frequently and intensely.

Generally, there were not that many issues save for the occasional irritation when family members would hold up a can of peas (or other vegetable product) and ask, "Can you eat this?" However, several family members continue to make jokes or comment on my diet. In 2004, at the tree planting ceremony for my mom, my overweight cousin, just a few minutes prior to the dedication, blurted out, "My friend was vegetarian and she went to her doctor who told her she had to eat meat, so she did. She said she has never felt better!" Amazed at the inappropriateness of her



comment, given the setting, I simply said, “Well, I guess she didn’t know what she was doing” and walked away.

Within the past year our family has been deciding what to do with my Grandma Coleman’s cottage. Do we sell it? Do some of us want to buy the others out? My brother said that he would consider a “time share” type of arrangement, because, due to my “lifestyle”, it would be difficult to spend more than a couple of days there together. I thought, “‘Lifestyle?’ What does that mean?” I immediately thought about my human sexuality lectures in which I explain that people refer to the “homosexual lifestyle” as a way to stigmatize, exclude, and to differentiate; no one refers to the “heterosexual lifestyle.” So, my being vegan was now a “lifestyle.” More recently, at a pre-Thanksgiving dinner in 2006 at a restaurant my brother remarked to the waiter, “He’s the strange one.” after I placed my order.

### ***Reactions My Friends Had To My Adopting A Vegetarian/Vegan Diet***

It has not affected my friendships very much, although I may have been invited to a few less get-togethers. I have four close friendships that date back to 9<sup>th</sup> grade or earlier and another from my one year at Flagler College. These close friends appreciate that I am a free-thinker and my history of not following convention. However, none of my friends have shown much of an interest in my diet or related motivations and beliefs. It is a topic that is mostly ignored, despite it being a central component of who I am.

### ***Reactions My Significant Others Had To My Adopting A Vegetarian/Vegan Diet***

I dated a woman who was vegetarian and working on a Ph.D. in chemistry. Her being vegetarian was definitely an important quality since I had gained an enormous appreciation for the non-violence this choice represented and the benefits I derived from it. It was nice being with someone who shared my diet and understood the social dimensions, but it was not central to our relationship; we didn't talk much about being vegetarian or about animal rights issues, though cooking together was nice. In retrospect, I am amazed that we were happily and ignorantly consuming dairy products, oblivious to how it contributes to the suffering and exploitation of animals.

My most recent long term relationship ended because I felt I needed to be with someone who was vegan. I felt hypocritical working on my dissertation, interviewing vegans, and lecturing and then being with someone who "didn't get it." I imagined, and dreaded, students, acquaintances, and future readers of my book(s) asking me, "Is your girlfriend (or wife) vegan?" I wanted her to be a reflection of my beliefs (at least in regards to the exploitation of animals). I also wanted her to really join me in what often feels like a lonely journey. "People" don't understand; I wanted her to understand.

We had a great relationship built on friendship. While we didn't agree on the topic of animals, we didn't argue about it. We were always making "deposits" in our relationship bank account, not "withdrawals" (Covey, 1990). While the majority of her friends and family, and my friends and family thought we were great together, our relationship ended. During one of our last conversations I said, (now attempting to duplicate the tone of her 2 or 3 year mantra) "Our relationship ended because when

you want a sandwich (with meat), you're going to have a sandwich." She replied, "Or you could say, that our relationship ended because you couldn't accept that when I want to have a sandwich, I'm going to have a sandwich."

This was a very difficult loss. I have likened it to the death of my mother. Yet, there was something redeeming about it. I couldn't help but think about priests or other religious leaders who give up relationships to devote their life to God; it is their calling. Speaking on behalf of animals is my calling and I passed the test, at a huge personal cost. Time will tell how my personal life unfolds and the role that maintaining a vegan diet and related belief system has on it.

### ***What Prejudice, Stigma, Or Social Difficulties Have I Experienced Due To Being Vegan?***

As I mentioned earlier, it is normally not that big of an issue, yet at the same time it is. Many people see me as "the vegan" and zero in on that quality. For years, whenever my omnivorous girlfriend and I would go out in a social group, it seemed the conversation would inevitably turn to my vegan diet and she would have to listen to the same questions, and answers. It was tiring for me and a turnoff for her. I think if I had read *Living among meat eaters* (Adams, 2003) earlier she might have seen that it doesn't have to be that difficult. Adams advises vegetarians to "show them, don't tell them" by cooking delicious foods and not engaging in conversation with meat eaters. "Don't let them control the conversation" for it allows the meat eater to focus on you and not their own thought processes. I was working harder, not smarter. My personal life is easier now. It seems a simple suggestion, not to engage in these conversations, but knowing I will go out and be able to relax has been nice. I liken it to when I got rid of

my cell phone in 1998, after having been one of the earliest adopters of the new technology; the stress was imperceptible until it was out of my life, and tranquility returned.

I have been called “freak” by more than one family member, something that did not occur when I was a meat eater. While discussing a pizza order for our department at Cleveland State University, a faculty member responded to someone’s suggestion to include a vegetarian pizza by exclaiming, “It’s un-American not to eat meat!” I have heard this sentiment several times. Adriana used to call me an “extremist” and many people have quietly questioned my sexual orientation due to my “feminine” diet, something that didn’t occur before. One female friend was surprised when I told her how common this was, “Chris, you are the most heterosexual man I know!”

For some reason, the change from vegetarian to vegan increased the level of stigma exponentially. I think it has a lot to do with the real or perceived motivation for the change. If people think I do it for health reasons they are less likely to respond negatively, but if they think it is for animal rights reasons they feel judged, become defensive, and lash out in obvious or not so obvious ways. This is one reason I tend to carefully protect my identity as a vegan, though it is quite common to be “outed” by family and friends.

### ***How Has My Self-Image Changed Since I Adopted A Vegan Diet?***

It hasn’t changed much at all due to my diet. I have always seen myself as sensitive and compassionate, but now I know more ways to practice it. I have been seeking what Anthony Robbins (1992) calls CANI (constant-and-never-ending-

improvement) for at least the past 20 years and so I expect to evolve and my diet was a part of that evolution.

***Do I Think It Requires Discipline To Maintain A Vegan Diet?***

My life has been built on discipline, so I am probably not the best judge. I have been lifting weights and exercising since I was 10 years old; 28 years of intentional exercise and I have rarely missed a day. I enjoy the dual challenge of denial and dedication. But I don't think being vegan requires discipline if you're doing it for the animals, and you keep the images and details in mind. If you really think about what you are eating - muscle, body fat, blood vessels, the egg of an animal, and bovine mammary secretions then the "food" is no longer appealing and requires no internal fortitude to refuse. If the typical meat eating American were offered dog, cat, monkey, or human flesh they would not view it as food, they would have no desire to eat it, and would not feel deprived for having rejected it.

***Is There Something About My Personality Or How I Approach The World That I Think Influenced My Becoming Vegan?***

I have always loved animals and have been fascinated by their personalities and inclinations. As a child, whenever I went over someone's house where they had dogs, I went directly to them and showered them with affection. I felt like I brightened their day. I still do the same thing, sometimes causing their human companions to feel like I am more interested in the dog than them. I am able to easily establish a bond with dogs and have a heightened sensitivity towards animals in general.

I grew up fishing at my grandparent's cottage on Cuba Lake (NY), a 7-mile-in-circumference scenic beauty that is my favorite place on earth. One day, when I was 12 or 13, after a successful day of fishing I wandered into the shed and witnessed my grandpa Coleman scaling a fish. The fish was flopping all over, which begged the question, "Grandpa, does that hurt him?" "No," my gramp replied, "it just tickles him a little bit." I never fished again. Remarkably, however, I continued to eat fish, apparently unable to connect the dots or understand the concept of complicity.

In addition to being more sensitive than the average person, I am willing to not be part of the crowd. I think I want people to like me as much as most people, but I am not willing to compromise my values or alter my practices to accommodate their expectations. For example, I do pushups (on paper towel), squats, calf-raises, and assorted exercises in the airport during layovers. One 18 year old boy on his way to Cancun recently asked me, "What are you doing?" "Exercising", was my reply. Confused, and with squinted eyes, he asked, "Why?" He and probably most others think it is ridiculous, but I don't care – I am in shape, I feel good, and I am making use of my time. He appeared bored out of his mind, but at least everyone thought he was normal.

I also seek the "truth." I want to know how things really are, even if it that knowledge is painful. In 2004, while on a solo vacation on the sunny Caribbean island of Bonaire, I donned a pair of sunglasses for a bike ride around the island, but soon discovered that the light blue water just wasn't as beautiful with them on. I like to see the world unfiltered, beautiful or ugly.

***Others Who Eat Meat May Have Had Similar Experiences, But They Have Not Become Vegan – What Do I Think Explains This?***

It is interesting that my initial response to this question has remained basically unchanged: “I don’t know. It is difficult to explain. I don’t understand why.” However, considering that I have read numerous theories, contemplated the question for years, conducted numerous formal and informal interviews, and I am able to scrutinize specific examples, when pushed, I am capable of proffering a more detailed explanation. The majority of my theory is derived from my own experience, as a former meat eater, and my “gut” feelings, not academic theory.

Meat eating can largely be explained by a combination of three factors: (1) conditioning, (2) the belief it is essential for good health, (3) and the mental images people have created that the life of a farm animal is not that bad (and that they have not thought about the details of their death). Because meat eating begins so early in life it becomes “just something you do” and something that is not questioned - it just “is.” A person learns that it is okay to eat animals. In fact, “you need to eat meat.” If it is something you need, you really don’t have to think about it that much. How often do you really think about brushing your teeth? You just do it.

However, at some point, I believe people realize, at least on some fuzzy level, meat comes from animals. Amazingly, it is not clear how. Finally, if people are confronted with the idea of animals being killed to produce meat, they don’t think it is as bad as it is. Somehow, if they have not been shown the visual images and sounds associated with slaughter, contemplating the journey from animal to meat is too

theoretical, it is not real. It is as though adults, at least in this realm, are child-like, “concrete thinkers,” unable to imagine and feel what goes on behind the scenes. I was one of those people.

The following analogy may help to elucidate my point. In 2001, the state of California experienced rolling blackouts. Safire (2001) commented, “Contrary to popular belief, electricity does not come from the socket in the wall.” In other words, people don’t think about what it takes - the burning of coal for example, to generate electricity. I remember this quote well, because I immediately linked it to the disconnect people show related to meat: meat comes from the grocery store, or meat comes from McDonald’s – it doesn’t come from animals who struggle against death only to have their throats slit.

Additionally, many people are intentionally ignorant – they don’t want to know many details, especially if they sense it may cause them to feel a need to make an inconvenient change or feel guilty if they don’t change. I believe my former girlfriend (the woman with the Ph.D. in chemistry), who is presently a lacto-ovo-vegetarian, would not continue to consume dairy or eggs (in baked goods) if she became more informed. Yet, because she avoids unpleasant or violent subjects and images, her ignorance allows her to continue without distress.

When someone sees graphic footage I believe many believe it must be the exception, not the rule and think, “It can’t all be like this.” And there is a belief that follows, though probably one they are not conscious of, “If things were really this bad, I would have known about it before – there would be an outcry.” This idea has probably



been influenced by the interview I conducted with John during the pilot study and his recounting of why his niece Lisa rejected his vegan diet. Although John tried to share food and information with her, she spurned his diet and advice. After turning vegan years later John asked her why she had rejected the diet. She said, "I thought, 'How could you be right and everybody else be wrong?'"

Lastly, people seek to avoid pain and experience pleasure. This idea comes from hours spent reading and listening to Anthony Robbins. Knowledge about animal suffering and one's contribution to it, giving up foods, and learning how to cook new foods could all be described as painful.

### ***What Does The Future Hold In Relation To Vegan Diets?***

I think awareness of many of the factors (health, environmental, psychological, philosophical, animal welfare, and animal rights) will continue to increase and lead to slow, but significant changes. Animals will see their handling, living conditions, and general welfare improve modestly. This won't be true for all animals - some of them will continue to suffer greatly and will not benefit from general, but slight improvements. However, animals will still experience pain and will ultimately be killed. Humane slaughter will remain elusive.

Groups such as Vegan Outreach, with their slow, but effective method of handing out informative, direct, but non-accusatory pamphlets will lead the way. However, I don't expect a sea change until overpopulation makes it unequivocally unethical for consumers to purchase calories (meat) produced in such an inefficient manner.

Presently, all indications are that the world produces enough calories to satisfy the caloric needs of everyone; it is a distribution and political problem, not a production problem. However, if the widely predicted estimates - 9-billion people by the year 2050 - come to fruition, then I believe there will be mass human starvation and people will not be able to (or will be less able to) justify consuming such an inefficient product as meat. It seems most people only change when they are forced to – when pain becomes too great. This will probably be the case with plant-based diets. When people realize their one meat meal could have fed three or four people instead of just one had it simply contained grains, beans, or vegetables and there are insufficient calories to go around, change will happen. But then I think about the genocides that have occurred in Rwanda (1994) and Darfur (2006) with little global response or recognition. When there is great distance, there is apathy. So, it may be that mass starvations will motivate more people, but many will remain unaffected, even by human deaths, and happily savor their filet mignon.

**Table 1.****Description of Informants**

Pseudonym	Age	Year; age vegetarian	Year; age vegan	Original Motivation	Gender	Occupation	Education
Linda	48	1989;30	2001;42	Health	Female	Registered Dietitian; speaker; author	B.S. Applied Human Nutrition
Bill	40	1987; 20	1988; 21	Animal Welfare	Male	Registered Dietitian; head of AR organization	B.S. Philosophy of Sociology; B.S. Nutrition and Dietetics
Mitch	56	1970; 19	1982; 32	Health/Taste	Male	Registered Dietitian; speaker	M.S. Dietetics & Nutrition; M.A. Geography
Allen	51	1982; 24	1993; 35	Disgust/Animal Welfare	Male	Philosophy Professor; author	Ph.D. in Philosophy
Jeff	35	1988; 16	1990; 18	Animal welfare	Male	Philosophy Professor	Ph.D. in Philosophy
Jon	37	1991;22	1997;28	Health (weight)	Male	Philosophy Professor	Ph.D. in Philosophy
Luke	40	1986; 19	1988; 21	Animal welfare	Male	Animal Activist; author	M.A. English

Pseudonym	Age	Year; age vegetarian	Year; age vegan	Original Motivation	Gender	Occupation	Education
Sam	27	NA	2003; 23	Fun	Male	Animal Activist; graphic designer	B.S. Graphic Communications
Jill	22	1994;9	2002; 17	Animal welfare	Female	Animal Activist	B.S. Business Management
Greg	52	NA	1991; 36	Wife's challenge; health; environment	Male	Medical Doctor	M.D.
Shabazz	47	1978; 18	1980; 20	Animal welfare	Male	Medical Doctor	M.D.; M.P.H.
Phillip	49	1974;16	1997;39	Spiritual/Health	Male	Medical Doctor	M.D.
William	51	1989; 33	1990; 34	Health	Male	"Farmer"; activist; farm sanctuary worker	A.S. Liberal Studies
Wendy	58	1997;48	1999;50	Animal welfare	Female	"Farmer"; farm sanctuary owner operator	A.S. Liberal Arts
Dwight	68	1990;51	1991;52	Health	Male	"Farmer"; activist, author	B.S. Agriculture; LL.D.  (honorary doctorate in Law)

## Medical Doctors

### *Greg*

A touch of daylight remained as I pulled into the stone driveway and the car crackled towards the farmhouse. That's when I saw, and began to hear, Greg and his wife calling to me from a table set up in their back yard. Famished, I began to coach myself not to expect an offer of what I knew would be outstanding vegan fare, but before I could peer into the bowls on the table, they asked, "Would you like some?"

Relieved I would soon experience satiety, I relaxed as I anticipated the potato salad, salad with avocado, hot dog analogue with ketchup, mustard, and relish, and cantaloupe with cherries freshly picked from a nearby tree. Then Greg's eyes lit up: "I should show you the garden before it gets dark!" Their 100' by 30' garden contained everything from asparagus to zucchini and was surrounded by an electric fence to keep out the deer: "Without the fence they'd eat everything. The deer have the entire yard, but we keep 5% for ourselves." After the tour we sat down for the interview and spoke in-between mouthfuls.

Greg, a physician specializing in radiology and diagnostic imaging, now 52, was 36 when he went vegan, partially to "get along" with his wife who had been interested in vegetarianism, but he decided upon veganism only after he read up on the subject to make sure it was safe. He, his wife, and three kids are completely vegan at home, but he has infrequently succumbed to the temptation of the rare cookie or cake at an office party: "Honestly, I haven't been a purist about it at times...I'm probably 99% vegan

when I'm outside the house. I mean, there's no question because occasionally it's 'don't ask, don't tell.'"

In addition to wanting to please his wife, his initial motivation had to do with protecting the environment. He has always considered himself an environmentalist and as he read he appreciated the fact that a vegan diet is "much more sustainable than the standard American diet." He said, "But once you start, then all the other reasons come into play. You realize that you're not supporting factory farming which is awful and you're not hurting animals. You're helping to make the planet more livable and sustainable for everybody else." However, he questioned the extent of his contribution, "But, of course, then you start to recognize it doesn't really mean anything unless a significant percentage of the population is doing this. But that's like voting. Does your vote really count?"

Having been vegan since 1991 he says, "I have been doing it for so long that I don't really think about it any more." But life hasn't always been like this. He grew up on the ocean catching blue crabs, flounder, bluefish, or clams on the weekends which gave him a sense of self-sufficiency. His family ate the standard American diet that was meat and fish-based, although they did make sure to get fresh fruits and vegetables, some from their garden. He says that when he first became vegan he promised himself he would have a lobster four times a year but he's only had it twice in 18 years as a vegan; giving up seafood has been the hardest part.

Throughout his formative years, seafood, chicken, or beef was served nightly. And of his morning sustenance, he says, "As far as breakfast, I have vivid memories

because it's amazing that I survived my childhood. I just devoured bacon and toast with globs of butter on it." Today, he still likes the smell of barbecue and cooking meat and sometimes looks longingly at the cheese as it moves past him in a restaurant, but his children, ages 14, 18, and 20, find it "horrifying" since they've all been raised, either from birth or an early age, on a vegan diet.

He and his wife were married in 1986 and for the first four years of their marriage they were not vegetarians. However, his wife had been leaning in that direction for a couple of years before their marriage. Eventually, around 1989, she challenged him to become vegetarian. He began reading and she started going to Vegetarian Society meetings. Originally he thought "It must be dangerous because otherwise why would people not be doing it?", and since he was a doctor he decided he should read up on it. The defining moment for Greg occurred when he read *Reversing heart disease* (Ornish, 1996). His "ah, ah!" moment came when he read that getting research money for investigating lifestyle changes was difficult for Ornish because there's no money in it. Greg said, "Nobody's going to sponsor those kinds of studies because there's no drug to sell, there's no operation." However, Ornish was able to find the funds to conduct a study and Greg was impressed that after a year he "was able to show that diet and lifestyle changes could actually open up arteries, objectively, angiographically; and I'm an angiographer, so it meant something to me."

Greg concluded that it was simply a better decision to go vegan rather than vegetarian: "I thought, well, you know, just becoming a vegetarian doesn't make any sense....It only makes sense if you go out and be a vegan." Greg may have been thinking

of the following passage, “Halfway measures aren’t enough to reverse coronary heart disease for the majority of people.... Only a diet almost entirely free of animal fat, oil, and cholesterol will significantly lower blood cholesterol levels reliably in just about everyone” (Ornish, 1996, p. 254).

He liked the idea that it was a challenge, and while laughing he said, he was happy he could get ahead of his wife in her pursuit of vegetarianism: “So we just went straight to being vegan and it was just one day. We just did it! And we never looked back, really.” He said, “Being vegan at home is very easy.”

The difficulties they encountered were “essentially social”:

You feel like all of a sudden you’re part of a different subculture. People might not be inviting you over to their house because, you know, you’re a little bit more difficult to take care of than everybody else...I think it’s true. I don’t think it’s just a feeling. It is actually true that you tend not to get invited out so you have to make a little bit more of an effort to get together with people.

Holiday dinners required some initial navigating, but his extended family has adjusted, his sister even tried becoming vegan immediately and the entire family is probably “more conscious about not eating meat all the time.” Eating at a restaurant with meat eaters is generally not problematic “because you can always order what you want and they can order what they want.” However, he and his wife tend to treat, and when they buy, “it’s got to be vegan.” However, traveling involves more tests: “I just came back from Europe and finding a restaurant [there] is always a challenge.” He spoke



of the difficulties his family had in France: “When we were in France last week it was pretty tough getting a decent meal. French cooking is loaded with butter and gravy and all that kind of stuff and anything that moves. There are a lot of cultures on the planet like that too.” Despite the travel and social difficulties, the benefits have outweighed the challenges.

He says his weight used to fluctuate more, and he would put on more fat in the winter than he does now, and now the weight he does put on “disappears very quickly now in the spring.” Semi-jokingly he quipped, “Nothing bad has happened. So, I don’t know if it’s because of veganism or just because it hasn’t happened, you know?”

Although he has always been pretty confident, he thinks being vegan may have improved his self-image slightly since he is now more knowledgeable about nutrition. He says, “If I was still a meat eater, I probably wouldn’t have learned as much.”

When you do something different like this you have to study, bone up on it for two reasons: one is you want to make sure it’s good for you and safe, and the other is you know you’re going to get asked questions all the time and you don’t want to sound like an idiot. So I’ve become pretty aware of nutrition since then.

He and his family have met many people due to being vegan, a lot through the Vegetarian Society and the Vegetarian Summerfest they have attended the past fifteen years. Their three children have looked forward to it each summer.

That was a big difference in their lives because they’ve made friends that they keep in touch with over the rest of the year. So since we’re not a

religious family, I think in some sense that kind of helps. It has helped give them a sense of identity. "We're vegan!"

Greg says his children are "totally indoctrinated" and his eldest daughter is proud of it: "She wears it like a badge!" She is also "very interested in nutrition and knows a lot about nutrition - more than most adults because she's made a study of it." While she attends a private college that is very vegan friendly, "she does get into some conflicts with other kids who say they really have to have meat." Greg's middle child, "who's probably the most resentful of it" because "we're a little bit different.... really has no urge that I can tell to eat anything other than vegan." He concluded, while laughing, "Other positive things, I get asked to speak in public. That's always fun!"

On the topic of friendships, Greg says he probably has a different set of friends than he would have had if he remained an omnivore. While his work friends are good about making sure there's a vegan meal at their monthly meeting, he says, "I don't know if we're not getting invited to their dinner parties. I suspect we're probably not because it would be a pain."

Nevertheless, he believes he has impacted his meat eating friends and acquaintances. Because of his obvious health and the health of his family, those who know them "realize it's not a requirement to have meat and dairy at every meal" in order to be healthy. He understands and accepts that as a minority he is "setting an example."

So if you're a member of a minority group, it doesn't matter what kind of minority group - anything that's different that happens with you, people

attribute it to whatever it is that's different about you. So these stories about hiring a minority for a job and then they can't finish the job because they've caught tuberculosis or something. "Well, we're not going to hire one of them again!" You know! [laughing]. It has nothing to do with the fact that they're a minority, but that's how humans perceive things.

Greg's point is that people have a strong tendency to generalize a characteristic or condition they see in one person to an entire group, and disregard the causative agent. If a person encounters a vegan who is angry, well all vegans must be angry the thinking goes. Furthermore, anger must go hand-in-hand with being vegan; there is no need to consider a source of anger unrelated to veganism, right? There is also an inclination to seek negative examples and to generalize those negative qualities, rather than seek some envious quality, say generosity, if the "angry vegan" also happens to donate a lot of time and money, and to generalize those positive qualities. While Gregg doesn't view this as a major problem, he is acutely aware that he, and anyone who is vegan, is a representative of their minority group and as such their behavior and health are judged and generalized.

However, Greg believes "we live in a pretty special time and a special place" thanks to those "people who ran interference for us" and fought some of the early battles. He says, veganism was not well-known when he started in the early 90's, but today, "When you call an airline they know what vegan is. When you tell them you want a vegetarian dinner they say, 'Do you want vegan? Is it ovo-lacto, or vegan?'"

Although his children have had some troubles with school parties, he thinks schools are going through a special time also: “Well, at least around here they’re all proud of the fact that they’re inclusive and that there’s diversity and that’s really wonderful. This is just another form of diversity - dietary habits.”

Even though schools are doing better in terms of diversity, they are often still a haven for misinformation. It makes Greg mad that “the dairy industry supplies all the nutrition information to students in elementary school.” He says,

All that stuff that we were getting - the coloring books and all that stuff - that was all from the dairy industry - the Dairy Council. And the four basic food groups is a product of USDA whose goal, their charter, is to promote the sale of agricultural products; help the value of it grow every year, and the way they do that is by making it more and more meat and animal product-based. So it really has nothing to do with nutrition toward the end. I mean, at the beginning it supposedly did because they had all these malnourished recruits during WWI but that’s because they weren’t getting fed enough. Now we’re at the point where everybody’s getting fed way too much.

He grew up a victim of propaganda also, but he was able to go in a different direction because, as he says, “I’m very evidence-based. You have to prove things to me” and “I like my behavior to be in concert, in harmony with my beliefs.” In spite of his knowledge and beliefs he still thinks discipline is required to maintain his diet: “It definitely does because the dominant culture around us is not vegan.” Since people are

“such social animals” and the culture supports omnivorous diets and beliefs, it is no wonder many people fall prey to the trap delineated by Greg: “I think they believe that whatever anyone else around them is doing must be right and since vegetarians are still significantly in the minority, it’s not obvious to people that that’s the better way to be.” He added that since most people’s parents are meat eaters a switch to a different diet means fear of “insulting your mother because, you know, she was trying to kill you all these years. And so you don’t want to hurt *her* feelings by switching.” Expanding on the idea of the power of conformity, Greg said:

You look around the world and you realize that people who live in very crazy cultures think it’s completely normal because, basically, everyone around them is that way. The North Koreans all think that the whole planet is crazy and everyone’s out to get them and that’s because that’s what their leader tells them and everyone around them believes it so that’s what you believe. People are just very impressionable and very social. That has a lot to do with it.

I asked Greg what he thought about the meat eating physicians he knows. Greg quoted a cardiologist who visited his department a few years ago and said, “A vegan diet is no question the best diet, but I couldn’t do it and I choose not to do it.” Greg says, “And this is a cardiologist saying it’s definitely the best diet, the healthiest diet.”

He also addressed registered dietitians, who he thinks “are a lot better now, especially the younger ones” in part because they are more likely to know about the benefits of plant-based diets. He spoke of the ADA, the American Dietetic Association,

and their funding sources and how “these big sponsors”, such as the Dairy Council and candy companies have influenced them:

So the dieticians always have this phrase, “There are no bad foods.” It’s crazy! There are definitely bad foods! Soda is a bad food but they wouldn’t say that. They would say it’s because they’re being fair but I really think it’s because, fundamentally they’re influenced, and their literature is influenced by industry.

Discussing “failure to thrive” he became quite animated:

I have not personally met anybody who is like that. Well, there was a recent story in the news, a horrible, stupid case that was mentioned in the New York Times, “Death by Veganism.” So the parents are crazy! They didn’t feed their kid! They happened to be vegans so that’s what I’m talking about when you’re a member of a minority group and you do something stupid. When something stupid happens, it’s because you’re part of that minority group that it happened - not because for some other obvious reasons like you got infected by tuberculosis or you just happen to be crazy and you don’t want to feed your kid. Apple juice and soy that’s what they fed the infant. It’s just ridiculous! So that was insane. They’re insane and everyone who eats a vegan diet got tarred with the same brush.

He also spoke about the need for science, not personal accounts, to pinpoint the cause of illness. To illustrate his point, he spoke of a consultation he had with a female vegan:

I remember once a girl coming up to me and telling me that her hair started falling out. It's hard to know if it's because of a deficiency or because she was going to start losing her hair anyway, you know? Part of being a scientist is trying not to be anecdotal about everything.

Greg believes it is essential to "understand things from the perspective of a population" and asked, "Do I think that if everyone were vegan, we'd be much healthier? Absolutely!"

So I think there may be a few people out there who may have trouble on a vegan diet. Maybe. Maybe a tiny minority but if you had to choose between putting everyone on the standard American diet and putting everyone on a vegan diet, I guarantee you, you'll have a much healthier population on a vegan diet.

He thinks rather than vegans needing to defend their diet the consumer of the typical diet has some explaining to do.

What happens now is you're always under scrutiny. You're under this little magnifying glass because you're different from the mainstream. You know? But it's just as easy to turn it around and say, "Do you happen to know any meat-eaters with diabetes who aren't thriving on chips and

soda?” They can barely waddle to their desk! But they don’t think of it that way.

As we neared the end of the interview, and the bottom of our bowls, Greg spoke more about how their choice has been a “great way to raise kids” and positively impacted their children by providing them with an identity and instilling in them healthy practices and beliefs and compassion. He also discussed the importance of “getting allies in the cause” and said that he and his wife disagree about whether hunters could be considered allies and the ethics involved in hunting, as he doesn’t find it “particularly awful.” He says his friends are shocked by this but his logic is thus:

One of the real problems facing the planet now is that people just don’t go outside anymore. And they just don’t know the woods. They don’t communicate with nature at all. And so hunters when you compare them with factory farming, so, okay, I think hunting is kind of stupid and shooting an animal is kind of dumb, but at least those guys are going outside and there’s some kind of honesty to what they’re doing as opposed to people who have their meat packaged up for them and get it at the meat counter. I think that’s worse, but we don’t seem to have conflicts with most of those people. I think that if you’re going to pick a fight with somebody, it ought to be your average meat-eater who’s getting his or her food from a factory farm.

The question of who your allies are led to his mentioning a story he heard on NPR (National Public Radio) earlier in the day about CSA’s (community supported



agriculture). He said traditionally CSA's provide a share of vegetables once a week to its members, but this new CSA outside Boston delivered meat. Greg said, "These people, once a month, they get a package of frozen animal parts." The animals from which these parts come live their lives in a pasture, not a factory farm, in conditions "like one-hundred fifty years ago."

And man, if everybody got their meat that way, things would be a whole lot better. So, I'm not going to encourage people to join one of these things, but maybe if they're meat-eaters I would! If you're going to be honest and you really care about the animals, that's how you should do it. It's much more ethical. The animals don't suffer as much. The animals really don't suffer until the end. The ones in the factory farms are suffering every single minute and that's just criminal; it's just hidden away from view.

### ***Phillip***

Before the interview began, Phillip, a 49 year old hospital-based physician who practices internal medicine and critical care, admitted he was not 100% vegan and wanted to make sure he did not misrepresent his diet. I asked if he was closer to vegan than he was vegetarian and when he indicated he's nearly vegan, and that he is very lactose intolerant and infrequently eats cheese or eggs, we continued with the interview. His degree of adherence might be a little more lax than that of Greg and his "don't ask, don't tell" policy, but Phillip identifies as being vegan. He hails from a prestigious medical school and is the only African American among the sample.

In 1974 he became a lacto-ovo vegetarian at the age of 16 for health and spiritual reasons. Early in his teen years his parents divorced which shocked him and his brothers because his parents appeared to have a good relationship. He said, "It was very much as if the world as I knew it was completely shattered!" As a result, he decided he would "try and figure out what life was all about." He thought, "If I could understand life better, I could understand myself better, understand people better, then I could pick a path through life that would not be subject to these random episodes of severe emotional pain."

The first question he began with was whether God existed. After a period of intense contemplation and prayer he came to believe God existed and that there was a "best way to try to approach life and to be as a person." The bible influenced his belief in the rightness of a vegetarian diet since the first chapter of the first scripture of the bible, Genesis 1:29, makes it clear that God "designed us to be plant eaters!" The passage states:

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (Bible: King James Version, 2008)

His spiritual journey led him to become a Seventh Day Adventist, a Christian denomination that emphasizes diet and health. His questioning mind then wanted to know why a vegetarian diet was better for him and this led him to read about the health implications of a vegetarian diet.

So I started reading everything I could find on the topic of diet and disease and the more I read, the more I became convinced that, wow, this really *is* healthier for humans to be vegetarian! But even after I became really convinced that that was the case, I had a hard time giving up meat because I just didn't think I could live without it! It just seemed to be something I felt like I *really, really* needed and wanted.

His cravings were a product of being raised with an abundance of meat since his parents were from the South and their family ate a "traditional American diet with a southern flavor to it." They ate beef, pork, chicken and fish. About his passion for meat he said, "Growing up I was a big meat eater. I loved it! I couldn't imagine living without it! In fact, there were rare occasions when my parents would fix a meal without meat and I would cry and sulk." However, his "mother was very good about putting a balanced meal on the table. There was always meat and a variety of different plant foods to go with it."

His "next major step" towards a stricter form of vegetarianism occurred during his mid-twenties. The father of one of his closest friends, a man Phillip loved, was an athlete and wonderful person, yet he died of a heart attack. It was a crushing blow for the man's family, and Phillip felt their pain.

I realized people don't have to go through this kind of terrible pain and this kind of premature loss! That if people knew what was better for them, that they could make better choices, they wouldn't have to go through what I saw his family go through.

So began a “long odyssey” that included going to medical school so he would have the credentials to convince people to change their diet and so he could gain “the sophisticated understanding of human physiology and health” that would allow him to teach people to eat a health-promoting diet. He said, “So, as part of that whole process, the more I learned, the more I became aware that an entirely plant-based diet was likely healthier for us.” It wasn’t until 1997, a year before his fortieth birthday that he became vegan (well, almost vegan) as a result of his continuing research into healthy diets and his interest in refining his diet.

Phillip has not encountered great social difficulties during his ongoing dietary transition. However, throughout medical school, residency, and beyond he has felt a need to speak up so that his dietary needs receive equal consideration. For example, during residency there were numerous mandatory educational meetings sponsored by drug reps, but his dietary needs were often not met. Eventually he told the other residents, “Look, I’m not going to show up if there’s nothing for me to eat because I’m not going to spend the whole day starving while everybody else is well fed.” His assertiveness paid off and vegetarian food began to arrive. Interestingly, if he didn’t arrive within 20 minutes of the start of the meeting the veggie options were gone; they were the first to go.

Phillip shared another story that is indicative of his self-assurance and boldly direct approach. He was working in outpatient HIV care when he received an invitation in the mail from a pharmaceutical company to attend training on their new drug at a

fancy hotel. He was happy to find the invitation included a survey of his dietary needs and he thought, “Oh, how cool! They’re really proactive. They’re really aware.”

Phillip cheerfully filled out the card, but when he arrived to the conference’s opening dinner, “a lavish party with literally tables and tables of food” that included roast beef, shrimp, chicken, and a variety of fish, he found only one vegetarian option: a “very tired looking stir-fry with white rice.”

I called the organizer and I said, “What is this?” and she said, “Well, we have stir-fry” and I’m like, “Look! Number one, it’s not very interesting, number two, it’s not very nutritious, number three, if I eat this - within an hour, a couple hours, I’m going to be hungry again because this is mainly water and fiber.” And she said, “Oh, well, there’s salad.”

To that suggestion, he replied, “You know what? Salad is rabbit food! Rabbits weigh three pounds. I weigh one-hundred and seventy-five pounds. I need something to eat.” And so she says, “Well, okay. Fine. Just tell me what you want.” Fueled by a sense of exclusion, he retorted:

Nobody else who attended this conference had to come up with a menu so I shouldn’t either. This is a major hotel. They ought to know how to provide nutritious food for vegetarians. Would you please go talk to the chef and ask him to come up with something.

The organizer was initially taken aback by his “upfront” and “in your face” assertiveness, but “they actually did have some very nice vegetarian options for the remainder of the meeting.” The tale continued:

What sort of surprised and slightly annoyed me was after that exchange, several, literally about five or six other doctors came up to me and said, “I’m really glad you said something because I was feeling the same way!” And I’m like, “Well why didn’t you speak up?” I’ve never been one to believe in suffering in silence, especially when I know that what I’m asking for is healthier for everyone concerned.

Phillip expounded upon how his self-image is bound up with what some might call a cocksure approach to dissenting opinion. He says there is a comfort in knowing he’s right and “there’s a certain kind of confidence that it gives you, and calm.” He generally tries “to make a point not to be rude, inappropriate or inconsiderate” but he will not shrink away or be “mealy mouthed, wimpy, or shy about it.”

Even when I’ve had the occasional professor who says, “Aw, nobody believes that! I think that’s a bunch of hooey!” it doesn’t faze me because I know this is right! So I guess it’s given me that kind of confidence and I guess it also helps me feel... I feel good knowing that I’m not trashing the world to the extent that I would be if I were living differently.

Deep reflection has also been part of Phillip’s life. This tendency was revealed in his telling of a lecture gone awry. He was asked to give a three-hour lecture for beginning medical students at the University of Pennsylvania, an invitation he considered to be quite an honor. He spent several months working on this lecture, considered the presentation to be outstanding, but was surprised “to be greeted at the

end with a lukewarm to slightly hostile response.” Students doubted him, and wondered, “How can this be true?” and “Why isn’t anybody else saying this if it’s true?”

What I came to realize was that I had just walked in and trashed their mothers, their grandmothers, their family culture. Most of them were probably planning to go on a date that evening and eat at McDonalds or some other restaurant. And I had just trashed all of that! And their response to me was purely an emotional one! It helped me to understand that when you talk to people about food, you’ve got to understand that people relate to food *more* emotionally than rationally.

This sort of emotion-based reaction is not how Phillip operates. As much as life experience, he believes it is his core tendencies that have shaped his dietary choices. Phillip remembers, from a very early age, wanting to understand the way the world operates and having conviction that his feelings and thoughts were valid, therefore he wasn’t easily intimidated by those who disagreed with him. This mindset prepared him to explore health and nutrition, and gave him the fortitude to stick with his ideas even though he wasn’t getting a lot of support from people in his “immediate orbit.”

Phillip plans to conduct a longitudinal study, one that will track vegetarians and vegans over a long period of time, in order to marshal support for these diets. He is excited about writing a book to transmit his findings. He hopes it will cause people to not disqualify themselves from eating a vegetarian dish because they’ve classified themselves as meat eaters or omnivores. He said many people think, “Chinese people eat Chinese food. Indian people eat Indian food. Vegetarians eat vegetarian food.” This

thinking leads to a diet that undermines our physiology. According to Phillip, “The average person doesn’t understand that their body is designed to handle a diet of primarily plant food. Most people really believe that they need meat and other animal food in order to be healthy because that’s what they’re taught.”

Another reason individuals discount the type of diet Phillip recommends has to do with the power of cultural tradition:

It’s not an easy thing for people to do because culture is so central to who we are. That’s how we identify ourselves. Food and the way we eat is all a part of that and so it takes a lot for someone to be able to separate their dietary habits out of their cultural identity and realize that they can change their diet and still be culturally who they are and true to who they are.

Phillip believes he didn’t succumb to the pull of the masses because, from an early age, he had a strong sense of self. He said,

I never was one of those people who felt like I *had* to belong or that I had to change or that I even *wanted* to change in order to be accepted or belong. But that’s not true for a lot of people.... we all want to have friends and feel accepted within the community but for a lot of people they’re willing to compromise or adjust or change who they are or what they might want to do in order to make that happen. I would say the majority of people, in my opinion, are not secure enough to be willing to be different or be considered a pariah in order to be true to themselves.



It's easier for them or in some respects more desirable to change who they are in order to be accepted by everybody else.

Phillip said, "I could never, ever imagine joining a fraternity because there's no way I'm going to run around doing something I consider to be stupid or make myself look *stupid* just to be accepted by people. Accept me for who I am." After the interview I returned to this statement and told him about an experience I had while attending Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida when I was 19. I had written a letter to the editor of the college's newspaper, a senior and fraternity member, about how their antics and the silly costumes they donned at home basketball games were an embarrassment to every student. Shortly after the article's submission, following the next home game, and immediately after stepping foot on the sidewalk twenty feet from the exit, I found myself surrounded by about 20 or more frat boys who were looking to intimidate. I stood firm in my conviction and argued face-to-face with the wannabe bad boys. Phillip said, "Obviously, you touched a nerve in them and rather than confront their own ideas, they chose to attack you to try to get you to retract." He has experienced this attempt by others to restore cognitive consonance by attacking; the lecture at the University of Pennsylvania being just one example.

Others may not be drawn to a vegan diet because they have seen it practiced in a way that holds no appeal. Phillip still enjoys eating delicious foods, but many vegans don't present the diet in an interesting or flattering way.

In my opinion, some of the people who've adopted veganism because of animal rights issues seem to have something of the "ascetic" impulse

within themselves, meaning that they almost either don't mind suffering or maybe even *want* to suffer for the animals. These particular individuals oftentimes do not appear to be interested in making their food interesting or delicious or fun because it's perfectly okay with them to have something that's a little drab and dreary and dull because they're "doing it for a cause." For some people that even seems to be "the point."

He said he knows "people who sit around and eat lettuce and bananas almost all the time." That's not healthy and it's "not something that's going to appeal to the average person - nor should it, in my opinion."

I queried Phillip's estimation of doctor's views and knowledge related to vegetarian and vegan diets. He said, although "certainly there's an element within medicine that is somewhat hostile to the idea of animal rights" his colleagues have been more or less accepting. He has run many of his ideas past them in order to identify "any errors in logic." However, he believes most physicians are "very, very ignorant about what they should be eating and why." He spoke of the deficiencies of standard medical school curriculum. He said that what little is taught contains a lot of "flat out misinformation." Doctors are fed little beyond the basics of nutrition information, the source of which is based upon the USDA's politically inspired "four food groups nonsense." The focus is also on deficiency diseases such as scurvy rather than on diets for optimal well being. The belief in the need for "dairy as a calcium source and the need for animal flesh and protein to build and maintain muscle mass" permeates the

teachings. His final assessment of doctor's nutritional knowledge: "Most doctors are about as ignorant and ill-informed and misinformed as the general population."

When someone from the general population decides to become vegetarian and doesn't thrive Phillip is convinced it is because "their diet is in some way too restricted." He has encountered this complaint before and he will ask, "Well, what were you eating?" and he'll get answers such as, "Salads and a lot of broccoli." Phillip concludes that it is not a matter of failing to thrive on a well-balanced vegetarian or vegan diet.

I wondered if Phillip's personal relationships had thrived since he began changing his diet. His family's response has been "very positive overall" with his mother becoming a more conscientious eater and his dad and brothers providing acceptance. Phillip's Seventh Day Adventists friends at church are "completely understanding and supportive and many of them have adopted a vegetarian diet" and he has had many good discussions with his non-church friends, some of whom have incorporated more plant foods into their diet. However, he believes his food choices and associated belief system has effectively reduced his pool of potential mates. He said,

I probably have been single more of my life than I have been in a relationship although the longest and most serious relationship I had was with a Seventh Day Adventist, but it has affected my potential relationships in that I could never see myself with someone who ate meat, period. I can't stand the smell of it, the idea of it, and I could not be with someone in a serious relationship if they ate meat.

In order to know Phillip better one needs to understand the value he places on his relationship with God. Phillip begins his lectures with a quote from the bible, and so I will end his narrative with reference to some of his spiritual/religious beliefs. Towards the end of the interview he told me of a conversation he had with one of his Jewish friends who couldn't understand why, in the bible, God required the Israelites to sacrifice animals if killing animals is wrong. Philip explained his interpretation:

It isn't a sacrifice unless you love and value the animal. If you look at killing an animal the way you would crumpling up a piece of paper that's not a sacrifice; there's nothing painful or difficult about that. It's only if you recognize and acknowledge the creature's value and their life, if you understand the pain of taking this life. Then, and only then, is it a sacrifice. Otherwise it's a useless ceremony. God's purpose wasn't to be cruel or malicious, He was just trying to teach people how heinous sin was that it required a sacrifice to atone for it. Which is why we need to strive to be better people.

He said that in addition to having a heightened consciousness in respect to animal rights issues, having greater mental clarity, and knowing he is healthier as a result of his diet, he expressed his faith when he said, "I am more in tune with where God and the universe wants and needs me to be, and I know that what I am doing is right."

He says "people fail to appreciate the spiritual component of being vegetarian or vegan."

Basically the bottom line is that God communicates with us through our mind and to the extent that your mind is clouded and cluttered with garbage and crap and waste materials, it's like having a bad cell phone with a lot of static. You're not going to be able to hear His voice and sense His presence as effectively or as fully. This is something that is underappreciated - the benefits and value of vegetarianism.

### ***Shabazz***

I looked up Shabazz's educational and professional background prior to our interview. He has an undergraduate degree in biology, two master's degrees, one in Public Health and one in Public Policy, and a medical degree; his degrees come from two different Ivy League universities and he completed his medical residency at a third. I then began to read about his professional accomplishments. Shabazz has worked for over 15 years in emergency medicine. On September 12, 2001 he helped set up a triage station in what was left of a firehouse at Ground Zero in Manhattan, an experience he feels grateful to have been part of. He has also provided medical and public health assistance in such countries as Antarctica, Australia, China, India, Jamaica, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, St. Lucia, and Taiwan. Shabazz is deeply concerned with the impact that people have on the earth, saying that the human race is functioning like a "big extinction machine." In some of his work, which he calls "conservation health", he tries to combine helping people in need with environmental and animal protection. For example, he designed a health project in Borneo for rainforest-dwelling peoples that also helps with the conservation of endangered orangutans. He is presently a professor

of Community Health at a Northeastern university and teaches graduate courses in environmental, occupational, and community health.

The evening of the interview he was extremely fatigued having recently returned from China, and at one point he had difficulty retrieving a word. He said, searching, “What is that word? I’m thinking in another language...” before recalling it - “empirical.”

Before the interview it was obvious Shabazz just wanted to talk; it seemed he wanted to ease into, or briefly postpone the formality of the interview, maybe to test his jetlagged head. We spoke for about 20 minutes before I pressed record on the digital recorder, during which time he told me his goal as a professor is to help students become better people – for themselves and the world. He asks them two questions at the start of each semester: What do you need? and What can you do for others?

One idea that has interested him lately is whether it is possible for someone to go from poverty to simplicity. Shabazz shared with me an article he wrote that was published in his university newspaper when he was a graduate student that begins to explain his current curiosity:

Against the tide of our ever-increasing national appetite for things, there is also a discernibly growing current of anti-consumerism in America, a movement towards “voluntary simplicity” and a less materially-oriented set of values. Many people are beginning to question structuring their existence around the pursuit of bigger cars and bigger houses. A number of highly successful individuals now describe themselves as “downwardly

mobile,” some even choosing to be “independently poor” in pursuit of more meaningful lives.

He wonders whether a person who is poor can get to the same place as the wealthy person who is choosing to live a life of poverty and finds great meaning in it – without first achieving wealth. Is it possible for a person to feel wealthy who lacks material wealth?

He “grew up in a crowded little house” and “had to pack up and move” many times and thinks this might be why he tremendously enjoys giving away non-essentials. He wrote in the student paper:

I like the liberated, almost spiritual feeling I get when I unburden myself of some material possession. But there is no denying another fact: I like buying new things. These competing urges do battle for my soul. Into one ear the demon of acquisition yells “Buy it!” while in the other the angel of divestiture whispers “Get rid of it!”

He said, “I fantasize about living in a small place with little stuff.” There are few things that would make him happier than being able to fit all of his possessions into a backpack. He would “rather have a tiny little house on the edge of a National park” than a huge house – “You need just a nice little place to sleep in, in the middle of a beautiful, natural setting.”

After the demographic data (age 47; vegetarian 1973 at age 18; vegan 1980 at age 20; ethnicity – “other”) was out of the way we began the interview. When I asked,

“What is it like to be vegan?” he exclaimed, “That is a very open-ended question!” but went on to say,

Generally, it is a very positive experience. It’s been a very life-changing and educational experience. It’s changed the way I look at the world; it’s made me... more aware of things, more grateful for things and more compassionate and has deepened my sense of who I am in the world.... It has enriched my life in many ways.

Growing up he liked the taste of just about all meats, “except maybe meatloaf.” He said meat was served at most meals – it was “taken for granted and unquestioned” – there was never any sense that there was anything “wrong or bad” about it. Although they didn’t eat pork in his home this was due to his mother being Jewish and his father being Muslim. However, Shabazz noted that he still ate pork elsewhere “so it wasn’t that we were particularly religious” they just had the habit of not eating pork in their home.

Asked to describe the process that led to his dietary change he answered, “Well that could be a book in itself!” His first foray into vegetarianism, at age 13, derived from his “intuitive and empirical sense that animals were capable of feeling” and he felt a “kind of spiritual kinship” with them. He remembers connecting with his grandmother’s cat when he was five years old, and recognizing on some level that this “creature had a mental life and was capable of feeling suffering and pain.” Later, but prior to his one-month stint as a 13-year old vegetarian, he began thinking about what meat was, why he ate it, and what that meant. It bothered him to the point that he wanted to stop



eating it, but he found little support in the home where he was staying and drifted back into meat eating. He remembers eating a particular Slim Jim – wrapped in “that yellow and red package” – and thinking, “it was okay because it comes wrapped like a candy bar.” He says the packaging “took away from its real significance as the dead body of an animal and put it into the context of something you buy and consume as a product that is almost artistically made.” He was living with his mother’s friend and family at the time – when he followed the present day slogan to, *bite into a Slim Jim*, and its pus-like filling. During his brief attempt at eating a vegetarian diet the family he was living with told him he could become vegetarian, but they only went so far as to tell him to pick out the meat in meals they served and offered no substitute. The combination of the “removal of the product from the actual animal” (i.e. the Slim Jim), his lack of cooking skills, and an unsupportive living environment was enough to end his attempt at vegetarianism.

His second attempt, at 18, was successful. It began, memorably, in his college’s physiology lab as students were assigned the task of taking the sciatic nerve out of large bullfrogs and dissecting them. He explained the process:

In order to do that we had to pith them, which means we had to kill them and get their brain dead but their nerve would still be alive underneath.

And the way we were supposed to do that was to take a scissor and put it in their mouth and cut the top of their head off, and the person in my group who did that was kind of an overweight, acne-fied, Hispanic guy with glasses - he was a nice guy, but that’s what he looked like - and he got the scissor only part way through the head and couldn’t get it the rest

of the way through and the frog made this kind of hissing, screaming sound that actually made me say “Fuck eating meat! I ain’t eating this no more! This is too horrible!” I was just overwhelmed by the cruelty of this. And so that is when I became vegetarian.

He laughed as he retold the horror of that experience, but he was cringing then. Two years later he was talking with a female vegetarian friend about Singer’s (1975) *Animal Liberation* and she questioned whether he was still drinking milk. Shabazz thought it was necessary for health, but she informed him of the nutritional adjustments he could make, and pointed out the “half way nature of just being vegetarian.” She also detailed the fate of the mother and calf, and how milk supported an industry they were both opposed to. They each decided to give it a try; twenty-seven years later they are both still vegan.

“Have you encountered any difficulties?” I asked. “There were never any difficulties”, he said, with joking sarcasm. While his health has never been an issue, there have been “lots of arguments and strained relationships.” In the past he has tried to push people into vegetarianism, even tried to make them feel guilty, but generally avoids doing that now. He says, “It’s a continued process of learning how” to manage the urge to attempt to get someone to change and being accepting and kind. While he doesn’t want to surround himself with vegetarians and vegans - that makes him feel uncomfortable – he doesn’t particularly like it when people around him are eating meat. Ideally, he would like to simply tell a meat eater he is vegan and for them to immediately understand and actually become vegan. He said, “It would be just a word

to the wise. If you get this and someone points it out to you, then you'll do it – that there would be no further discussion.” Shabazz said this is essentially what happened with the vegan who referred me to Shabazz – he got it right away. Shabazz says, “He is wise. He’s a very smart guy.”

Shabazz didn’t spend a lot of time talking about relationships; he seemed interested in talking about ideas. In order to know some people best you need to know them in the context of their relationships, but for others it comes through understanding their ideas.

However, I sensed that there was a pain that coursed through a number of Shabazz’s relationships. In an after the interview discussion he mentioned that being vegan has made him a less violent person, something I could identify with having had a similar experience. He said his dad was a mean guy – he was beaten as a kid. For Shabazz there was no ambiguity; he feared his father and avoided him as much as he could. The violence of his childhood, both in himself and around him, sensitized him to violence in all its forms. He said, “My rough upbringing was helpful in many ways – for better or worse it’s helped make me who I am today.” He also had to fend for himself at a young age which he believes accelerated his maturation process: he had gotten drunk at the age of ten, a once only experience, and smoked marijuana at 13, only to quit by 15. Shabazz theorized that maybe his veganism was in part a response to his early awareness of violence and the need to do something to reduce it.

He spoke very briefly of his wife, who was not vegan herself, but “was very sympathetic with the idea”, his son who is starting to dabble in vegetarianism, and his

eight year old daughter who's been vegetarian for a few years. His mom is "sort of neutral on the subject." He asked aloud, "So, has it caused me any problems? I would say depending on how I've handled it - it has caused various problems of all sorts of relationships, family, friends, girlfriends, etc."

During his bachelorhood days Shabazz dated two vegetarians, but never a vegan. He said his previous partners had either avoided eating meat around him or had become vegetarian, due to a mixture of being sensitive to his needs, and to a lesser degree having some sympathy for the animals. Although he believes the experience was a positive one for them, his past partners generally didn't fully internalize the ethic, and typically tended to revert to some meat eating after the relationship ended. Reflecting on all of his romantic involvements, he lamented, "There has been a certain fulfillment that I have not had because of not having that basic value shared by my significant other. It's been an ongoing theme for me."

Shabazz hasn't felt socially stigmatized, but realizes there have been certain limitations to his choices. Just as he wouldn't go out drinking he doesn't patronize a Buffalo wings joint either and some activities that have "a kind of traditional, nostalgic meaning", such as having a hotdog at a baseball game have not been an option.

He spoke about the transformative nature of being vegan. The relationship challenges that have surfaced as a result of his diet and how he's handled them have caused him to ask the question, "What does it mean about me?" He has tried to understand the difference between what he wants, what he believes in, and how that

influences his behavior. He shared an example of one of the lessons he's learned, and in the process of sharing divulged how he feels about meat eating:

I think it is wrong for anyone to eat meat. I just think it is a wrong thing to do. I don't care how you feel about it or what good it does for you. Unless you really, really need it – you shouldn't do it. It's just not nice. That's my feeling. It's wrong. On the other hand, it's also wrong for me to make somebody feel bad about something; it's wrong for me to be mean about it unless it is actually going to change somebody in a very obvious way, very quickly. For me to bother somebody about it...two wrongs don't make a right. If I nag somebody into quitting meat eating - that might be okay, it might be worth it. But generally it doesn't work like that; people don't get nagged into it.

He doesn't like to think he's "holier than thou" or that he's great and other people aren't as good if they aren't vegan, but sometimes he "might have those sort of ideas." In most social settings he draws "a very strong line between other peoples' behavior" and his own. He used the example of teenage smoking to flesh out his point.

If other people are smoking, you might be tempted to smoke too. So that would be an extreme of being influenced by those around you, and I would say I am on the far other extreme; that everyone else could be doing something, and be extremely happy about it, and I wouldn't be doing it, and I would still be there.

One realization that he has had in recent years, that interrupts his supercilious tendencies, is that there is nothing that he “can do or think that is actually new; it has all been thought out before.” While his “specific set of experiences” is unique, his ideas are not. He said, referring to the old joke, “Just remember, you are unique, just like everyone else.”

He believes “it is right to be vegan and people that don’t are wrong. In that particular thing, I am doing right things, and other people are doing wrong things.” Yet he concedes, “On the other hand, maybe someone else is kinder in another way or more giving, or more wise in some other aspect of their behavior than I am. It’s just that I think I have that one particular thing right about my own personal conduct.”

Being vegan has allowed Shabazz to “clearly demarcate” his own behavior from others – “sometimes that is good and sometimes it can be an alienating experience.” Unless one is in a community of vegetarians or vegans, which he has never been a part, it can feel “very lonely” – and “there is a certain sense of independence and isolation that comes with it.” He has, however, received support online. The Internet has allowed him to connect with likeminded devotees; and just knowing there are people who share his passion has provided Shabazz with a feeling of empowerment.

Because his vegan diet is such an integrated part of his life it now requires little effort for him. Eliminating animal products has helped him develop discipline and enriched his life because he’s willing to give up anything for the right reason. He says, “I can give up things if there is a reason to and not feel terribly deprived either.” Being

vegan has cultivated an ability to relinquish some forms of pleasure to achieve a greater sense of fulfillment or deeper level of being.

Although Shabazz believes there was something about his personality that led to his becoming vegan, he was the only participant to indicate that it might not be due to entirely positive or endearing qualities. He described himself as being “very deliberate, determined, and in some sense being willing to sacrifice going with the flow, for a certain set of principles” and pointed out this could be viewed as a favorable trait to possess or it could be looked at as being dogmatic.

You could call it being a perfectionist, kind of controlling, wanting to be my own self-determined person; or being independent in nature. You can look at it in either a positive or a negative light in terms of what is special about me which led to that. I’d like to think that my being very kind and aware of other people’s and animal’s feelings influenced me too, but I don’t know that I am particularly more kind and aware than others are.

Shabazz quickly retrieved his mentally stored list of five reasons why people don’t adopt vegetarian or vegan diets: taste, habit, social influence, convenience, and the belief animal products are necessary. However, he added, almost as an afterthought, speciesism.

People who would not do something unkind to a person, perhaps not even pinch a person, would kill a chicken and eat it, but wouldn’t scratch a person even a little bit. So there is a sense that there is a huge difference between people and animals and people are to be treated

with respect and animals are not, in that sense. Maybe there is a certain type of respect, but their life is not worth giving up snacks for.

He was excited when talking about the benefits of veganism and his vision of the future:

It has shaped my view of the world and what I believe about the world and what I believe is the meaning of life and my life and my role on the planet and what I think is the way that the planet is heading, or the way I'd like to see it go.

He believes people should not have too much of an impact on the planet and foresees that over time the human population will be reduced naturally as a consequence of people choosing to have fewer children, and the quality of human life will go up, with a much higher proportion of the populous living happier, more fulfilled lives. About his vision of the future, he predicts:

If human nature is what I think it is, and I think it is fundamentally good and striving towards the good, that is something that will take place, but not in my lifetime. Over a period of a thousand or a couple of thousand years, things will begin to move substantially in that direction and it's just that we're at this bottleneck of crisis of environmental sustainability, overpopulation, over-consumption, and industrialization; but that over time, a fairly long period of time, things will get better.



He clarified his point, “I say, ‘fairly’ because essentially, it’s really a very short time if you look at the history of man and the history of the earth.” If Shabazz is correct, if it takes 1,000 years or more, at what stage of development is the human race?

He summarized how his vision, philosophy, and actions coalesce:

So that is my vision of the future that I kind of model my actions around a movement towards that vision, which is very far into the future and somewhat abstract but it manifests itself in my daily life now. So if I am striving personally to live simply and to have less impact, I feel I am moving the world in that direction just a little bit – it may be miniscule, but at least I’m moving in the right direction - and that is a nice feeling.

The veganism is just part of that; the concept is to *do no harm* when eating, and to have less impact, to take what you need generally, and to live simply.

In the face of overwhelming suffering, Shabazz remains optimistic: “Billions of animals killed every year, and that number goes up every year. It’s not going to get better before it gets worse, but it will, maybe, eventually get better.”

### **Registered Dietitians**

#### ***Linda***

Linda, a 48 year old Canadian, provides private consultation in addition to writing, speaking, and research. She became vegetarian at 30 years of age in 1989. Though she was close to being vegan immediately after her decision to change her diet, it wasn’t until six years ago, at the age of 42, she fully committed herself to strict

veganism. At the time of her life-altering encounter with a paradigm-challenging deer hunter she was trying to incorporate more vegetarian meals and was working as a public health nutritionist in a part of Canada she calls “beer, bingo, hunting, and fishing country.”

Although it can be challenging, being vegan gives her a sense that she is doing what she needs to be doing in this world. She says, “It is well with my soul, but it is not always easy.” It gives her a sense of peace because she has always felt, from the time she was very young, that “animals are thinking, feeling beings and deserve to be treated with respect and kindness.” A story from her childhood illustrates her life-long disposition towards animals:

My parents took my brother and I to a bullfight in Spain when I was 6 years old. I was stunned to learn that 10,000 people had gathered to watch a man and his helpers torture and kill a beautiful animal. The matador, El Cordobes, was the national hero. When, after stabbing the bull several times, the bull gored the matador, just slightly, you could hear a pin drop in the stadium, except for one lone voice of a six year old girl who leaped to her feet to cheer for the bull. The bull fighting fans around us were not amused, and my parents tried to stop me for fear we would be lynched.

Although she possessed a special affinity for animals, she grew up in an old-fashioned, traditional family which was very food-centered, so she “absolutely loved the taste of meat” and ice cream was just about her “favorite thing in the world.” Her family

ate “more than their fair share of meat and dairy products” but they also had plenty of fruits and vegetables. She spent about five years in Germany with her family where their favorite meal was Wiener schnitzel (veal cutlets breaded, fried in butter and smothered in mushroom gravy). Upon returning to Canada they ate lobster, filet mignon, and enjoyed Friday night barbeques and the best two-inch thick steaks dad could find.

Linda believes the start of her transition to vegetarianism originated in her late teens when she began to gravitate towards health foods and her mom bought her a vegetarian cookbook. She went directly from high school into a dietetic nutrition program and continued to be interested in foods that supported health. Married in 1978, she and her husband gradually shifted towards a more plant-based diet that included chickpeas, lentils, tofu, less meat, and several vegetarian meals each week. However, the catalytic experience that shocked her into a very near-vegan diet, was the result of a visit from a very good friend, the best man in her wedding, who stopped by for coffee before deer hunting. He called first which gave her time to “think of things that would make him feel really guilty about going to kill a deer.” Once inside the house, she said:

I don’t understand how you can go into the woods with a big gun and shoot such a beautiful animal? I don’t understand why you would even want to do that. The only thing I can think of is it would make you feel like more of a man. You know, you’ve got this big gun, and it’s a macho thing to do. But, I just can’t bear it. It drives me crazy.

Linda was unprepared for his response. He shot back:

Just because you don't have the guts to pull the trigger does not mean you are not responsible for every animal that you buy that's camouflaged in cellophane at a grocery store. At least the animals that I eat have had a life. I doubt very much you can say the same for the ones sitting on your plate.

Stunned, Linda had no response. She said, "I had never really thought of myself as being responsible for the animals that I was buying out of the grocery store. I had divorced myself from that thought a long, long time ago." She admits that people don't tend to think about the connection between the living animal and the meat on their plate and when they do it becomes very uncomfortable. She says, "It's funny that what pushed me over the edge was a deer hunter, but that's exactly what happened."

After the exchange, her friend left to kill a deer and she was determined to find out more about the animals she was eating. Fortuitous events would follow. Within a couple of weeks a man walked into her office in the public health unit with two books under his arm, "*McDougall's Medicine: A Challenging Second Opinion*" and "*A Diet for a New America*" by Robbins. The client wasn't sure if these sources were reliable. Unfamiliar with the texts, Linda located the reviews provided by her dietetic organization, and upon discovering the assessment that neither author had the credentials for talking about nutrition, and both books were considered unreliable, she told her client, "Well that wasn't very helpful. Would you mind leaving the books with me for a week, and I'll tell you after I read them?"

She conducted an "awful lot of literature searches to see if there was any truth to" the claims made in the books. The review of literature confirmed the veracity of the

work cited in the texts and Robbins' stories of animal abuse broke her heart in two. *Diet for a New America* helped her reconnect with what she knew as a child, the bullfight in Spain and the worms she would take off the sidewalk and place in the grass when she was little. She said, "I knew I could never eat another animal. I certainly couldn't touch meat, poultry, or fish again. And at that point I was pretty bound and determined not to touch dairy or eggs either." Once she decided to go vegan she went home and said to her husband, "I want to go completely vegetarian – completely. Would you be willing?" And he said, "I thought you'd never ask." Linda says she was "absolutely stunned" and thankful.

Linda's husband has been extremely supportive. She says, "My spouse is a very quiet, thoughtful, intelligent person and he's very well read... he was always a step ahead of me." Once they made the decision to become strict vegans they followed that diet for about a year until the family moved and gave into social pressures, particularly with the children. At that point, some dairy slipped back into the diet, such as cheese on pizza.

In the beginning, the difficulties she experienced mostly involved her father and her husband's father, and extended family. Both sides of her family were "mortified", and even though she was a dietitian her parents were "terrified." They were very concerned her children, who were one and four, wouldn't grow on a vegan diet. Her dad was the only one who knew a vegetarian, a colleague he taught with at school, but he thought this hippie guy was a bit of a nut when it came to food, and that not feeding meat to his children was akin to child abuse.

The first Christmas after becoming vegetarian her family tried to lure them back to meat because they found their vegan diet so disturbing. Normally, only a turkey would be served for Christmas dinner, but that year they prepared turkey, shrimp, pork roast, ham, and beef: “They did one of every animal they could think of.”

Despite those efforts, Linda’s daughter is vegetarian, but near vegan, and her son and husband are vegans. Her daughter was four at the time and liked meat very much. After explaining to her little girl that they had decided not to eat animals anymore her daughter was shocked, but she understood. Her only question was if they had ever eaten any horses. Relieved at the answer, she said, “Oh, thank God. I couldn’t have stood to eat a horse” and “That’s okay. I’ll be a vegetarian too.” When her son was 3 years old and asked for a MacDonald’s hamburger, she decided to tell him the truth about where meat comes from. When she told him that their burgers were made of cows, he looked at her and said, “People do not eat cows!” When she explained that they did, he responded with tears in his eyes, “But mommy, cows have eyes and ears – don’t they know that cows are people too.”

Today her extended family is far more accepting, and the days of being blamed by her husband’s family, and their attempts at feeding her husband meat when she’s not around are in the past. Gradually, Linda’s parents have come to accept and respect her family’s choice, especially after she started writing books and they heard her speak. Her parents, in-laws, brother, aunts and uncles and so forth aren’t anywhere close to being vegetarian, and all of the family gatherings are very meat-centered, and if she gets anything so much as a cold they blame it on her being vegan. Her relatives will say, “If

only you ate a piece of meat, you'd be fine." So, with family there were difficulties that have slowly improved; professionally, she feared it would be brutal.

She didn't know how she could continue to be a public health nutritionist since all of the resources were based on food guides. She said, "It seemed like an oxymoron to think of a vegetarian dietitian. It didn't seem like you could be both things." She seriously considered leaving the profession, but through a soul-searching process she discovered that what she wanted to do was make a difference in the world. Determined she could move her organization forward more easily if she was on the inside, she decided she "had to stay." Linda soon discovered that she had found her professional niche, and her worst fears never came to pass.

Apart from the family challenges, she "felt wonderful going vegan." She had not realized she was lactose intolerant, and after eliminating dairy her stomach aches went away for the first time in her life. She said, "I just couldn't believe how much better I felt." Having always struggled with iron deficiency she was amazed her "iron levels shot up and became quite normalized." This surprised her because she had thought that by eating meat she had been getting a lot of highly available heme iron. However, because she ate so much dairy, which is low in iron and inhibits the absorption of iron, her iron levels improved with its elimination. She felt more energetic and had improved health, but the most important thing was how her "soul felt." Linda was "at peace" with herself: "I knew I was where I needed to be and where I had been moving from the time I was a little kid in terms of reverence for life."

Linda's non-vegan friends have been supportive; though they were initially shocked, most were respectful. However, after they moved they began gravitating to friends who had similar values. Linda formed close relationships with two vegetarian registered dietitians and they also formed other friendships through Earth Save. Yet, they did create friendships with the parents of their children's friends who were non-vegan.

Asked if she had experienced any prejudice, stigma, or social difficulties Linda first spoke about her professional experiences: "I was very worried that within my profession I would be looked down upon, I would be challenged, I would be thought of as a fringy person and it never happened. I'm amazed actually." She thinks her colleagues have embraced her because she is "very science-based and that there's someone who can help them when there are vegetarian clients." Though her book has been attack by the dairy industry she withstood the challenge.

Socially, neighbors "were a little standoffish." She was once told, "I hope you're not an animal rights activist too. You're vegetarian, but I hope you're not one of those animal rights activists that are destroying the farmers." There were more challenges like that, but she and her family tended to spend more time with vegan friends they could better connect with.

Asked how her self-image had changed since adopting a vegan diet, she told me about a time when she was 16 years old and how she sat at the water's edge of a nearby lake at five in the morning, reflecting on what her life was about. She decided she would stop getting plastered with her friends on the weekend and vowed never to allow



anything into her body that she could become addicted to, and that could derail her from making an impact in the world. Linda knew she was here for a purpose and that it was something significant. Fourteen years later, after her conversion to veganism, she realized what her life was about:

I realized it wasn't really about me – it was something that was beyond me and beyond my family, and what I really wanted my life to be about was making this world a more compassionate place and helping the animals that were in a situation beyond my comprehension - that smart human beings could ever allow animals to become mere commodities and to look upon them as having no feelings, of having not much value other than how we value them for food or clothing or whatever. I knew my life had to be about trying to change that perception and trying to reduce animal suffering. It was such a wonderful feeling to know what I was here for. It gave me peace and determination.

Do you think it requires discipline to maintain a vegan diet? “Of course. Absolutely! There is no doubt that we have to be conscious and committed”, Linda replied. It would be so much easier to eat a meal at someone’s home than to say, “No thank you. I’m not hungry” when “you’re starving.” She said, “It’s always a challenge, and you have to be fully committed and remind yourself why you’re doing this because a lot of non-vegan food tastes pretty good and looks pretty good and smells pretty good.”

Linda believes many vegans are “super-sensitive people who have a level of compassion that is deeper than the average person”, and they possess an ability to feel for animals and understand other beings have feelings that matter. It is this nature that she’s had since a child that she believes influenced her becoming vegan. She concluded, “Most of the vegans I’ve met are incredibly compassionate human beings, and I resonate with them. There’s something special about people who make this choice.”

Why don’t more people become vegan? Linda has written extensively on the topic, and she knows there are many reasons, but “The biggest reason is that they justify their choices in many ways because of social factors.” She offered up her brother, who completely respects her decision to be vegan and looks at her as bit of a heroine, as an example:

In his social world – he drives a convertible BMW, wears \$1,000 suits and \$100 ties and \$300 shoes and those are the circles he moves in and they eat \$400 meals which include foie gras, filet mignon, and everything else. He couldn’t imagine being able to move in those circles unless he did that and that’s what his life is about.

People justify their choices by believing the animals are here for that purpose; that they wouldn’t exist if we weren’t raising them for food. They also think “everything is fine – we don’t treat them badly.” Other people justify it by saying, “We really need meat” or “I tried going vegetarian, and I ended up anemic.”

Linda thinks very highly of many of her meat eating colleagues, who she finds are often “tremendously knowledgeable and respectful.” They use the books she has

written in their practice and recommend them to their patients and clients who have chosen vegetarian and vegan diets, and they use them in courses they teach at universities. They also call her with questions and attend her presentations at conferences. Some dietitians are threatened, especially old-school dietitians which is understandable, according to Linda. She studied from 1978 to 1982 and learned two things about vegetarian diets: "I learned that vegetarian diets were risky, especially for pregnant and lactating women, and children... and vegan diets were downright dangerous and nobody should do them." So, if these professionals haven't pursued continuing education in the area of vegetarian and vegan diets or are unfamiliar with the official joint position on vegetarian diets in both the American and Canadian Dietetic Association that clearly states they are safe and adequate at every stage of the life cycle, they may remain ignorant, which occurs in every profession.

What explains why a person might fail to thrive on a vegetarian or vegan diet? Linda states that it depends on where they are in the life cycle and distinguished between the needs of the younger and older individual. While "It's not difficult to provide an adequate and appropriate vegan diet for a child" the number one cause of failure to thrive would be a diet inadequate in calories and inadequate in nutrients. Linda expounded upon the cause:

The biggest reason for that is over zealous parents try to be as pure as they can be and they go gung ho with au natural and lots of fiber and no fortified foods and they're really strict about no added fat.... they are so convinced about disease risk reduction that they pick a diet that is

appropriate for disease reversal in an adult and apply that to their children and that is a formula for disaster. The diet that reverses disease in an older person is generally very, very low in fat, very high in fiber and very inappropriate for a small child who we're trying to get to grow properly.

She said that parents need to become informed so as to insure their child gets appropriate intake of B<sub>12</sub>, vitamin D, calcium, and protein. And for older people, problems arise when they transition to a vegan diet by eliminating meat and dairy, but don't incorporate legumes and greens; they attempt to subsist on "a diet of bagels and pasta which is never going to be optimal for human health."

As we concluded the interview, Linda said,  
If you're vegan because of animals, if you're vegan because of compassion, because you want to see a kinder, gentler world then you need to be an example of health. Don't ever underestimate the power of your personal example. Be everything you can be in terms of physical fitness. Try not to be overweight or underweight. Try to be the healthiest person in your workplace. Eat a diet that you make sure is not B<sub>12</sub> deficient, make sure you get what you need, get educated, go to lectures, read books, make your food absolutely phenomenal, have the best lunch in your office, be the shining example of health because there is nothing you have at your disposal that is a more powerful way to influence people. Don't think they won't notice. If you're sickly they will use it to

justify their meat eating. It's the worst thing you can do. If you want to push people miles away from being vegan, be unhealthy, be overweight or be underweight. Whatever we do that contributes to poor health, they will use to justify killing animals.

After the interview, I brought up the prevalence of disease in North America and within my own family, and told her of a dinner in which my family was making fun of me for being vegan despite them having numerous health problems among them. Linda could identify. She shared a similar story.

They were bugging me and saying things. And then they said, "You're so skinny Linda. You're so skinny." And I'm actually very normal weight; I'm not skinny at all. You know 5' 3" and between 110 and 115 pounds. I actually said something that I don't normally say, but I just got so irritated. I said, "I am not skinny. I am normal. You are all fat!"

### ***Bill***

At forty, Bill runs a non-profit animal rights organization and is also a registered dietitian. He spends about one to two hours a day on nutrition for his organization, answers health-related questions, and helps people with vegetarian or vegan diets over the Internet a few times a week, never charging clients for his counseling services. He has earned two bachelor's degrees, one in Philosophy of Sociology and the other in Nutrition and Dietetics. He went vegetarian in 1987 at 20 years old; a year later he was vegan. Bill told me that he doesn't like the "ism" in veganism – he thinks it leads some non-vegans to view it as a religion rather than the social justice issue it is for him. He's

convinced that non-vegans have a strong incentive to view veganism as a religion because it makes it easier for them to dismiss than if it were viewed as a social justice issue, such as being opposed to slavery. Though an atheist, he is not opposed to vegans thinking of it as having “religious importance”, since he thinks it is more important than religion, but “vegans can sometimes contribute to the nonvegan view of veganism as a religion by being so visibly concerned about traces of animal products in things.”

The first question, what is it like to be vegan, surprised him. After repeating the question he said, “My focus is more on spreading veganism rather than being vegan myself. To me being vegan is not a big deal.” The only time he thinks about it at all is when he finds himself in a large group of non-vegans. He tends to avoid talking about it with those he knows unless they have questions. He says,

I actually don't even like it to come up because I feel like they don't understand it and we're in these two different worlds, and so I don't even feel like trying to bridge the gap which is not a great way to do activism.

Thank God activism isn't just talking to people I know or I would be terrible at it.

Throughout his childhood meat was served at least twice a day and Bill experienced “significant enjoyment of animal products” and ate a lot of them. Though not overweight, he was “a big eater back then” who loved going on road trips because it meant the family would stop at McDonalds. His grandmother visited regularly and made comfort foods which were heavily reliant on animal-products.

Eggs were the first animal product Bill gave up; this action was a direct consequence of purchasing a record album released in 1987 to benefit PETA titled *Animal Liberation*. He sent away for more information, using the materials inside the jacket. One of the first newsletters he received included an article about egg production. He recalls, "I was horrified at how the chickens were raised. So, I gave up eggs first, and then shortly after that I gave up mammals. I ate fish and dairy for a few months, and then I decided to give that up."

His list of positive outcomes since becoming vegan include not contributing to animal suffering, losing about six pounds that he was happy to lose, a low cholesterol level, and the prevention of future weight gain. Although his first week without meat was "very hard" it didn't take long to adjust. During that first week his friends at college ordered a Meat Lovers pizza that "smelled so good." But after about two weeks he "figured out what to eat instead" and therefore "wasn't feeling famished" anymore. The difficulties he encountered centered mostly on family adjustments during the beginning stages.

The crux of these "small difficulties" was the rejection Bill's mom felt at having foods she had been making rebuffed. Bill thought she would join him once she learned about how animals were raised since she loved animals too, but to Bill's chagrin she did not have the same feelings he did.

He and his mom created a pattern that involved Bill "trying to convince her and her being mad at" him. He found this early zealotry had unintended benefits:

I know a lot of people get teased by their family and criticized when they're just minding their own business, but I think that I found that when you're trying to get someone else to change they're happy enough if you just leave them alone; just call it a truce.

Eventually, however, changes occurred in the family. His younger brother became vegan after a year and the middle brother experimented with it for a while. His parents also started making vegan foods and "for a few years they were some of the best vegan cooks" he knew. After he became a vegan activist they accepted the change, knowing it was not something they would be able to change.

Bill's friends "had pretty positive responses", with most of them becoming vegetarian or vegan at least for a period of time. However, Bill has abandoned his missionary zeal to convert those he knows; it just took too much emotional energy. He finds it far more efficient to "try to convert strangers who are on the verge and who are very open to it versus trying to work on friends and family."

Today, most of his friends are vegan because they share similar feelings about the world and a concern for animals. It is rare for Bill to feel as deep a connection with people who aren't vegan, in large part because, "Some people have a sense of, 'I want to do what's right' and a lot of vegans tend to have that sense about them." It is partly this sense that has attracted Bill to his partners. Of the 15 to 20 women Bill has dated during the past twenty years only two or three have been meat eaters. The first woman Bill dated became vegan, at least temporarily, and still contributes financially to his organization.



Although Bill said he doesn't feel like he has been discriminated against due to his being vegan, he has encountered a variety of responses that have ranged from understanding to indifference to thoughts that he must be weird to care about animal suffering. He's not quite sure what people think of him: "I don't ask my friends who aren't vegan what they think of me being vegan."

Bill does not think being vegan has altered his self-image though he does feel good about becoming vegan and contributing significantly less to animal suffering. He says,

I just desperately want to stop animal suffering I don't really care what people think of me as this process unfolds. I expend my emotional energies in ways I find the most efficient. I don't do a whole lot of thinking about "What does it mean to be vegan and how does it affect me?"

He also avoids consuming products produced with the benefit of slave labor and donates to Amnesty International, but just as with being vegan, he doesn't "formulate an opinion" about himself because of these actions. He said, "I just don't go around feeling like I'm so great because I do these things and other people don't."

Being vegan requires a lot of discipline for a lot of people, Bill thinks, but it does not require much discipline for him because, as he says, "I take the animal suffering so seriously, and the images are so stuck with me, and I guess I care about them... apparently more than other people do or I've made a connection easier than other

people do.” He doesn’t even notice the animal products when he goes down the grocery store aisle.

It used to require more discipline for Bill, and he would become envious of people who could just sit down and comfortably eat anything at restaurants, but over the years he has become less rigid and doesn’t quiz the waitresses to make sure there is not even an insignificant amount animal product in a seemingly vegan selection. Options have also increased over the years making it easier on Bill, especially when out at restaurants.

What is it about Bill’s personality or his approach to the world that influenced his becoming vegan? Two basic issues are at the heart of it: his ability to identify with animals and care about them, and not caring much about what other people think about him. He knows some people who care much more about animals than he does and others on the “continuum” care a lot less, he’s not sure why, but he’s “definitely on the ‘cares more’ side.” About not caring if people don’t like that he’s vegan he said, “If someone stopped being my friend because I was vegan, I’d be like ‘Fine. Good riddance to you.’” Whereas he knows many people would be so upset by it that they would go back to eating animal products.

Why don’t more Americans adopt vegetarian or vegan diets? A combination of two main determinants: Peer-pressure and taste/satisfaction. Peer-pressure “is a very, very big problem. There are a lot of people walking around in the world that if everyone else was vegan, they’d be vegan too, and it wouldn’t be that big a deal.” Bill also noted that there are a lot of people who don’t know much about animal issues and therefore

may not have considered becoming vegan. He cited as evidence that some Americans are ignorant about animal issues, the recent news story of 2008 presidential candidate John Edwards' statement that he hadn't heard of PETA.

Earlier in the interview Bill spoke of how his parents have gone back-and-forth being semi-vegetarian and not. Asked to explain this, he said, "It mostly has to do with their peer group. When they are around friends of theirs who are heavily into eating meat they will do that because they don't want to cause controversy." He also compared it to someone deciding if they're going to drink or they're not going to drink, "You just get in these frames of mind where you think, 'I'm not going to do that anymore' and you don't for a while and then one day you're like, "It's no big deal. I'll do it." He wondered whether there was merit to Dr. Neal Barnard's claim that cheese contains casomorphins that have drug-like properties that produce a high and cause people to get "into some frame of mind that they then don't care about the animals anymore; it doesn't matter to them."

When I asked how his experience compares to other vegans he knows he said "better than average" due to his parent's generally benign response. Of the hundreds of vegans he knows he has seen a wide range of reactions, from those who have parents who have gone vegan to those who have been "completely ostracized from their family, and everything in-between."

The question, what are your thoughts about meat eating colleague's knowledge, practices, and beliefs related to vegetarian and vegan diets, elicited the following response: "Being a registered dietitian probably doesn't set you that far off from the

general population in terms of what you eat. They should probably be eating semi-vegetarian where they don't eat much meat if they're following the research." However, he admits, "I don't think there's terribly convincing evidence that you're going to do yourself great harm by not becoming vegan."

In general, he thinks the younger generation of dietitians is much more open to vegetarianism and veganism than the average doctor. He believes this younger generation has a positive view, but they may think "'there's no need to go that far' or 'it would be really hard to go that far' and they might envy those who do, but they're not going to do it themselves."

When asked about possible nutritional deficiencies Bill said, "I don't know that it's common for people to not thrive on a vegan diet, but a lot of people do come down with B<sub>12</sub> deficiency symptoms which generally start with tingling in the hands or feet." Though "these days it's hard to be a vegan and not get vitamin B<sub>12</sub> fortified foods in your diet" unless "you take on a completely whole foods diet and you're not getting any processed foods." In addition he stated that failure to thrive could be due to premenopausal women not getting sufficient iron, some people not getting enough protein through beans, or obtaining too few calories.

At the end of the interview he felt it was important to add:

I think that if you're vegan to prevent animal suffering you should consider doing a lot more than just being vegan yourself....you can affect a lot more animals by doing a little bit of activism than being vegan

yourself throughout your whole life by convincing other people to cut back on animal products and it's not hard to do.

### ***Mitch***

Mitch went vegetarian at 19 years of age, in 1970, the year four students at Kent State University were slain by National Guardsmen at a protest of the U.S. incursion into Cambodia. By 32 he was vegan. Presently 56 and in private practice as a nutrition consultant he holds two masters degrees: Dietetics and Nutrition, and Geography.

Being vegan is “a feeling of doing something good at each meal or at least not doing something awful at each meal” which makes it “much easier to look at farm animals and not feel guilty about having just eaten or exploited them or their brethren for food products.”

Mitch was fortunate that from a very young age he had an uncle who was a pescio-vegetarian. This helped pave the path for Mitch so that within his family “it wasn't considered a big deal if you didn't want to eat the meat or the fish.” He wasn't very fond of chicken or fish, but he liked other meats, especially barbequed foods because of the smoke flavor. However, his preference has always been to have a lot of plant foods.

He decided to experiment with a vegetarian diet as a result of witnessing the effects it had on a high school friend of his who returned after his first year of college a vegetarian, and a changed person. This “selfish, obnoxious kid” was now “very gentle and mellow” and practiced meditation. Mitch wanted some of that.

His friend opened his mind to the possibility that one could survive without fish and meat: “I always thought being vegetarian you ate fish instead of meat, and I never liked fish very much so I never even seriously considered it.” Once he realized a diet without fish could be adequate he chose vegetarianism. The switch to veganism occurred as a result of viewing a film while attending an educational conference, the Vegetarian Summerfest annual conference, where all meals are vegan: “I saw a film about the dairy industry – every reason there was to be vegetarian, there was to be vegan as well, and I became vegan at that point.”

Mitch didn't encounter any significant difficulties due to becoming vegan. He says, “Well, I was already a registered dietitian at that point and so there wasn't anyone telling me I was doing anything unhealthy because I knew more about nutrition than most people did.” The only difficulties he mentioned were “eating out, finding food in a convenience store and various places where there wasn't a good selection of plant-based foods, and in some social situations people would say they didn't know what to prepare” for him.

His family was already accepting, due in part to the precedent set by his uncle, and in part because he was a nutrition professional. His two children were raised vegan and they had no problems with being vegan. Remarkably, he also has not experienced any difficulties with friends, significant others, or social situations.

He thinks the reaction of his friends has something to do with the era in which the change to a vegetarian diet took place: “It was back in the 70's and early 80's when people were doing different things.” Additionally, the friend who caused him to change

influenced some of his other friends with his ideas. Mitch says of one very close friend who became vegetarian only to return to eating meat: “If anything, he was more apologetic about eating meat again than having a problem with me eliminating dairy.”

He attributes his lack of social difficulties to being a nutrition professional. He says the following interaction is common:

If they find out I’m vegan, they’re immediately talking about how they don’t eat much meat and how they could never give up cheese or something like that, but with the intonation that they probably know that they ought to, just not from a culinary standpoint.

However, he has interacted with thousands of vegans because of his profession and knows that “people who are not nutrition or health professionals definitely get a lot more criticism from family, friends, co-workers that they’re going to be compromising their health.” He hears this especially from young people; sometimes their parents won’t allow them to go vegan. Vegans can also get grilled at social events.

In social situations women tend to be put down as not needing to or not being willing to eat this kind of macho diet. They don’t need that whereas guys need that. And guys that eat that way are accused of not being real men because they’re too squeamish, and they don’t accept that the world is cruel, and this has been going on for centuries – ‘grow up and accept that cruelties are going on in the world.’

Mitch credits a number of health benefits to his diet. He said he used to get one or two headaches each month prior to eliminating meat; and like most people he would take an aspirin and they'd go away.

About two months after I became vegetarian I was on a plane flight when they still served meals, and I forgot to order the vegetarian meal, and they served me a little steak, a little filet mignon, because I bumped up to first class and I thought it would be kind of a waste to not eat it, and I did. I was hungry on the flight, and by the time the plane landed I had a splitting headache and I realized that was the first headache I'd gotten since I became vegetarian several months before, and that's the last time I remember having a headache – 30 years ago.

He believes his vegan diet has allowed him to better maintain his weight, which used to fluctuate a lot when he was younger. Today, if he catches a cold "it doesn't last nearly as long and there's less mucous production", and he rarely experiences stomach upset, which was a regular occurrence before.

Psychological benefits include feeling like his diet is more consistent with his beliefs: "I've always had a lot of respect for animals, and I always felt a little bit funny about eating them if I had respect for them." It is this respect and "having a strong sense of values and wanting to be consistent" that allows him to feel that it doesn't take much discipline to maintain his diet: "If that's a priority then it doesn't feel like discipline. I think for people who are strictly motivated by health issues it would be more of an issue."



He points to his “compassionate nature”, openness to change and new ideas and desire to explore other foods and cuisines as predisposing traits that led him to his present diet. The move from a standard American diet, which he found restricting, to a plant-based diet, “opened up a world of eating” that would not have been open had he “still felt like it was necessary to have animal products every meal.” He says, “That’s why I find it restricting. Most people only eat a few kinds of meat which seems repetitive to me. I eat a wide variety of plant foods.”

Explaining why many omnivores aren’t inclined to go vegetarian or vegan, Mitch says they are unwilling to “give up things that they enjoy” and don’t want to “accept that things that they’ve been doing or were told were okay by their parents or peers that there might actually be something wrong with that.” He thinks that people often believe “that a balanced diet involves eating everything that there is, and somehow taking out whole groups of food is going to be dangerous in some way in the long run” and “even though they might buy into the idea that excess amount of meat or dairy products could be dangerous, they also believe that having zero amounts of those things in their diet is equally, if not more, dangerous.”

The amazing thing to me is that people know vegans and they see that these vegans are healthy and yet they still – they think somehow people are lucky – they’re eating this way and maybe they’re just lucky – and on the other hand they also feel that they’re going to be lucky and not suffer consequences from eating the animal products that they know might be linked to disease, but not everybody gets problems. Just like people who

smoke think they're not going to be the ones to get lung cancer;  
somebody else will get it.

Omnivorous registered dietitian's "biggest flaw is they don't know enough about the plant-based foods that are out there", according to Mitch. Their conception of a vegetarian diet is epitomized by someone who "eats iceberg lettuce, tomatoes imported from Mexico and seedless grapes"; a diet that lacks variety, nutrient content and culinary appeal. They are often surprised when they begin to learn about the plentiful variety of ethnic cuisines and about the nutritional content of those foods. He asked, "Why would they still eat meat themselves?" and answered, "I attribute that to social acceptance, as well as wanting to enjoy what they enjoy." Mitch spoke of his perception of the attitude towards food among registered dietitians:

I remember I was at a meeting of the American Dietetic Association years ago and a keynote speaker was Julia Childs and at the time the information was out about not eating too much red meat, especially liver being a rich source of cholesterol and most dietitians had been trained to think of liver as this nutritious food were having to rethink that and Julia Childs says, "I don't think there's anything wrong with liver!", and she got a standing ovation from these dietitians who wanted to hear that. That's who these people are – they just want to enjoy food and not think about the negative aspects because what most dietitians have traditionally been trained in is making sure people get an adequate diet and not

worrying about getting too much of something and risking heart disease or whatever.

He says the classically trained dietitian is generally focused on diets designed to address nutritional deficiencies in patients with particular diseases or symptoms, not the consequences of overeating. He spoke of dietitian's mantra that "in a balanced diet, a healthy diet, there's room for all foods", which makes the food industry happy and inclined to contribute to the Dietetic Association.

All you have to do is look at the Journal of the American Dietetic Association and you can see the full page ads for the Pork Council, Meat Board, M & M Mars, the Dairy Council, and Frito Lay to realize they want everybody to be on their side supporting the profession of dietetics.

The ADA's culture is not very supportive of female, vegetarian registered dietitians, according to Mitch: "I know female dietitians who stay in the closet about being vegetarians or vegans because they get put down for it. Vegetarianism is now pretty well accepted among dietitians, but there is probably still discrimination in the workplace if a dietitian is openly vegetarian."

Veganism is still often considered radical. Veganism is probably more objected to than it is in any other profession because dietitians really get that push from the dairy industry how important dairy is and there's no substitute for dairy. Even in the food pyramid, as flawed as it is, the meat group is actually the meat and beans group, whereas the dairy group is there alone, and there's no plant-based substitute given for it.

He believes failure to thrive on a vegetarian or vegan diet comes down to “Inadequate variety” or “Inadequate intake.” He says, “Little kids who fail to thrive are often given an excessively high fiber diet and are not breastfed adequately or long enough.”

Breast milk has no fiber and that’s what babies are supposed to drink – some would say until they’re almost six years old – when they get their molars in and they can grind food well and grind up fiber well so they can absorb nutrients properly.

For older children and adults it may have to do with the belief that three meals a day provides sufficient opportunity to obtain the necessary calories and nutrients, even though breakfast and lunch are light, and dinner is used as a way to cram in a lot of food. He says that people don’t realize that plant foods, while nutrient dense per calorie, are not nutrient or calorie dense per serving.

If you’re looking at nutrients per calorie they’re fine, but – people will say you’ve got to eat a big plate of broccoli to get as much calcium as a glass of milk. Well the broccoli still has less calories than the milk and a lot of people don’t think of that and they have a hard time eating a huge plate of broccoli unless they spread that intake out during the day so they can get that volume of food in.

At the end of the interview, Mitch wanted to talk more about the “dairy issue.” He said, “I want this to appear in as many places as possible.” He believes there is convincing scientific evidence linking dairy products, with hormone-related cancers,

such as breast, prostate, testicular and ovarian cancer, and he is surprised that, given the strength of these connections, the general public continues to believe they can't be healthy without dairy products.

They can't even fathom the idea that dairy might be unhealthy. They think it's necessary. And if you talk about those connections they'll say, "Well, everything causes cancer, but I don't want my bones to fall apart."

### **Philosophy Professors**

#### ***Allen***

Allen, 51, grew up a latchkey kid, a result of his father's death and his mother's long working hours, so he often ate by himself: "Great cuisine for me was cooking a hot dog and throwing it in a piece of white bread." Having been acculturated by TV and fast food culture he consumed dairy products on a daily basis and continued eating fast food into his college years, washing it down with copious quantities of beer or whisky. His relationship with food began to change in his late high school years as a result of a perceptual shift that was taking place on a "subliminal and very personal level."

I remember it happening with steak because, unlike like hamburger, steak is very clearly a body part, a slab of flesh. It's part of an animal. I remember telling my mom that I didn't want to eat steak anymore, it was grossing me out. I continued to eat fast food, hamburgers, and all that, but I couldn't eat steak anymore. Yet, little did I know the true power of the intuitive and moral forces stirring within me, and how they would

transform everything – literally everything, from food to fashion, from body shape to existential, social, political, and cosmological outlook.

However, years passed and he continued to eat a lot of meat: “I had the SAD diet (standard American diet) for sure!” It wasn’t until he was 24 that the early steak experience “really blew up in [his] consciousness.” His college program had him “learning a lot of radical things”, and his “consciousness was starting to evolve and change rapidly.” He tells the tale of a fast food encounter gone wrong, and a “primordial experience of connecting the food to an animal and not being able to eat it” that occurred in 1982, at the age of 24:

I went into a White Castle restaurant, it was about 2:30 a.m., and I was half drunk. For some reason I was really hungry, and I ordered a double cheeseburger; usually just a single was fine. When I started eating it, it was so grotesque and hideous, dripping and gooey, and so over the top, that it just made me recognize what it really was. Then that experience with the steak came back in a much bigger way, such that I vividly saw this hamburger not as slab of “food” but as the remaining evidence of blood, tendons, and muscles of a being that was once alive but was killed to be served to me in a bag. I was eating another animal! With a powerful sense of disgust and loathing, I put it down and threw it away. In fact, hoping the experience was a short-lived anomaly, rather than a potent and permanent harbinger of change, I tried to eat hamburgers a couple times after that fateful night and I spit out each one.

“My epiphany at White Castle restaurant was something akin to a religious experience that transformed me amidst the most profane of spaces.” After a few false starts, he was now on the path. Though he “wandered around for a couple of months not knowing what to eat, not really being able to eat, completely oblivious to the concept and meaning of ‘vegetarianism’” he eventually met a couple of vegetarian mentors who assured him he was “on the right path” and they provided meals, literature, and guidance. The culmination of this odyssey was the adoption of a vegan diet and identity at the age of 35.

While it was his ability to identify with animals, epitomized by the steak and hamburger experiences, that helped him to realize what he was eating and not want it anymore, it was reading Marx while still a omnivore that began opening his mind critically to the world around him. He began socializing with radicals on campus and was “becoming critical and learning what it was like to live in opposition or antagonism with people because of radical political views.” He was also practicing critical thinking: “Practice in recognizing that the system, the empire, the world view is completely fucked, because it is rooted in violence and domination. So that was important, and from there I made the shift to a vegetarian and ultimately to a vegan.”

It wasn't until about 1987, after reading Singer's (1975) book, *Animal Liberation*, that he got to animal rights and began doing it for ethical reasons. It was this book that provided the details “of what animal oppression really meant” and he began to see that the “Nazi genocidal forms of violence humans have inflicted on one another barely

touched what humans have done to animals.” This allowed him to see “the heart of evil in human reality.” It was “an awakening.”

And yet, being a vegan is a little bit like the epiphany in the climax of Joseph Conrad’s (1999) *The heart of darkness*. You don’t want to be dogmatic. You don’t want to come off as a Christian. You don’t want to pretend you have the Truth, but you’re not a relativist either. You know what your realities are and you know what’s good for you, and you know that other people don’t know, and you want to share that with them.

And when you’ve read something like Singer’s (1975) book *Animal Liberation* and it hits you, and you’re like that character in Conrad’s story: you’ve come back from the heart of darkness, and you’re not the same person anymore. You’re with these other people, and you’re walking around in their culture, and you know that they don’t know, or they don’t care, or both. And you just wonder, “Who are these people?” So it becomes a major issue that is always influencing how you deal with people. As much as you try to negotiate your relationships with people, it’s always there.

Questioned about his experience being vegan, Allen began by making reference to Sagan’s (1985), *Contact, a novel*, in which the aliens, Vegans, come from Planet Vega. Allen says that the book provided him with a “metaphor for how you can feel in this society” - practically, because “it’s very difficult to eat as vegan”, but “more importantly,



philosophically, ideologically, people see you as if you're from some other planet almost." Which raises the question: can a vegan date a human?

He openly discussed how the great debate - sex or ethics - can play out in dating relationships. He is a life-long bachelor who has found that if he drops the "V bomb" it can often be "a deal-breaker right from the start", and therefore he tries to delay the revelation so they don't run away. However, eventually the subject is broached, but if someone tells him, "Oh, I could never give up meat" Allen has generally decided its over and chosen to turn away. If a woman is receptive to the idea, but not ready to change, he may ask that they strike a deal where she avoids eating meat in front of him. In the meantime he hopes she'll "see it" and "come on board." Many of his former girlfriends have.

Allen views the dietary proclivities of the women he is interested in as a "major issue" that tests his moral commitments:

To put it frankly, it's a choice between ethics and sex. Here's a girl I'm attracted to. And, you know, who cares if she's wearing a fur collar or eating hamburgers on her own time - I can't even think of kissing someone after they eat meat. But if it's not right there you can kind of ignore it, you know? Who cares about all of that!

The internal philosophical debate continues: "And on the other hand you start thinking 'Oh, my God! Can I really do that? Can I compromise my principles just for sexual gratification?' It becomes a psychological tension at some point."

Although he has “been on both sides, obviously, over the years”, choosing a tryst with a meat eater sometimes and denying himself the pleasures of the flesh on other occasions, he summarizes the impact of being vegan this way:

Again, there’s this dialectic of how veganism spiritually connects you deeper to things and to a tradition, a historical tradition, a human tradition, of the great spirits and prophets and truth seekers and moralists. But at the same time it separates you from everybody. It can destroy relationships. It can prevent relationships.

Allen explored analogous examples of “deal breakers” that many might easily relate to:

You try not to be dogmatic about it, but at some point you just have to say, “Look, I don’t want to be around someone who is using nigger jokes. I don’t want to be around someone who is violent toward women. And I don’t want to be around someone who continues to eat meat and shows no regard for the value of animals.”

He added that after making the choice to be vegetarian he was healthier, more energetic, felt a greater connection with animals and was growing morally and spiritually, but at the same time he was becoming alienated from other people.

It’s not always your choice to do that; they’ll alienate you. It’s a double-sided thing going on; as you’re growing and evolving, you’re moving away from people. You’re finding it hard to be with people. It’s just inevitable in some sense.

The experience with his family was no exception. Becoming vegetarian simply added to the “big gulf” that had been created by being a political “lefty.” Allen’s politics, diet and childless bachelorhood existence were all sources of tension, but there was never a break in the family. While his family was mostly accepting, they started to see him as “a little weird” and “mocked” his diet occasionally. One of his brother’s wives even limited the contact he had with her children to reduce the influence he might have on them; despite her efforts to shield them, two children are now vegan adults.

During college he would travel home for holidays, and he recalls one “shocking episode on Thanksgiving dinner.” His sister arrived wearing a full-length fur coat.

I had never seen that before. I assaulted her on that right away. I said, “Jesus Christ! Do you know how that was made?” Well, her response was, “Well, everybody should be able to wear at least one!” and of course I found that vapid. She was bringing a whole plate, a whole tray of lamb, and I was just disgusted and repulsed by that. The rest of my family was all carnivores and they all saw no problems with that kind of thing - so I found myself adjusting to them.

About the difference between family and friends he mentioned the common refrain, “You have to put up with your family but you can choose your friends.” However, as a vegan he finds it difficult to get close to people if they’re carnivores and has no interest attending barbecues or other social functions that revolve around food. So, the search begins for friends who share a similar world view, which is challenging where he lives.

Allen subscribes to the importance of educating friends. He says, quoting Chuck D of the rap group Public Enemy, "If I can't change the friends around me, I change the friends around me." He attempts to share the message that they "live in a culture of disinformation and propaganda", but if they don't get it and they are not growing and evolving or they're not open to it, he finds it "hard to respect someone who doesn't appreciate the fact that maybe they've been lied to also."

Of the overall social problems he encounters he says:

It can be a real problem. However you try to finesse it, they see you as an outsider. 'You're not one of us. You're a weirdo and we don't want to be with you.' It can affect your career! You're not one of the boys. You're not in the club. You don't go out with them on Friday night and eat chicken wings and beer.... It's like you don't want to fit in, and it can be seen as an insult or a threat or challenge.

He considers meat consumption to be a basic ritual and habit and not participating challenges a very fundamental aspect of human identity and consciousness that all meat eaters have.

It doesn't matter whether you're talking about a truck driver or your dean who has a Ph.D. and so-called educated people! They all think the same way! And when philosophers challenge veganism and animal rights they give you the same, basic, stupid questions that are uniformed - the same questions you would hear from students or laypeople.

He says that beyond being seen as a weirdo, vegans are viewed as “coming off as morally supreme or superior.” Other interactions include vegans being looked down upon or as a source of fear and intimidation, all of which are barriers to everyday relationships. In addition, vegans may be perceived as being divisive and too individualistic.

In the face of these social challenges, a vegan still needs to attend to the practical matter of obtaining sustenance that is animal-free. Asked if it requires discipline to maintain a vegan diet, Allen said, “Oh, absolutely! Absolutely!” Yet he remains steadfastly vegan in an area of the country that makes it no picnic. If he can do it there, he thinks, anyone can do it. He wondered about “vegan cheaters” who probably wouldn’t admit to various degrees of transgressions, be it a little milk in a nasty coffee or being “so hungry that you don’t really want to ask what’s in the bread of the sandwich.” But for Allen it comes down to the principle of it.

And so being a vegan means being in some very uncomfortable situations where you can’t eat, where you find yourself hungry; I personally never bended to that. I’ll go hungry rather than eat something I’m not sure of.

So you just steel yourself to it from the start and expect that there will be times when you can’t eat or won’t eat even though you’re hungry.

So, besides the inherent alienation involved in being vegan and the added difficulties of securing guilt-free sex and untainted food, why don’t more people go vegetarian or vegan? Allen lists the following contributors: indifference, selfishness,

concern over the social “shake up”, selective amnesia, and the lure of carnivorous culture. Speaking of the different attitudes he encounters in the classroom he said:

A lot get it right away, a lot get it for a little while and fall back into carnivorism and a lot never get it. The worse case of that was - I had a student come up to me and say, “I’ve read the book, I’ve looked at shocking pictures and videos and I’ve got to tell ya, it doesn’t bother me. I just don’t care.”

Others may care, but they are “so selfish that they’re not going to change what’s convenient to them in their daily lives” and so while they appreciate his points, “they’re too selfish to take real concern of animals and change things.” Some may have more concern, but “they’re not prepared to deal with the rupture that they have to undergo with their family, friends, wives, and colleagues, etc. So rather than deal with that shake-up, they just waltz.”

They may also choose to succumb to selective forgetting and media messages: The truth stays with them only for awhile and they get sucked back into this carnivorous maelstrom, the advertisements and what other people are doing and the saturation of the foods. They just fall back into it. It’s too easy to fall back into carnivorous culture.

After the interview, he spoke of the old Socratic myth, that virtue is knowledge – to know what is right is to do what is right, “It’s bullshit. A cigarette smoker will say, ‘Theses things are killing me, but I can’t give them up.’”

You could not change because you're selfish. You care, but not enough.

You could know, but not change because you're addicted. You could know, but not change because there is something irrational that you can't control. You should be able to know and then change, but that's not human reality.

Asked what he thought about meat eating philosophers, he said: "Well, some of my colleagues are vegetarians but they're still total assholes. So someone can be a vegetarian but still be a contemptible person. Vegetarianism or veganism is a necessary condition of being a good person, but not a sufficient condition." He also finds it "hard to fully respect someone who clings to the carnivorous lifestyle" and is "not sure what their excuse is anymore" since the information about the wide-ranging implications of animal product consumption is so widely available. He says, you expect colleagues "to be intelligent, you expect them to be critical, you expect them to be open" and when "you see them not doing that, you have to wonder." He then asked a series of questions, "If you're an educated person or claim to be, why aren't you engaged in this? Or, why aren't you discussing this? Why aren't you tortured by this? Why aren't you seeing this at least as a dilemma?"

At the end of the interview he wanted to expound upon the holistic nature of being vegan and compared it to the distinction between shallow ecology and deep ecology:

There are shallow vegans or shallow vegetarians and deep vegetarians or deep vegans. I think maybe a deep vegetarian is a contradiction in terms.

If you're a vegan and only doing it for health reasons I would see that as shallow, but a deep vegan does it for all reasons because they are all relevant. My identity is a deep vegan identity... it's coming from Planet Vega.

He believes animal rights and animal liberation are world movements which are not driven only by white westerners anymore:

So I see this as a global awakening, a global revolution, as a new social movement, and I see it as the deepest, broadest movement that there is because it incorporates everything else....Because animal oppression is a part of the machines of human oppression and these things have to be analyzed together and taken apart together. We need a broad alliance politics today that is radical and revolutionary.

Being a deep vegan for Allen means "seeing the system of animal oppression that exists within the global system of capitalism" and therefore he has difficulty understanding "someone who's a vegan like Scully, or Republicans, or people who believe in this and the so called Democratic liberal system, pluralist system" because "a little bit more critical thinking and historical knowledge will show you that this whole system is unsustainable and highly exploitative."

After the interview I told him I had noticed he had been coughing throughout the interview, which I suspected was due to his working long hours to meet a deadline for an article; he emailed me the day before our interview at nine a.m. and asked me to call him later in the day as he was just going to sleep. I told Allen, "I've thought recently that



if I publish a book and it becomes successful, and I die young from cancer, people will say, 'See, he doesn't know what he's talking about.'" Allen said, "Yeah. You feel guilty because you're supposed to be healthy" and acknowledged the importance of holistic health and getting proper sleep. The last thing he said was, "Don't type all the coughs."

### **Jeff**

Jeff, 35, an athletic philosophy professor who lives in an area of the country "where everything is just drenched in flesh and animal byproducts", will be moving back to southern California ("Thank God!") where being vegan was "pretty seamless, pretty effortless." He finds being vegan to be a "rewarding and transformative experience" and an "affirmative practice" though he thinks "Most people who are non-vegan tend to think of it as a rather ascetic practice where you're denying yourself things."

In 1988, at the age of 16 he went vegetarian and two years later vegan. His transition began when his parents decided to go vegetarian for health reasons. He initially protested and his parents made concessions, cooking meat for him. His parents were reading *Diet for a New America* by Robbins for its health content, but when Jeff read it, he discovered how meat and dairy were mass produced, something he had no conception of prior to that time. He says, "I changed that day, as soon as I found out." He initially missed Mexican food with meat in it, though in general he was "never a huge meat fan." He missed dairy the first few months after eliminating it, but, as he says, "slowly but surely I became averse to that and now no longer desire any of it." His parents, brother, and wife are all strict vegetarians, each embracing it for ethical reasons.

Jeff, with a BA, MA, and Ph.D. in Philosophy from two state universities, thinks it a bit strange that his switch “wasn’t a matter of argumentation” given his profession. He stated,

It had zero to do with argumentation or zero to do with a sense of... extending my set of obligations that I felt I had towards human beings outward. It wasn’t that at all. I just immediately realized how horrific the process was and stopped as soon as I understood the gravity of it and what I was involved in. It was largely an emotive response.

The difficulties he encountered after changing his diet were not overly challenging for him. Learning more about nutrition was made easier because his mom is a nurse with a strong background in nutrition, and his dad cooked all the meals throughout his live-at home, bachelor’s degree years. However, when he went vegan he had to figure out what he would eat because his parents “have never been keen on being vegan” and his dad, though supportive of his ethical motives, found the practical implication of cooking an additional vegan meal “a pain in the ass.” Outside the home he was “teased considerably like most vegetarians” but he didn’t allow it to bother him much. The positive aspects, “better health, more affirmative relationship with animals, and enacting in practice the intellectual and ethical ideals [he] holds”, were far more powerful than the challenges. From his vantage point, it is unfortunate the students at his college don’t receive the same level of support he did from his family because there are many who are interested in being vegetarian, but they simply lack the essential support they need to achieve it.

In addition to having a supportive family, Jeff was fortunate to have supportive girlfriends: “Most of them, as soon as I explained the reasons why I did it were on board with it. I think every girl I dated during that time became vegetarian.” His wife of ten years, though not vegetarian when they met, became vegetarian soon after their relationship began.

As a former competitive cyclist and current triathlete he has found his sports friends to be open to it, possibly because in both of these sport there is, according to Jeff, a tradition of veganism since some of the best athletes in those fields, like Dave Scott, are vegan. Close, non-athlete friends didn’t give him “any stress at all” but acquaintances would give him a harder time and consider him “a little bit off” or an “oddball” due to his being vegan.

It is disconcerting to Jeff that his academic colleagues give him a harder time than anybody else. He says, “I get it from where most people would least expect it – I get most of the prejudice and stereotypes from academics.”

Every meal I have with them it’s an issue and they make jokes about it, and obviously I could psychoanalyze that – I think I know why they do that, but I would say that most of my colleagues that are acquaintances are really uncomfortable with it, and always bring it up and always make an issue of it, and I never bring it up. I would never say something at a meal and I never make an issue out of it, but it truly is an issue for them. So, dear friends and sporting colleagues have been very cool with it; acquaintances and colleagues have been very uncomfortable with it.

While Jeff doesn't encounter social problems caused his diet in his personal life, outside this group he notices "very subtle things that probably only a guy vegan would notice or pay attention to" such as the "assumption among certain guys that if you're vegan – I don't find this among women, but I do find it among more macho men – the assumption is, if you're vegan, you're gay or weak." In addition to the vegan jokes he gets "all the standard stereotypes that go along with being vegan" though at 6' 2" and 180 pounds he is "certainly not the image most people associate with a vegan" which he believes reduces the amount of flack he receives.

Jeff doesn't think his self-image changed much due to his dietary change.

I've always kind of been sensitive to animals and interested in animals and have had deep affections for them ever since I was a very, very small kid.... my self-image and my identity have always been wrapped up in relational structures with animals....becoming vegetarian and vegan was more a matter of, "Oh my gosh! I didn't know that was going on!"; putting two-and-two together. But that moment wasn't transformative in any self-image sense. It was more transformative in terms of practice.

The last few years at his present college and town have given him a greater appreciation of the effort it takes to be vegan and, he thinks, the scarcity of readily available vegan foods may contribute to the belief it is an ascetic practice. Though it is a "joyful practice", Jeff knows:

You have to really pay attention and really have to do your homework because the use of animals in food and other byproducts is just

everywhere. So, not only do you have to be very informed you have to not take the easy way out sometimes when food options aren't available.

Although he acknowledged the "considerable discipline" required, it matters how it is framed. A person may have two different experiences depending on their views. Jeff says, "it can be a very negative thing where you're denying yourself, or it's a discipline that even though you're 'denying yourself things' it doesn't feel like that, nor do you live like that."

When asked if there was something about his personality or how he approaches the world that influenced his becoming vegan he said that in philosophy "the tendency is to [try to] argue people over to vegetarianism or [to try to] argue people over to thinking about animals differently. I really don't think it can happen through argumentation."

From the beginning he was empathetic and predisposed to being vegan as it was a natural outgrowth of his personality. He had always been "extremely sensitive to animal suffering, especially for a guy"; he never fished or hunted even though his friends did. He has observed that:

Most people who are committed vegans and committed vegetarians that there's something to do with their ability to see outside of themselves; there's a certain kind of empathic quality - what sociologists and psychologists would call pro-social behavior. There's a kind of altruistic impulse that just has to be there, and I don't think there's any amount of argumentation that can lead you over in that direction.... but then again

I'm a philosopher, not a psychologist. I'm probably the wrong person to ask.

While there are "lots and lots of reasons" and numerous "ideological barriers" why more people don't consider vegetarian and vegan diets he doesn't "see eating meat or any of these things as a kind of moral prejudice like Singer and Regan do." Jeff referred to David Nibert's work and his sociological approach. His interpretation of Nibert's position is that there are ideological barriers that are placed in front of people which act to block empathy they would be more inclined to have if those barriers were not there.

There are all kinds of linguistic structures, social structures, political structures, cultural structures that would lead one away from that position. If some of those were lifted you'd see a lot more vegetarianism, but there's so much that's wrapped up in being a meat eater having to do with masculine identity, feminine identity, and social status. There are all these constraints that are placed on top of a person and to break through them requires quite a bit of energy and quite a bit of dedication.

Regardless of the approach one takes, a philosophical, feminist, or sociological approach, "each one of those only seems to undercut a certain aspect of what it would take to make you rethink the way you relate to animals or eating animals." He finds it "irreducibly complex and probably singular from person-to-person."

Jeff estimated that he knows about ten vegans and believes their experiences are probably similar to his, though this may be a product of where they met, since they

are activists and academics. Most are “pretty militant” which he explained to mean “deeply activist.” For he and the vegans he knows “it’s not just a side issue; it’s usually their central issue in life that they deal with politically and academically.” He doesn’t know many vegans who “just have that as a side issue.” He knows “tons of vegetarians who just kind of don’t eat meat” but to find “committed vegans who aren’t into animal rights activism or have something to do with animal rights” is rare.

Asked about his meat eating colleague’s, Jeff discussed at length the failings of philosophy to create “changes in practice” though he thinks it is important that animal rights is on the “philosophical map.” Many of his colleagues in philosophy have read Singer and Regan and “know the associated discourse” yet they too encounter “gigantic ideological barriers.”

The arguments that Singer and Regan make, for instance, should be, to any philosopher, overwhelming. Yet, I’ve never seen so much bad faith in the way their work is appropriated. So, the typical response in philosophy is that, if you don’t like what you read – you reject Singer because you’re not a utilitarian or you reject Regan because you’re not a right’s theorist or something like that – they usually find some philosophical technicality to get themselves off the hook and to have good consciences about what they’re doing.

He doesn’t “place a whole lot of stock in argumentation transforming people because the rationalizations” people can use lead to a “shifting of the terrain.” These arguments aren’t “bad, philosophically speaking”; it is possible to generate

“counterarguments for those positions” but he finds “philosophy usually becomes its own obstacle.” Philosophers “always have a way to get around those arguments and always have a way to circumvent them.” He knows “very few people who are professional philosophers who have read that material and allowed it to transform their lives” but of the colleagues he knows who read it seriously, it at least became a question for them.

At the end of the interview, Jeff added, “people are not opposed to vegetarianism or veganism altogether, even though there are ideological obstacles”; the problem lies in the fact that in many areas of the country vegan foods are not readily available. Though he does believe “It is a personal or moral decision to some extent, and you have to have your ethics transformed”, he would like to see “people who are vegans take this out of the moral realm” and instead would prefer a sociopolitical approach.

After the interview we spoke for another 25 minutes. He talked more about his upcoming return to California; he hadn’t realized “how deep it would run on a day-to-day basis in his present location.”

We talked about his belief, that a person will not go vegetarian or vegan due to argumentation; that it must be an emotional response. I told him that this struck a cord for me. My former girlfriend from Argentina once told me, “I understand what you’re saying, I just don’t feel it; I don’t feel like you do.” He knew exactly what I was talking about.



I talked a little about how she grew up seeing numerous street animals and how she viewed animals as being filthy as a result of her experience. I asked her, "If animals are these filthy beings, then why are you eating them?" Jeff, expanding upon the importance of one's culture on their inclination to become vegetarian, responded by saying:

You've got to face the fact that people grow up with radically different images of animals, different cultural circumstances, geographical circumstances and those arguments only have weight with a certain audience and a certain background and a certain set of assumptions; they're just pointless elsewhere. The arguments almost have to be contextual and the discussion has to be contextual every time.

We talked about teaching and how our student evaluations might be affected by incorporating concepts related to animals in our classes. Jeff said students are fairly open to discussing the ideas. He attributes his success, in part, to his approach, "Oddly enough, I set myself up as the buffoon." He tells them "Here's your cuckoo, leftist teacher who is a vegan." He also "de-centers" himself and will role play as Singer or Regan, but he says, "It's always difficult and there are always students for who it touches a nerve and there's always a handful of students who have a harsh reaction to it or are irritated by it." He has stopped showing videos because he would get such a diverse reaction, from emotional students to very passive ones who "just don't give a shit." He also quit playing videos for "selfish reasons" because he just couldn't watch them anymore; they upset him so much.

One of the last questions was, “What do you think about the idea that those who argue the most, or who are the most angry are the most likely to go vegetarian?” He said, “I’d like to believe that’s true, but I tend to believe it’s not. I think that’s more for the intellectually inclined crowd.”

### **Jon**

He is 37, but has the wiry look and aura of a skateboarder or surfer, activities he still passionately pursues. Sitting in his comfortable, book-laden office it was easy to imagine an old friend of his dropping by with a serious backpack on, days of facial growth, and a skateboard in hand and being greeted by Jon saying, “Dude! Can you believe it? I’m a philosophy professor!”

This thought occurred to me because he seemed so relaxed; he had slipped off his professional cloak and immersed himself in summer outdoor activities, which have become even more savory since his move to this cold, Northerly town a couple of years earlier. He told me later, over Chinese dinner at one of the six restaurants in town that have one vegetarian or vegan option, that it takes him a while to begin using academic vernacular once he emerges from the ocean, forest, or lake to begin lecturing in the fall semester.

Jon, who has earned a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in philosophy, went vegetarian 1991 at age 22 and turned vegan six years later after reading *Slaughterhouse* by Eisnitz (1997). He laughed when asked what his childhood diet was like: “If you had known me as a 13 year old, you would never in a million years have guessed that I would become a vegan!” His family “ate a ton of meat”; it “was about as meat-heavy as a diet could be”,

and he ate in similar fashion to his father's side of the family who were all big eaters and who loved meat dishes. Jon thinks he had his first salad around age 21.

His initial motivation to become vegetarian was not moral; rather it was based in health and weight issues, possibly a product of an adolescence filled with self-conscious thoughts about his weight. He was acutely aware of the paternal lineage from which he descended, comprised of "huge meat eaters who were obese from a very young age."

He enrolled in a physical education class in college, and despite his high level of physical activity – he worked at a skateboard park five days a week and skateboarded every day for several hours - he learned, to his disappointment, that his body fat was "average." He had thought the in-class health assessment would indicate he was in the "athlete of the year" category. Jon is not sure why, but he attributed his less than stellar ranking to all the meat he was eating.

During this time he was taking a philosophy class with a young, vegetarian professor. This woman, a role model he could identify with, caused Jon to believe he could become vegetarian too.

Jon began by phasing out red meat, but he essentially substituted Kentucky Fried Chicken for hamburgers. He has noticed that people either phase things out or they go cold turkey and he was a "phaser."

After the semester, he went home around Christmas and upon arriving asked what was being served for dinner. His mother informed him they were having a lean cut of steak. Upset, Jon expressed his beef with the beef, "What are you doing? You know I'm not eating red meat. Why aren't we eating chicken or fish?" His mother calmly

replied, “This cut of meat is far more healthy than all this other crap that you’re eating. The fact that its red meat isn’t the issue - it’s the fact that it’s way more healthy.” He realized she was correct. However, he “had a very strange experience eating that piece of steak.”

Unbeknownst to me, it had become very difficult for me to eat a piece of steak without thinking of it as the muscle of an animal... Not to take this in too theoretical a direction, but Carol Adams (1990) calls this phenomenon the *absent referent* and that was the kind of experience I had... animals had become very present for me in that meal. I started thinking, “My God! This is a cow, not a piece of steak! From that point on, I committed to phasing everything else out. So after that I started phasing out the chickens. I held on to seafood for the longest because of the social aspect.

He lived at the beach on the east coast, a place where seafood restaurants were “very much a part of the social fabric”, and all birthdays included frequenting one. Despite the social difficulties, he stopped eating fish.

He says he always recognized that “veganism is kind of a continuation of the same principles” and since he lived near Perdue’s main chicken processing facilities he was constantly reminded about the plight of chickens. He spoke of seeing chickens in transport trucks on his way to school or just about anywhere he went, “And it’s brutal to see these chickens. And you know that the chickens that are laying your eggs are basically in the same conditions in some battery house somewhere.”

While a graduate student he did not consume a lot of milk or eggs, but he still ate the typical college student staple, cheese pizza. Around this time he read an article in *The Vegetarian Times* that discussed the animal enzymes that can be found in cheese, such as rennet and pepsin, thus making those cheeses non-vegetarian.\* With the revelation that “cheese really isn’t vegetarian” he was nearing the tipping point.

The coup de grace that ended his consumption of animal products was the book *Slaughterhouse* (1997).

I remember the day - I bought *Slaughterhouse* at about 9:30 p.m. at a bookstore that was near my apartment and I didn’t go to bed that night. I started reading it and got completely engrossed.... I was up all night, I was exhausted and I was crying...

The next day he realized, “the idea that I would contribute in any way to that industry just made me sick.” And, he thinks if he were not vegan his meat eating would be an occupational hazard.

He knows “there are a lot of people who are not vegan or vegetarian who psychologically are perfectly healthy. They don’t feel guilt. They don’t feel bad about what they eat.” But he’s not one of them. Since he teaches courses in environmental philosophy, he and the students are constantly talking about animals and animal ethics. He said, “Psychologically it would be really difficult for me to be in those conversations and feel good about myself were I not a vegetarian.” He says he doesn’t lord it over his students or use himself as a role model, and he doesn’t say “I don’t have to worry about this because I’m an angel” but he thinks it would be “brutally difficult” to eat animal

products after these classes. He says his students experience this and tell him, “I walked out of class and I went straight to lunch and I couldn’t stop thinking about what I was eating.”

Vegan or vegetarian students are often referred to his office by previous students. Jon speculates that “students just like to know there’s somebody in the faculty who shares their interest.” He says that during these conversations they can typically finish each other’s sentences since the challenges and rewards are pretty similar. He thinks students have a more difficult road “because students are still at a stage in their lives where everything they do is so social” and “much of what they do is still tied to the family” whereas he lives by himself. He said, “I’m not anti-social - it’s just that I’m just not highly social.” Contributing to Jon’s social isolation is his preference for activities that happen to be available to individuals such as backpacking, kayaking, skateboarding, and surfing.

While laughing, he said, the fact he is vegan helps him to be a little less social since he isn’t invited over as much. Jon also avoids “certain social situations that others may not avoid” which creates a “mutually reinforcing pattern.” This relative lack of personal social interaction makes it a lot easier on Jon since he has more control over what food is made.

Although he enjoys individual pursuits, when asked to describe the difficulties he has encountered since adopting a vegan diet he only mentioned the social difficulties. He said he has “never had any health problems associated with being vegan” or experienced any kind of problem eating food. He exclaimed, “I still really love food!”

Even though my primary reasoning isn't health-oriented anymore, it's a great benefit of this diet. I feel like I'm healthy by accident. I love to make my own food. It keeps me away from fast foods – I'm not just a vegan, I consider myself an environmentalist more generally. I think that if I wasn't a vegan it would be much more tempting sometimes to eat at a fast food place which is pretty ecologically destructive.

He has created a theory that he believes explains his becoming vegetarian.

Philosophically, environmentalists tend to fall into two broad camps: there are those who are called the individualists who think that some non-human individual entities have intrinsic value or deserve respect. And so usually the animal rights/animal welfare people fall into that camp: so it's, "This is wrong because this is hurting this individual animal" or "it's disrespecting this individual animal" and then there's this other camp that's more holistic, so it's looking at ecosystems and collectives... of which we are all a part.

Although professionally he doesn't side strongly with either camp, personally he has been an individualist, engaging in solo sports, and listening 98% of the time to punk rock which celebrates individuality and decries conformity. He said, "You start to think, 'If I'm going to stand up as an individual, shouldn't I be standing up for other individuals?'" The human rights movement that says, "Individual rights shouldn't be trumped by some corporate interest... transferred quickly into animals. It was very easy to see individual animals as the victims of these faceless collectives."

He grew up as “something of a non-conformist”, an “outsider” who was “always a little bit on the fringe” and, he says, “When you are that kind of person, you get exposed to this sort of thing a little bit more readily.”

I didn’t hang out with the football team; I hung out with skateboarders who were nonconformists. When you are in circles like that – if you are doing something a little less mainstream – it’s not as big a deal. People don’t freak out as much when you are unusual.

He sees a connection between his nonconformance and the appeal of philosophy. He says, “Philosophy offered a chance to think for my self about things – feel like I wasn’t just accepting the truths that were handed down – challenge the views about the world.” But while learning about ethical arguments and great philosophers he was also learning to negotiate with his family.

Spending a lot of time at home as an undergraduate in college when he went vegetarian, his mother was “basically supportive” but Jon’s dad “completely didn’t understand it.” Jon said, “The gender divisions you get on these issues were pretty well reflected in my household.” His mom may have been more supportive partly because she worked her entire life as a dog trainer; she showed her support by her willingness to make vegetarian meals when he was home. About his dad’s reaction, he laughed, and lamented:

My dad was a lot less understanding and he passed away about five years ago, but literally to the last day, every time I would see him he would say, “Are you still a vegetarian?” even after me being vegetarian for ten years.



Meat eating was such a part of the tradition that we had and part of the way that he and I bonded and he saw food as a way to connect with his family and his children and when you took that element out it took something away from that relationship. So that was a bit more difficult.

His brother who “claims to have no gastronomical tolerance for vegetarian foods...is intellectually very tolerant” of Jon’s diet and his friends have been very supportive. His close friends are spread throughout the country and most eat a vegetarian diet having come to it with little or no influence from each other. Jon finds it interesting they all “all tracked in that direction” and this commonality has strengthened these friendships: “it really is a nice way to cement a bond that you already have.”

Romantic relationships are important to Jon, but he’s currently single and is not opposed to being alone. He places a high priority on his partner being vegetarian and has dated only vegetarian women, though he is aware this cuts out a large portion of the population. However, because he’s “not the kind of person who is desperate to be in that kind of relationship” he believes the impact of this choice is limited. When he enters into a relationship he finds their vegetarianism improves the relationship because it provides instant bonding, rapport, and comfort since they share similar values. He sums up the effect that veganism has on dating as, “You lose a little, and you gain a little.”

Jon went on to talk about the rounds of interviews he went on to land his present faculty position and the challenges that are unique to a vegan. During the interview process, he felt it important to not appear to be “high maintenance” and only

asked that a vegetarian restaurant be chosen. He did not want to place any additional demands on the people who were bringing him in, especially since he was trying to land a job, by asking that they find out whether eggs are in the noodles at an Italian restaurant, for example. He said whether the demands are “reasonable isn’t really the question, the question is whether or not you feel like people are going to perceive them as unreasonable.”

While on the topic of other’s perception, Jon stated vegans are seen as being “overly moralistic.” He can understand this since as a burger eater he had the same thought.

Actually, I was that way before I was a vegetarian. If I sat down to a meal with a vegetarian, I always assumed that they were judging me. So, if I said, “Do you want a bite of my hamburger?” and they said, “No, I’m a vegetarian.” I would go, “Oh my god! You must think I’m horrible!”

There’s this instant defensiveness. You instantly assume the vegetarian or vegan is judging you. They think that you’re constantly judging the world and everyone in it as some kind of bad person.

Despite some of the social challenges he finds the practical task of eating not only easy, but a pleasure. For Jon, avoiding animal products is a matter of developing eating and shopping habits and once this occurs the vegan is on “autopilot.” Jon estimated that 95% of the time being vegan does not require discipline, though travel or mandatory work-related social functions can present problems. He defined discipline as

“having the willpower to go to five different restaurants before you find something to eat.” Jon likened these habits to morality in general:

Making moral decisions should be second nature. It’s a matter of developing habits. As kids our parents teach us to share over-and-over-and-over again. You learn that if you’re sitting at a table and you have a big meal - you offer something to someone else. You do it enough and it becomes a habit. Being vegan should be easy and natural in that sense.

Jon believes there are a variety of reasons people don’t practice vegetarianism or veganism: it is not very “socially visible” or promoted well, it requires some initial discipline to develop the requisite habits, family and friends aren’t supportive, they lack the practical knowledge of what to eat, or they may “genuinely believe in the rightness of a non-vegetarian or non-vegan diet” and “when questions pop up whether eating meat is right or wrong” they are able convince themselves “there is nothing wrong with it or they have some kind of explanatory mechanism behind it.”

Sometimes the reasons are practical; it’s more pragmatic to eat meat. It’s easier. It’s like someone who’s trying to quit smoking. It’s like, “You know, I was at the convenience store and the cigarettes were there, so I bought them. Well, I was at Burger King and everybody was eating so I bought it.” Sometimes it’s the practical situation of the world which we live in. Sometimes it is more philosophical – people genuinely try it on intellectually and reject it for whatever reason.

About his meat eating colleague's he spoke of his astonishment at the disregard of the importance of this issue:

Sometimes I think, "How is it possible that any thinking person with any degree of knowledge – even the most superficial degree of knowledge – could not be deeply troubled by this issue and at least modify their eating habits accordingly."

He recognized that one need not adopt a vegan diet to make a difference:

In this particular part of the country a lot of people hunt and more and more you have available organically raised livestock and things like that.

And so I would think that at a minimum people who are environmentally conscious, environmentally aware, would absolutely steer away from grocery store meat and eggs.

I questioned whether he thought any differently of philosophy professors, and he began by speaking of the disappointment he experienced in graduate school upon learning that his expectation of finding "all these people who were committed to certain kinds of lifestyles and issues and who really cared about things in a different way" was a fantasy.

I found that that's not necessarily true of academics of any sort, philosophers included. Often times they have not thought about these issues carefully, just as I haven't thought about certain issues in other areas of philosophy.

He went on to explain why philosophy professors may not possess greater familiarity with the ethics of animal consumption than the average person:

So someone could come to me and say, "What's your position on X?" and I could say, "I don't even know what that word means" and it's a philosophical term. The field is specialized enough that there are plenty of Ph.D.'s who have never really encountered animal rights literature or animal welfare texts or anything like that. Although professors have a greater set of intellectual skills, they're a more refined set of skills; they are not necessarily any more knowledgeable on the subject than anyone else.

Jon agreed that environmental philosophy professors would have been exposed to these ideas, but "even then it's certainly not universally true that they are vegetarians or vegans."

Sometimes it is intellectual. People have arguments defending certain uses of animals for food or dairy, for whatever, and they've thought long and hard about it and come to some fairly well-developed conclusion. Sometimes they don't have the discipline or they're lazy or they just don't put it together. It is the case that often times you will meet people who will say, "I wish I was a vegetarian." It seems to me if you have the wish, the application is so easy, now anyway, there's just no excuse if you have the inclination.

He has greater respect for those who have thought carefully about it and rejected it than those who want to but don't.

Those who say, "I would, but...." - that to me is even more astounding.

The people who reject it outright – I think, "Well maybe you have intellectual reasons for that that you feel comfortable with." But others seem to concede the argument and just say, "Well, what am I going to do?" and throw up their hands. I have less tolerance, intellectually, for that.

Jon's narrative concludes with his response to the initial question – "What's it like being vegan?" Jon replied with no need for contemplation, "The first thing that comes to my mind – the social difficulty of veganism and the personal ease of veganism." As I complete this last sentence, I smile knowing Jon is in the midst of his long awaited trip into the wilderness.

\*Note: In an article titled, *What's in Your Cheese?*, Keevican (2003) wrote:

According to the McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, rennin, which is an enzyme used in coagulating cheese, is obtained from milk-fed calves. "After butchering, the fourth stomach...is removed and freed of its food content." After this the stomach goes through several steps including being dry-salted, washed, scraped to remove surface fat, stretched onto racks where moisture is removed, then finally ground and mixed with a salt solution until the rennin is extracted.

## **Animal Activists**

### ***Luke***

Luke, a 40 year old activist, author, and publisher went vegetarian in 1986, 21 years ago, at the age of 19. By 1988 he had become vegan. Luke is fit, but his most striking physical quality is the intensity of his eyes and the determination they convey; his Myspace page includes this excerpt: "I work seven days a week on efforts related to animal protection and promoting vegetarianism." A gifted writer with a master's degree in English he believes being vegan is "far easier than most people would expect."

Of his childhood diet he said, "We ate the standard American diet with my mother making a valiant effort to encourage whole wheat breads and to put spinach into her meatballs; apart from that our diet was as meat-heavy as any other Americans at the time." Except for hamburgers and deep-fried seafood he did not really enjoy meat. Today, his "appreciation for food and the variety of foods is vastly greater than" he experienced as a meat eater. Luke said, "I get enormous pleasure from eating a diverse, healthy, and cruelty-free diet."

I asked if he thought it took discipline to maintain his diet. Despite being surprised this question was coming from a committed vegan, he answered, "Not if you care about animals. Not if you keep in mind what happens to farmed animals and what their ultimate fate is. With that kept squarely in mind, the thought of cheating never occurs to me."

After the interview, I commented that I thought the interview would last longer; it was only about 18 minutes. He said, "This was me playing the tapes for you. It should

be the case for any long-time activist. You should have your arguments down. Each of us really has to have our rhetoric down; have a command about how to talk about veganism.”

His remarks confirmed for me what I was feeling during the interview. After asking about 3 questions it was apparent that what he was providing were essentially pre-recorded answers. However, as we continued some questions caused him to struggle more than others (i.e. “Did you enjoy the taste of meat?”). He was also a bit surprised that of all the individuals he knows who work on behalf of animals not all practice a vegan diet. It seemed each answer given was constructed to best represent veganism. During our post-interview conversation, what he said seemed to validate my suspicion: “One of the reasons the movement has not spread faster than it has is that most vegans do not know how to talk the talk; they’re not good at talking about why they are vegan or why you should be.”

Before continuing with the narrative, it is important to address the issue of validity when “rhetoric” is provided as answers, at least for some questions. In this case, it is important to understand the man to be able to understand how to interpret his answers.

I have talked with at least 50 vegans in great depth about issues relevant to the diet and at least another 50 to a lesser degree. The majority seem to have a rather impressive understanding of the issues. However, Luke probably has the greatest combination of breadth and depth of any of those individuals, some of whom are the heaviest hitters in the animal rights movement. Luke can talk for hours and produce



intricate details related to seemingly all issues vegan, including recent legislation related to factory farming, industry methods, and dietary issues. His off-air remark about “playing the tapes” might seem to indicate an emotional disconnect, but this person is so passionate about saving animals it is what drives him to work nearly non-stop. Additionally, his “rhetoric” is the culmination of years of thoughtful contemplation and represents his beliefs about what is best for the animals.

As a freshman in college, he found himself in a room full of guys who were watching *Faces of death volume I* (Schwartz, 1981) which included slaughterhouse footage. He was horrified and within the year had changed to a vegetarian diet. Within a year or so of that experience, he “discovered the cruelties, injustices, and brutalities that existed in the dairy and egg industry were equal if not greater than what was going on in the meat industry and therefore felt obliged to begin purging dairy and eggs from [his] diet as well.”

His motivation for becoming vegetarian and vegan was the same: “In both cases, I saw that these things were products of killing and therefore I felt obligated to get rid of them.” He did not seem to want to elaborate on the difficulties he has encountered, something which I have noticed most vegans want to do. Instead, he acknowledged the reality, and moved quickly to the positive changes that have occurred.

Anybody who goes on the road, and I travel extensively, will occasionally end up in a nightmare situation, but today it is infinitely easier than it once was and the nightmares are diminished and fewer and further between. You can go to Kimball, Nebraska now – the tiny town of

Kimball, Nebraska – and see soy milk on the shelf of the town’s solitary grocery store shelf. Something like this would have been inconceivable twenty years ago.

His health has improved as well as his relationship with food and he takes satisfaction in knowing that he eats “the gentlest and most ethical diet I know how to eat.” In the beginning though there were some family challenges.

Luke’s change was met with disapproval and discouragement by his mother who would have rather he “ran off and joined the circus.” However, once she saw that the diet was “ethically and nutritionally... on solid ground...her position changed.” Today when they have family get-togethers there is a vegan meal served and meat and dairy products are absent.

Luke indicated that dating wasn’t a problem: “Being vegan hasn’t hurt my dating prospects, but that may be because I’m a guy and I bet that 70 percent of vegans are women.” But when asked about prejudicial treatment he responded with the following:

You get a bit of ridicule from it at times and the worst thing I’ve experienced is living in a cooperative household and being known as “the vegan.” Which frankly, sort of strikes me as being known as “the Jew”, as somebody who was raised Jewish, there is just something off-putting about hanging a label like that on a person because it marginalizes and trivializes what they’re all about....You’re expected to be a PETA supporter or you’re expected to be socially inept.... Long-term meat eaters have a real incentive to view vegans as being freaks because as

long as vegans are this freaky subset you don't have to take it seriously and you don't have to examine your own food choices.

He believes that he had been sensitized to the suffering of others due to his own experiences and this may have prepared him to become open to becoming vegan:

Even though I'm of average height today, I didn't grow until I was 17 or 18 and I was bullied quiet a bit in high school, and I think that made me more compassionate when I encountered other victims, whether they were humans or animals.

His answer to what explains why many who are exposed to vegetarian or vegan diets do not adopt them was succinct, yet powerful:

Principally one of two things: either a lack of compassion – not to call non-vegans sociopaths, but some people just don't care as much about exploitation and victimhood as other people do – and the other component is that some people really, really, really love meat or have such a tiny appreciation for the variety of vegan foods out there that the thought of moving to an exclusively vegan diet sounds as though it would be torture to them.

Luke knows 100 or more people on some personal level who are vegan, but he doesn't think comparing other vegans' experiences to his own is fruitful.

Going vegan is not like chopping off your hand. It's not that big of a deal, and I think that the commonality of experience of amputee victims would be a lot greater and lot more significant and a lot more interesting than

the commonality of experience of vegans. Even though it's a very important lifestyle change it's really not that jarring or noticeable to the point that I think we have some sort of unique commonality.

When asked what he thought about animal activists who eat meat he quickly responded, "I don't really think that anymore that there's any such thing as an animal activist who's not.... [Surprised] Well, that's not true! That's not true." He went on to say that his father, despite providing foster care for kittens, is not vegetarian and then he mentioned the "animal rights, animal welfare divide" before asking the question again and answering it: "I view them far more favorably than those who don't do anything on behalf of animals who still eat meat. Any step in the right direction, any step towards making the world a little more gentle, is something I'm always going to applaud."

Despite knowing a lot about nutrition related to vegan diets he declined to provide a detailed answer to why someone might not thrive on a vegan diet saying he did not have the nutritional credentials, and he thinks, "Very few people within the movement have the nutritional credentials to answer a question like that." At the conclusion of our interview he added that he believes "The most important thing is the animals need activists 100 times more than they need vegans." To clarify, he said:

Don't get me wrong – the animals really need everyone to go vegan, but if I can talk you, as a vegan, into pursuing some activism where you have not before that – if I can get you to make a commitment to pass out 10,000 flyers at your local colleges for Vegan Outreach I would feel 100 times more excited about that than if I gave a talk and some meat eater

came up and said based on what I just said he's going vegan on the spot.

If there was one thing I could change about the animal protection movement it's that we have a completely inadequate appreciation for the importance of personal activism.

After our interview was over we came back to his central point – that vegans can have far more impact being activists than by simply being vegan. He said,

An hour spent leafleting will do more good for animals than your entire lifetime of being a vegan. Think about that. If you pass out 500 pieces of literature in a couple of hours, which is quite attainable, there's no doubt that a few people will attempt to become vegan or at least make some substantial changes and those changes will, collectively, be greater than everything you're going to do with your personal diet over the rest of your life. It's really important to get out there.

He also estimated that only about 2% of vegans are engaged in activism in any serious way and if this number changed significantly "things would change so quickly." His call to action made me question whether I am doing enough by talking to college classes and writing on issues that may help animals. As we neared the end of our talk we discussed Pollan's (2006) book, *The Omnivores Dilemma*, and how it has sold millions to mainstream American, yet activist books, his included, don't sell as well. "Frankly, caring about animals precludes people from writing a best selling book on the subject." He referred to Pollan (2006), Spurlock (2004, *Supersize Me*), and Schlosser (2001, *Fast Food Nation*) and said, "The public is more like them than like us."

### ***Post-Interview Note***

Luke emailed with some minor editing issues and to clarify his comment about “playing tapes:”

A note about playing the tapes: this can be taken perhaps as phoning it in, and not engaging with your listener. But for common questions, it's important to have a set of tapes with the best possible answers already recorded. I'm always trying to improve my tapes, but if your tapes currently have the best response you can come up with, it would be irresponsible to say anything else.

### ***Sam***

Sam, 27, the only part-time activist of the three activists interviewed, is a graphics designer and talented film maker. He has filmed and edited several documentaries exposing farm animal abuse. He is a soft spoken person who still draws listener's attention because of the substance of what he has to say. After nearly 4 years of veganism it has become “second nature” to him and not something he thinks about all the time. However, it is a “central part” of his identity. He says about being vegan, “It's something I enjoy talking about to people who are vegan, vegetarian, or omnivore. It's something I'm not shy about and I definitely enjoy veganism as part of my life.”

His mom, despite her efforts, wasn't a great cook. Sam recalls having a “few meals that we just cycled through; pork chops, spaghetti and meat balls, just the usual staples.” He admits, “I guess I didn't really enjoy food when I was growing up....I remember trying to force down things like pork chops or spaghetti with the bland

tomato sauce and things like that and I would try to load it up with things like butter and cheese to make it more appealing to me. So, I wasn't really happy with the food I ate at home." He "didn't really enjoy the taste of foods that contained meat" but he also "didn't enjoy the taste of the vegetables either." Sam had to "doctor up just about everything but chicken."

His conversion to veganism was abrupt. Vegan friends, a couple, from Seattle were visiting and Sam wanted to fix dinner for them at his apartment.

So, I invited them over and I looked up what veganism was and I prepared a three-course dinner for them, and it was very enjoyable to me; I got to try out a whole slew of new foods. After dinner we were talking and I told them how much fun it was, and they said, "Well, why don't you just try going vegan if you've had so much fun preparing and eating the food?" And that's what I did. That was the process right there.

Sam went on to explain that he hadn't really ever considered being vegan before, but he soon noticed improved health.

After a couple of months of being vegan I started to feel better, I started to lose some weight I wanted to lose, but I wasn't even trying, especially around the stomach, and I started to learn about the environmental and the animal impacts behind veganism and that's what really cemented veganism for me. It was a fun experiment that opened up this new level of consciousness.

The educational process involved self-directed study despite materials not being readily available. He went to the library, but didn't find a lot. It was the Internet that connected him to websites and discussion forums; "Talking to people on the Internet really opened up those doors." Sam also rather quickly developed a new circle of vegan friends, and their support and encouragement was crucial in sustaining his commitment.

When asked if he had experienced any difficulties since adopting a vegan diet he first commented that he no problems finding food, but some social situations came to mind. He took responsibility for some of the problems: "...at first I wasn't sure how to manage explaining to family members ahead of time about my needs and I didn't come prepared." Initially he was a bit emotional that they weren't recognizing his diet and immediately accepting of it. However, after a period of adjustment he found it became lot easier, and his family now understands his motivations and his diet better.

He recalled one extreme situation that occurred at a bar after one month as a practicing vegan. At the time he was concerned about animal products in beer and the bartender overhead him talking about it. The bartender seemed angry and defensive, calling Sam a hypocrite for wearing leather. Sam wasn't prepared to defend arguments the bartender brought up such as animals who are killed when fields are tilled for crops that vegans eat. Characteristic of his affable nature, Sam says, "I feel much more prepared... I can thank him for making me more interested in these issues. I don't know why, but I haven't gotten the same reaction from anyone. And maybe that's just because I'm good now at smoothing out the situation, calming people down."



The educational process has helped him to manage his weight better and at the same time it raised his level of consciousness. Although he had been concerned about the environment and animals before going vegan he suddenly realized “the part that we as individuals play within that entire system, and I really felt much more empowered to change these systems because of this new level of understanding.”

I think it allowed me to step back and divorce myself from complicity in harming animals so that I was able to look at it more objectively and say, “Wow! This is really a problem! This isn’t something that I can just push out of my mind and say there’s nothing I can do about it.” I feel like a more complete person now because of all that I’ve learned, and all that I’ve accepted, and all that I do as an activist.

Sam’s parents accepted his dietary choice, however they weren’t very accommodating. His sister had the hardest time with his change, considered it a lifestyle choice, and fought it. He believes his openness about the reasons for his vegan beliefs caused his family to become defensive.

My grandfather in particular enjoyed having debates with me at the dinner table and even at a fancy restaurant he would bring up, “Hey this steak I’m eating – you have a problem with that?” He would joke and laugh, but other family members would become uncomfortable with that situation and they would blame me for it in the end for creating the situation where that happened.

I remember one night in particular. My sister was in tears because, “It’s always about Sam and his diet”, and “Why does he get such a rise out of people?” But in the end – it took them about a couple of years, but now a lot of my family have become vegetarians or vegan just because eventually they came around and were able to accept the issues. My sister is vegan now after finally taking the time to look into what’s going on.

While Sam has maintained his pre-vegan friends he has a new set of friends because he enjoys being with those with similar values. His old friends have become more “conscious of what’s going on” and “buy cage-free eggs or organic meat and things like that.” One friend has become vegetarian and one nearly vegan, and some have just thought about it, but none have been judgmental, angry, or defensive.

He believes being single at the time of his transition probably made it an easier because he didn’t have to consider what his partner was doing at the time. Since becoming vegan he has only had vegan significant others, by design. He spoke about dating again after his breakup with a vegan animal activist:

Recently, I’ve been single and dating again and I have gone out on dates with omnivores and it’s been very challenging for me to accept what they’re eating in front of me sometimes, and I’m certainly unwilling to pay for their dinner which leads to problems.

Though he’s open to dating someone who’s not vegan he doesn’t think it is going to happen because as he says, “there’s just a certain trouble that I have watching

someone chow down on an animal and then being interested in kissing them.” He believes the dating pool of vegans is large enough, and the ratio of male to female vegans is in his favor, so he isn’t awfully concerned.

Sam did not believe he had experienced being stigmatized though he wasn’t sure if that is because he does not place himself in situations that might elicit that response. He works at a tolerant place and has tolerant friends. He acknowledged awkward situations arise such as company gatherings where the company didn’t plan for him, but in these situations he tells them, “Well, don’t worry about it – I didn’t tell you. If it was really important to me I would have told you ahead of time.”

A variety of changes occurred after altering his diet that improved his self-esteem.

I had some gastrointestinal issues and things like that cleared up when I went vegan. I think of myself as a healthier person; I was a little concerned. I felt like I was falling apart at 23, 24 when I first went vegan and now I definitely feel more together, more fit, more active and I think that has really affected my self-image positively. I feel more sexually attractive and I feel like more of a complete person now.

The benefits he derives from the change in his diet come with little cost since he hasn’t found it difficult to maintain a vegan diet because he’s had fun with it from the start. Sam tends to shop at vegan friendly places and only wishes vegan foods were more accessible, but he thinks it’s getting easier every year.

Sam thinks the timing of his friend's visit from Seattle was serendipitous – it was after college, after he had gotten out of a very serious relationship, and he was “living alone and open to trying out new ideas and new directions.” He doesn't think he could have gone vegan in college and would not have if he had established a family with children. He was “just lucky” to have that exposure at that point in his life. Others may just not be as lucky.

That “vegan diets are still outside of the mainstream” is a reason why some don't consider becoming vegan. Sam said, “Vegetarian diets and vegan diets don't have the best public image right now, and I think people hear about it and they think, ‘That's a certain kind of person who eats that kind of diet, and I'm not that kind of person.’” They might also think, “I'm a good person, so my diet must be good.” Combined with “tradition and the cultural values we have as Americans with fast food, easy living, and convenience... they create a block that a lot of people have.” He believes it requires repeated exposure, a certain level of openness, and being at the right point in their lives for change to happen. Apparently, this has occurred for the activists he knows.

Sam could not think of any animal activists within his “circle of colleagues” who were not vegan and found them to have “universal knowledge of how serious an issue factory farms are.” Surprised by the realization that his activist friends were all vegan, he said, “I guess I should be very proud I don't know any animal rights activists who aren't vegan. It's easy enough that if people care about it to the level where they're willing to be activists then they can also easily change their diet.”

Having spoken with Sam prior to the interview about the concept of being a “freegan” I thought I would ask him about it since it’s fairly unique. Sam said:

Freeganism is the concept that if you find something that is dumpstered or something that’s been thrown away, but that’s still edible – even if it’s not vegan – you’re not really harming anything. When you’re eating it you’re not harming the environment or animals or anything. You are perhaps harming yourself, if what you’re eating is unhealthy, but it’s an interesting argument that it should be acceptable. I have eaten a few things here and there that were dumpstered from friends who are vegan who said, “Why don’t you just try this out?” I tried it.... I would probably never eat a dumpstered piece of cheese or anything because that disgusts me, but if it was like a pastry or something like that I would.

Sam concluded the interview by reiterating how much he enjoys being vegan and how important the cause is. He said he “looks forward to the day when veganism is common enough – where it has reached a critical mass – where it’s an easy enough diet for everyone – where it’s less of a fringe concept and I definitely think we’re headed in that direction. I’ve got high hopes.”

### *Jill*

I met Jill and two of her vegan friends at a Mexican restaurant for dinner, and following our meal we headed to a nearby friend’s home for the interview, she on her bike and me in my car. As I passed her I couldn’t help but smile seeing the enthusiasm, fun, and joy that was emanating from her with each standing, leaning over the

handlebars, cycle she made. It was easy to imagine her cheerfully handing out animal advocacy pamphlets to college students.

Jill, though 22 years old and possessor of a B.S. in Business Management, could still pass for a high school student, which has allowed her, on occasion, to blend into the mass of students in bus loops, leafleting at high schools in the Northeast. In her position as Outreach Coordinator she travels a lot, soliciting the help of committed volunteer animal activists in whichever city or town she is headed to, in an organizational and grassroots attempt to expose mostly college students to the cruelties of factory farming. Her work is the culmination of a path that began as her parents' "little revolutionary daughter" who decided to go vegetarian for the animals at nine years old.

Her journey into animal activism began in earnest in a gymnasium at age seventeen. She happened to notice a (non-vegetarian) friend reading Singer's (1975) *Animal Liberation* in gym class. She borrowed the book and read it twice: "The first time I read it I was really sad; I cried for a week straight. Then I immediately picked it up and read it again and was just angry with what I'd read. I decided then that I was going to go vegan and began considering myself an animal rights activist." Singer's book was "definitely a kick in the pants to become an activist – to take it beyond vegetarianism and simple personal food choices and make it a passion."

What was the ingredient that enabled her to make the decision to become vegetarian and vegan at such a young age? Jill attributes it to several factors. She has "always had a soft spot for other humans' and non-humans' suffering." She also recalls regular visits to farms prior to her decision to become vegetarian. She says, "At one

point I think there was a strange discomfort with going to see these animals one day and then eating them the next; having pets in the house and eating different animals. It just didn't sit well with me." Her mother's influence was also important: "My mom was always very compassionate towards domesticated animals so I learned that caring from her... and then I just took it to the next level." While Jill credits her disposition towards animals for her change she also believes, "Regardless of personality, I think it's a decision most people would come to logically, given the facts." Expanding on her belief, she said, "Veganism is such a logical choice that even people who don't have a tendency towards compassion and who don't feel like they're an 'animal lover,' it's hard for them to ignore the egregious cruelties and intense abuse that goes on in factory farms."

Jill believes it requires some discipline to maintain a vegan diet, but she thinks the focus should be on veganism as "a means to end suffering" and not "about a list of ingredients to avoid." She says, "There's a fine line between discipline and dogma" and it is better to focus on the best approaches to reducing suffering, not whether the sugar in a drink was filtered with bone char or whether there might be a touch of honey in some food item. She says discipline can be tough, especially with the barrage of advertisements for meat, eggs, and dairy that "companies are shoving down our throats, literally." For her, however, the difficulty is lessened by the thought of the animals: "I always think about the suffering that's involved, and it's really hard for me to ignore that just because I like the taste of something."

Her family, however, hasn't fully embraced her ideas. Meat was "definitely a central component" of meals throughout her childhood. She thinks that because of her

“strong Italian background” her “decision to go vegetarian was really difficult” for her family. At nine she stopped eating meat and began learning to make her own food. At first her parents thought it was “a crazy, kid phase” and so they “indulged” her, but as the years passed and her enthusiasm never waned, they realized she was committed.

Her dad was “always very antagonistic” and claimed that he was entitled to eat animals since he grew up on a farm and had “cared for those animals all his life.”

Disappointment in her voice, Jill said:

He just didn’t make the connection between them being living, breathing, and feeling beings – which is very strange to consider, because having worked with them and grown up with them, you would have thought there’d be more of a tendency to be compassionate for those animals, but I guess not.

While her relationship with her father suffered as a result of her dietary and activist choices, her relationship with her mother and sister improved. The three would make dinner together, her veganism becoming a “family affair.” However, without Jill’s influence and cooking they slide back into eating meat: “It’s a point of contention because they’re not vegetarian yet, despite my best efforts, but otherwise it’s been a nice component of our relationship.”

When asked if she had experienced any difficulties after switching to a vegan diet, the first thing Jill mentioned was:

Well, I was definitely an outcast. I didn’t know any other vegans at the time personally and it was tough to eat a nutritionally sound diet while



not earning my own income or making my own food and still being on a school lunch plan. I think I ate tortilla chips for about a year. That was my main sustenance [laughing].

Her transition to veganism was difficult because her former vegetarian diet was “very heavy in eggs and dairy”; she mostly ate cheese sandwiches, cereal and milk, pizza, and peanut butter sandwiches. Although it was a “very child-friendly vegetarian diet” it did not “translate well into a vegan diet.” During a still continuing learning curve she has developed an appreciation for tofu, tempeh, soymilk, or faux-dairy products, vegetables, and foods from other cultures.

When she arrived to college just a year later she was able to purchase her own foods and make her own food choices, which made the practical, need-to-eat aspect of being vegan much easier. She did have to contend with numerous questions about her diet, which annoyed her and caused her to want to say, “Just leave me alone and let me do what I’m doing!” However, she has always been “too polite” to say that. Today, she views questions as providing her with a “platform” to educate.

When asked what benefits she derives from being vegan she will tell them “it’s really exciting” and involves a “higher consciousness”; she feels good about herself for being vegan. She has also “explored a lot of new foods and learned a lot about agriculture and consumerism and consumption,” and her health has improved. Aside from her “tortilla chip year” she found being vegan led to improved athletic performance, something she values as a former high school and college athlete. Additionally, she says, “My family all have a tendency to be overweight and eating

vegan has helped keep me on the lesser end of that scale.” In addition to the physical benefits, there have been intellectual gains as well.

Animal rights and vegetarianism was the first academic issue that I really found myself passionate about. I kind of coasted through school, even in college. I found myself in my spare time devouring articles and essays on animal rights as opposed to the business materials I was supposed to be studying.... I think my veganism spurred a love for learning that was lacking before.

She also feels she has been fortunate in that her family, friends, and significant other have all been largely supportive, and her current friends, numbering over 100, are almost all vegan. For Jill, the social costs have been relatively minimal, even as a child.

Jill was “too young to understand the consequences encompassed by the choice to become vegetarian”; she simply remembers always being known as “the vegetarian friend” who would “wear shirts with animals on them all the time.” Even when she went vegan, she wasn’t teased. She recalls the experience was different for males at her high school:

I knew a lot of kids who struggled with it. Vegetarian male friends of mine got tormented at lunch – people would throw meat at them. Of course eating vegetarian is emasculating in the eyes of a lot of high school boys so it’s kind of hard for them.

Today, she lives in a “vegan bubble” because of her work and friendship network. She says, “I was laughing the other day because in my cell phone, my contact

list is probably 99% vegan... I have some of the best friends in the world because of veganism.” She has 300 contacts in her address book, and about 98% of them are vegan. She considers herself to have about 100 vegan friends. Both during college and more recently, when she moved to a large city and into a vegetarian house with seven vegetarians, she has been able to quickly find vegan communities. She says of her social world made up of vegans, “I’m the exception, not the rule” – most vegans do not have such an extensive social group.

She dated an herbivore from ages 16 to 21. They went vegan independent of each other, but their veganism “became a unifying element.” They lived together for several years, maintained a vegan house, and volunteered and worked for animal rights organizations. Jill says it was “the glue that kept us together.” She appreciated dating a vegan guy because, in terms of compassion, they were “on the same wavelength.”

Jill has been dating a vegan and volunteer leafleter for the same organization for the past few months. She likes that they work together on a variety of issues aside from veganism, such as environmental activism, the Ron Paul presidential campaign, alternative health and nutrition, the 9/11 Truth Committee, and other political and cultural causes. She says, “It brings me a much needed break from the vegan-centric world in which I otherwise live.”

Despite Jill’s immersion into the vegan world she is still able to proffer well-grounded reasons for why the majority do not embrace plant-based diets. Jill listed the commonly cited reasons: society, habit, tradition, and peer-pressure. Then she quite candidly, and surprisingly, given her fairly easy run with veganism, added:

Nobody wants to give up all their favorite foods and isolate themselves from their friends and family willingly. Nobody sits down and says that's what they want for themselves. So, you really have to be convinced of the arguments, you have to know the facts, you have to have seen it.

Additional reasons why people don't consider vegetarianism is that animals for food aren't considered animals anymore. She says, "The animals you get in the store, they're cut up, they're neatly packaged – the connection is never made between the cow and the hamburger. They even have different names." Jill knows that this disconnect affects animal shelter workers too.

She says few animal shelter workers consider vegetarianism. Jill has participated in demonstrations at Humane Society dinners and banquets where meat was served. She says that it is still common for Humane Society functions to include meat on the menu.

In general, people who are working on behalf of animals and animal rights are well-versed in vegetarianism and veganism and many of them are vegan, but as far as the shelter environment goes, there's still that disconnect that exists in the world between your dogs and cats at home and the cows and pigs on the farm, despite the fact that they are very similar animals. I think it's a matter of getting knowledge out there.

In general, she believes "people have to come to it on their own time. It has to be a decision they've made that's sustainable for them." For the college population, there are special considerations.

She says, “College students are overwhelmingly receptive compared to leafleting the average crowd” because they “are at a point in their lives where they’re spreading their wings, they’re out from under their parents” and are “more receptive to different sides of the story that maybe they’ve never been exposed to before.”

I’d say on a given day at a big college campus, I’ll encounter a handful of antagonistic students just trying to get a rise out of the “crazy vegetarian,” but I’ll also probably have two or three people tell me they were really moved by the information and thank me for being there, and two or three other people who say, “I took your brochure and now I’m vegetarian because of it.”

She talked about literature the average person comes in contact with: There’s a lot of information about the animal abuse that’s involved, but there’s very little sound advice about vegetarian nutrition..... Many people get [her organization’s pamphlet] at their colleges or see a PETA demonstration on the side of the road, but rarely do they get a comprehensive pamphlet on vegetarian nutrition. The focus is typically on the animal abuse, and so people are shocked or horrified into going vegetarian – and then they just don’t have anything to stand on.

She expounded upon her point by saying many college students have told her that there are not enough vegetarian or vegan options on campus “and nobody wants to eat grilled cheese every single day or the vegan pasta option every day.” Jill said, “We need to get more corporations and entities on board with vegetarianism so that it

becomes more accessible and people know how to eat a nutritionally balanced diet without having to do scores of research.”

Despite the challenges she said:

I do think there’s an upswing in vegetarianism. We’re seeing a lot of the younger generation embracing it. The word vegan isn’t a mystery anymore; you see it all the time in print and media. The word is getting out there. We’re seeing a greater wave of new vegetarians than there ever has been before.... If you’re vegan you should be commended. I think it’s a great choice.

### **Former Farmers**

#### ***William***

William, 51, is a soft-spoken, gentle man who says, “I’ve lived a violent life on many different levels. I came from a darker place than many people do.” However, today he works on a farm sanctuary tending to rescued and “downed” animals who will live out their lives being cared for in a setting that is palpably peaceful for both the animals and the visitors who come to see them. His transformation from cattle rancher, dairyman, slaughterhouse employee, and hunter to sustainable farmer and animal advocate is as remarkable as the fact that he is alive and well; his childhood diet claimed the lives of his mother and father years ago. His younger brother bought the family cattle farm and battles high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type II diabetes with medication.

In 1989, at the age of 33, he turned to a vegetarian diet to save his life from the ravages of heart disease after it became apparent he was already far down the same road his parents took. He says that although being vegan is probably the best experience he's had in his life because of how it has allowed him to grow and transform his physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being, he understands that those who haven't taken this "experiential journey" will likely not understand. He says to explain to people what it is like to be vegan is "almost pointless because unless they've had direct experience being vegan they don't know how it can transform them."

To attempt to understand where he is at the half century mark, it is important to explore his beginnings. William grew up on a cattle farm that always had a freezer full of meat. Meat was eaten at every meal. Despite a very different and informed view of nutrition today, when describing his childhood diet he momentarily, and unconsciously, reverted back to his prior views: "We probably ate better than the average family because we had this free beef in the freezer all the time." The family ate copious amounts of meat and dairy but, due to his mother's insistence, they also ate three different colored vegetables through the course of a day. He enjoyed beef, but because he had so much, it was the staple food in his family's diet, he hasn't missed it. However, because seafood was rarely served he considered it a treat. He still enjoys seafood flavor, but has learned that seafood gets its flavor from its environment, and so he has learned how to prepare dishes with all the different sea vegetables and can now make anything taste like fish or seafood.

But before he knew sea vegetables existed, he was a farm boy who had an affinity for calves.

In the spring, when I was young, I would jump off the school bus in the afternoons and run out to the fields to see if any new calves were born. Sometimes in the early spring it would snow and if calves were dropped in the snow they could develop pneumonia. In the case of calves that were down and cold I would pick them up and carry them up to the barn, mothers in tow. I would put them in a stall with a heat lamp and a blanket and keep them warm and encourage them to nurse on their moms. Sometimes I would fall asleep lying next to them. Occasionally a calf would succumb to pneumonia and die. It would always affect me.

Witnessing the loss of this “precious little life” and their mothers mourning, along with the “emotional honesty” he practices today, causes him to become emotional when viewing video of veal calves who are a product of the dairy industry. However, it was a health scare that gave him that first push towards a new diet, and a new life.

He was 32 and working in the dairy industry when he was hurt on the job. The injury, which turned out to be a muscle spasm, led to a visit to the company doctor and the revelation that he hadn't had a physical in 10 years. The results of a full panel of blood work showed that he had the same problem as his father, a man who had just had his second bypass operation, except William was told his blood profile was worse. Though William's cholesterol was normal, his triglycerides were close to 800 while his



dad's preoperative triglycerides were just over 400. His doctor informed him, "That is just as dangerous as high cholesterol." [Note: The National Cholesterol Education Program guidelines state that fasting levels of plasma triglycerides that are 500 mg/dl or above are "very high." <http://www.americanheart.org>].

The dialogue that followed with his physician was identical to "the drill" the family had been through after his dad had two heart attacks and the hospital assembled a team (cardiologist, respiratory therapist, and registered dietitian) to dispense advice that involved limiting fat intake to no more than 30% of calories, not smoking, and removing the salt shaker from the table. He always heard the same thing, "Being your father's son's you have a genetic predisposition to this disease, and we suggest you follow the same dietary guidelines as your dad does." The only problem was his dad had been following this prescription and yet he still had two bypass surgeries amid experiencing an aortal aneurism that nearly killed him and a stroke that took his speech. A third bypass was performed later.

The company doctor told him, "You've got to do something." William didn't know what to do, but he did know something he was too frightened to communicate to his doctor: he is certain he had a heart attack when he was 18. He only recognized the symptoms ("pressure in the chest, shoulder and left arm go numb, and literally then next thing I'm on the floor and it felt like an elephant was sitting on my chest and I couldn't breath") after being witness to his dad's heart attacks years later. His dad "was this terrible example" that, along with the self-diagnosed heart attack, motivated him. He wasn't willing to accept a death sentence, but he believed the best minds at the top

cardiology hospital in his state were unable to provide him with answers that would help. So, he asked the company physician what he should do.

This doctor, an osteopath, gave him a pamphlet. After reading it over with his wife he was determined to eliminate red meat and ice cream, though he hated giving up the “free, super premium ice cream” available at the dairy where he worked. The change in his diet altered family relationships: “The choice not to eat red meat didn’t go over very well with my family. It created a lot of stress and tension and a year later my wife and I just packed up our stuff and left.”

After reading up to this point in the narrative a colleague of mine, a professor in the department of Health and Physical Education at Monroe Community College, said, “That was abrupt. He stopped eating meat and a year later he left town.” He wondered if their relationship was good prior to this or if this was the last straw in an already strained relationship. So, I emailed William to better understand the genesis of this schism. William wrote back:

Our family relationship was good till this point. Funny how a simple decision of what I was going to eat changed the whole dynamic. I think I understand their reaction; it was based in fear, fear of what they couldn't understand. They couldn't connect the dots because the idea that diet could influence heart health was completely foreign. My family had bought into the industrial medical complex and handed their power away to the doctors. In other words, eat, drink and be merry, there is a pill or procedure to fix my life of excess.

With this part of the narrative clarified, we pick back up with William working as a mechanic in his new, metropolitan city, and against the laws of probability. The very first customer's car he worked on had a bumper sticker that read: "I don't eat my friends." Confused, he said to her, "A guy asked about your bumper sticker – is this like a joke that means you're not a cannibal?" She said, "No. I'm a vegetarian and animals are my friends." William, despite having an associate degree in liberal studies and being just short of a bachelor's degree, had not heard the word back in 1989, and queried the woman, "Oh. So, what's a vegetarian?"

After explaining the term, she directed him to a food co-op that was a mile from his home which is where he discovered an ad for a vegetarian pot luck dinner. At the pot luck he met the people who would become his mentors. He said, "I voraciously read everything that I could get my hands on because I was scared to death. I didn't want to die and I didn't want to end up like the rest of my family."

He initially thought that the few vegans in the vegetarian group "sounded kind of crazy", but the more he read, the more sense it made. He attributes his shift towards veganism to the "reading process", things he learned while working in the dairy industry that made him suspicious and an experience with an adopted steer. His first inkling that dairy might not be good for him came when he was a teenager working with his great uncle, a long time dairyman.

There was a situation with an orphaned calf we were feeding and I suggested just getting some whole milk out of the refrigerator and he said, "No. That would kill the calf. Homogenized milk will kill a calf."\* I

said, “Really? So, I’m drinking the milk from another species, but it’s been adulterated to the point that it will kill its own species. I don’t think it can be good for me.” That’s when I quit milk, and I never liked cheese. My only addiction was ice cream.

Once, after a vegetarian dinner, he heard a lecture about a farm sanctuary. He “wrote a check on the spot to adopt a cow.” After receiving the adoption papers he visited Scruffy several times. However, it wasn’t until four or five months had passed since his last visit that he had a life-altering experience. Walking into the barn he wondered if Scruffy would remember him: “I called his name and he looked up and ran over to me and just slammed his forehead right in my chest and just leaned against me. I gave him a hug and I just knew right then.”

I had this image in my head, this mental picture, that right over my heart was this light switch – you might call it a compassion switch and I could turn it off for doing a lot of the crap I had done in my past life, but now it was on and I can’t turn it off.

He was in “an emotional hurricane for weeks after that” and he realized that as a child he had used a particular phrase, as a coping method: “When I had to do all those things I didn’t want to do that I was either humiliated or shamed into doing or later just did to be a man – it came down to one phrase.”

If I had the power to eliminate one phrase from the human language, it would be the phrase, “I don’t care.” Because that’s what I would say. I would say, “I don’t care.” When you verbalize that and say, “I don’t care”

– if you really observe what happens inside of you – you disconnect – and it doesn't have to be from another animal – it can be from another person, situation, circumstance. You automatically become disconnected psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. It allows you to do anything. It's what allows a soldier to kill another person. You say, "I don't care – this is my job. I don't care. This has to be done for the greater good. I don't care." But it's all prefaced by "I don't care." Because when things are morally and ethically repugnant to us we have to find a coping mechanism, some key that we can turn to allow us to do that thing. For me it was saying, "I don't care." I think it's true for a lot of people.

He was on the road to spiritual and physical recovery, and his wife was his greatest ally. Together they had no problems with food. His wife transitioned with him and fortunately for William she is a "foodie" and "an amazing cook" who "collects cookbooks like other women collect Harlequin romance novels." Additionally, they explored ethnic cuisines available at Chinese, Ethiopian, and Indian restaurants. Rather than finding vegetarianism to be a challenge, they noticed the "world opened up" and instead of viewing their diet as being restrictive they thought "it was about saying yes to all these new foods we had never had before."

The only difficulties they experienced had to do with his family. He, nor his wife, ever proselytized to his family. William says he's "just not that kind of person", and he doesn't "believe shame or guilt are motivators to change anybody's mind about anything." Although he respected their choices, in the beginning they didn't respect his

and most family members wouldn't try the vegan meals he brought, though his dad partook from the start. However, over time they became more accepting. His mother began to come around about two years before her death. She had remarried a couple of years after her husband died from a heart attack, but her new partner had gone on medical retirement at 45 because of heart disease, over 20 years earlier. According to William, the doctor told her "His heart is so bad it isn't even worth it to operate – it's just shot." This scare, along with her own heart problems, caused her to do some reading, and changing. She cooked two vegan Christmas dinners as a gift to William, but died of a heart attack before she could make a third. William smiled recalling what she said when he asked her what his disapproving brother would eat at Christmas dinner, "He's just going to have to shut up and eat it!", and he did.

When William first went vegan his brother, a fundamentalist minister, told him, "You have to be careful – that's cult worship." Though his brother still believes it is a "wrong life choice", that its "cultish", William thinks he no longer views it as "a false religion." However, his brother has told him, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Laughing, William says, "So, it's a sin to be vegan. But he still loves me. I don't know if he really thinks it's a sin, but he thinks it's misguided."

While it is impossible to know, I wondered if William's brother would still feel the same if their parents journey had not been ended by health problems. It seems both were moving closer to understanding William's point-of-view. While going through papers, after I thought I had finished this narrative, I found notes that I had taken at one of William's lectures during which he spoke about his father's altered views about

hunting. William responded to my email request for a retelling of his father's experience:

My father had suffered two bypass operations and a stroke that had taken his speech except for speaking single words. On the first day of deer season my brother stopped by my folk's house to gather my dad to take him out to his blind. My dad was drinking coffee and my brother asked, "Aren't you going hunting?" My dad shook his head. My brother said, "If you are concerned about walking out I'll give you a ride." Again my dad shook his head. Then my brother asked, "What's the matter?" My dad said, "I think they have every right to be happy like I am." That was the first complete sentence he said since his stroke and the last. My father never hunted again.

It may be that William's father was starting to see violence the way William now sees it. Last year, "after a lot of soul searching and meditation", William filed at the Peace Abbey (<http://www.peaceabbey.org/>) to become a conscientious objector and pacifist. Quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., who wrote "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." William says he realized a need to "proclaim non-violence toward all humans", to consciously expand his moral universe to include all beings. Violence, in all its forms, has psychological consequences. What we as a society do to animals "becomes part of our psyche."

I think that the violence we visit upon animals, whether directly or through complicity has a cost to our spirits and souls. Indifference can be

a very dangerous act in this case. When we exclude any other from our moral universe it has a direct cost to our collective well being as a society.

Sadly, William lost some of his hometown friends when he gave up meat and hunting. He was “disowned” by his hunting friends while his other friends just thought of it as “an eccentricity.” He was close with his hunting friends, but William supposes, “Bloodlust is stronger than ties of friendship.” In the last five years William has noticed his veganism has become more acceptable to the non-hunting friends he has kept, a change he attributes to the increase in mainstream media coverage about vegetarian and vegan diets.

His relationship with his wife has only been strengthened by the journey they’ve taken together. They have “muddled” their way through, learning from individuals, books, conferences, and their own experimentation. Speaking of their emotional, spiritual, and psychological growth, he says, “It’s expanded our horizons and given more depth to us as people. We understand things a little bit better; it’s helped develop our critical thinking because we understand” the interconnectedness of injustices committed against humans and animals.

He went on to talk about the intrapersonal changes that have occurred, which are intertwined with his new set of beliefs. He reiterated that when he became a vegan he “had no sensibilities for farm animals” since he was doing it for health reasons: “Making that shift towards considering animals as sentient beings, and subjects-of-a-life was something that came along later.”



He finds it helpful to recognize that there were forces that had been working on him since birth that molded his mind, and his actions.

Considering I grew up on a farm and grew up in a culture that totally supported a particular world view – I was indoctrinated into this particular relationship with farm animals – first taught to me by my family and then my community and then through 4-H and FFA [Future Farmers of America], and the college, and society at large, advertising, media, it all reinforces that animal agriculture thing – we are a part of this culture even though most people are not connected to farming, we are the products of 10,000 years of herding culture. We’re very deeply invested in it. I just thought that was a normal way of being in the world.

He spoke of the “Ah-ha” moment he had with Scruffy and the “emotional honesty” that followed. He began asking questions.

How do I feel about these animals? What do I do with these animals? What have I done in my past? I’ve done meat packing. I’ve done all kinds of things. I’ve done horrible things to animals. I look back on that and... I don’t beat myself up for it now. I look back on it and I can understand how people can think the way they do and live in the world the way they do.

Being vegan has allowed him to be “a more complete and well-rounded person” because he is now emotionally honest with himself and those around him, his actions are consistent with his beliefs, and he cares, which is “quite a chore.” He tries to “foster

greater ideals more explicitly” than he did previously, such as joy, happiness, and love; emotions which are scary for many men to talk about. He no longer sees himself as a consumer; he is a citizen.

It’s like you’re a bull with a ring in your nose – when you make the moral and ethical connections it’s like you take the ring out of your nose and nobody is dragging you by the nose anymore through advertising or PR or any of that. You’re able to look at the situation objectively and think about the process, and it makes for a much richer life.

To break free from the chains that hold us, one needs discipline in the beginning.

He believes it takes effort and education to leave behind a thoughtless existence:

Living on the standard American diet is basically just living your life comfortably numb. When people make their food choices they are based on what I call the big three: beef, chicken, or pork. But for most people I know, it isn’t even that, its hamburgers. For lunch it’s McDonald’s, Wendy’s, or Burger King. People make their food choices by-and-large, if they’re honest with themselves, for only two reasons: taste and convenience. Not nutrition or any moral or ethical concern, it just tastes good to eat it.

William passionately spoke about one person being able to make a difference and the need for “more people to step out of line.”

If we could all just cruise along and nobody rocks our boat, life’s okay.

Unfortunately, you can be part of a problem if you do that. Socrates said,

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” I think that’s what we need to do. We need to wake up and live an examined life. Step out of line. The vast majority of people in this country are like cattle: walking nose-to-tail, walking single file, and following the leader. Unfortunately, the view ahead of you isn’t that great.

After the interview I asked if he would share more about his pre-vegetarian experiences in animal agriculture. William said that most of the chores he had to do on the farm didn’t bother him much, but of the few things that did, castrating calves was one of them. He tried to avoid participating, but he “was expected to be there to witness it if nothing else.” During this continued discussion, his utterances were noticeably subdued; the sensitive microphone barely recorded his words.

I remember the first time I was expected to do the castration. I still wasn’t big enough to hold the calf, to restrain him, but I was big enough and coordinated enough to do the actual castration and when they handed the knife to me tears started running down because I didn’t want to do it. By ten they said, “Well, either you do it or we’ll send you up to the house with the women.” Growing up in a macho, rural community you didn’t want to be called a woman – you didn’t want that association being made – so I took the knife and I did it. But as time went by, the more I did it, the less I felt. You just get numb to it.

It mystified, this sensitive, informed man that adults required this of someone so young: “But the thing is, I look back now – I was ten years old and I was expected to do

that.” The other thing he didn’t like doing was slaughtering rabbits, but his family raised about 20 per year for meat.

When you kill the rabbit there isn’t stunning euthanasia – you just grab the rabbit and you twist their head completely off and then just hang their hind feet and let em bleed out. I’d go deer hunting, squirrel hunting, but I wouldn’t go rabbit hunting because it was the same thing. When you shot the rabbit you’d twist the head off and I wouldn’t do it. I did it a few times, but then I just couldn’t do it, it was so repugnant to me.

He then turned his focus to the cattle raised on his family farm:

The cattle we ate on the farm we butchered on the farm. The cattle we sold would go to a local slaughterhouse which, when I got a little older, I’d go there and help out. With us it was a .410 gauge shotgun between the eyes, but at the slaughterhouse they used an eight pound sledgehammer.

Having seen numerous slaughterhouse videos and visited one, and being in an unemotional state it wasn’t difficult for me to hear about the details involved in the killing of these animals. However, I was becoming increasingly concerned for William and uncomfortable with where this question appeared to be taking him emotionally. I thought about the “informed consent” form he signed and a line in it that reads: “There are no risks from participating in this interview.” I asked William, “Does it bother you to talk about it? He said, “Yeah. That I see is my calling in my life now is to bear witness to that for other people because so many people have never seen that or heard of it. Back

then I didn't feel anything, but now I feel a lot." I decided to continue for a few moments more since he viewed this line of discussion as a "calling" which allows him to "bear witness." I shared details of my visit to an Argentine slaughterhouse where a sledgehammer was used to stun the cows and how three, four, or more blows were often needed. He spoke of his experience:

Well, they move around a lot and sometimes you'd miss and take out their eye. It's terrible. That's the whole thing – people ask me, "Is there such a thing as humane slaughter?" There is no such thing as humane slaughter. It's not possible.

I commented that the slaughterhouse in Argentina was like a horror movie with blood and body parts everywhere, in an old facility and that I imagined the slaughterhouses in the U.S. might be more aesthetically pleasing. His response was that of an insightful film critic.

There are different kinds of horror movies too. There's one where - the mechanization of U.S. slaughterhouses – the mechanization and efficiency of disassembling animals is frightening in that efficiency, but then you take a family owned slaughterhouse where I used to work at and it's gritty, it's dirty, the walls haven't been painted in years, concrete walls, it's like a bad B film. I think Paul McCarty had it right, "If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everybody would be vegetarian."

It seems fitting to conclude William's narrative with another one of his family's quotes: "My grandfather used to say, 'Every one of us is either going to be an

outstanding example or a terrible warning.’ Well, I don’t want to be the terrible warning. I want to be the outstanding example.” Mission accomplished William.

\*Note: I emailed three professors at Cornell University in the department of Agricultural Science, who listed one of their areas of expertise as dairy and inquired about the risk of feeding homogenized cow’s milk to a calf and all three disagreed with the notion that homogenized milk would harm a calf. However, the importance of the exchange between William and his uncle remains unchanged: it caused him to see the consumption of milk from another species as being an unnatural product for a human to consume. One professor’s short email referred to it as a “wife’s tale.” The other two provided detailed answers.

Dr. Bauman who has expertise in both animal and human nutrition is a faculty member in the Department of Animal Science and the Division of Nutritional Science at Cornell wrote:

No, no validity to the claim. Homogenized milk will be digested just like non-homogenized milk. In fact the digestion of the fat might be slightly better because the smaller fat vesicles provide more surface area for the digestive enzymes to attack.”

And a second wrote:

Thanks for the email. Homogenization changes the micelle structure of the fat globule membrane and makes it more uniform so it doesn't float to the top in the same way it used to years ago. However, to my knowledge, no calf should die from consuming homogenized milk. Not

sure where that started from. I have heard that quite a bit over the last 10 years but am not sure where it started from. The calf has lipases in the saliva that start the digestive process of reducing triglycerides in free fatty acids for digestion, so any reduction in the micelle should only help that process by creating more surface area. Probably more technical than you wanted but there is no reason to believe it will kill a calf.

### ***Dwight***

Dwight earned a B.S. in agriculture and has been bestowed with an honorary doctorate in law (LL.D.), and was the first of four generations of farmers to implement the chemical-based agricultural practices promoted by his land grant agricultural university, turning “a small organic family farm into a large corporate chemical farm with a thousand range cows, five thousand head of cattle in a factory feedlot, thousands of acres of crops, and as many as thirty employees.” He witnessed the destruction this approach had: “I saw the organic soil go from a living, productive base to a sterile, chemical-saturated, mono-cultural ground produced by my so-called modern methods.”

Presently 68 years old, he has experience working in a large organic dairy, raising beef cattle, owning a large factory feedlot and has raised cows, chickens, pigs, and turkeys in addition to mostly grain crops. A vegan diet and passion for spreading the message about the benefits of a vegan diet and the need for Americans to adopt sustainable agricultural and consumption practices drives him to travel 300 days per year and over 100,000 miles. He has “not knowingly eaten an animal product since 1991.”

He was raised in a meat and potatoes family, had meat at every meal, and grew up on the largest dairy farm in a farming state. For about the first fifty years of his life he lived in this environment and said, "We ate what we grew and there was never any question about it... milk, ice cream and cheese were normal staples of our diet." When I asked him if he had enjoyed meat he said, "Absolutely! No doubt about it."

What led this giant of a man, one of the early 300 pound football players, on the road to vegetarianism?

Well, in 1979 I was paralyzed from the waist down; had a tumor on the inside of my spinal cord, the doctor told me that if the tumor was on the inside of the cord I had less than one chance in a million that I would walk again. Went in, had an operation, they took the tumor out from the inside of my spinal cord. I walked out of the hospital with a one in a million operation. I asked the doctor what caused it. He said adolescent cells stimulated growth probably from the chemicals used on the farm. I thought, "Hell, what we need to do is become organic farmers." I went to my banker, I said to him "I need to borrow some money, I want to become an organic farmer"; he laughed at me. In 1983, I sold my farm; I started reading and studying.

He began to realize it wasn't just the chemicals that were contributing to his poor health.

When I quit playing football I kept eating the same way. I got well over 300 pounds, my blood pressure was sky high, my cholesterol was over



300, I'd sit down and my nose would bleed. I knew I had to make a change. I became a closet vegetarian. That went so well, I figured if I could do that as a vegetarian, I could do better as a vegan. I became a vegan and lost 130 pounds, my blood pressure today is normal and my cholesterol is 130, so for me I think I saved my life by changing my diet.

He finds the "the most interesting" aspect of being a vegan is the increased physical energy and mental clarity, along with the benefit of waking up in the morning feeling a lot better. He added, "But the biggest thing that I get out of being a vegan is the knowledge that no animal has to die for me to live", and he enjoys the "cleanness of spirit" that comes with this choice.

I changed my diet due to my health. I am a vegan today because of the animals. If they came out tomorrow and had impeccable proof that eating meat was good for you I would never again eat meat because I personally never want to see another animal die because of what I do, and so, for me, when I get up in the morning knowing that I have inflicted as little pain as possible on the animals and the planet, that makes my life worthwhile.

Possibly because Dwight recognizes the importance of motivation, he is one of the best motivators, and gives impassioned speeches. Yet he also understands there is the matter of practical application. About his experience he said, "The problem I had was I didn't know what the hell I was doing and I learned slowly." Yet today the

metamorphosis need not be so slow or painful: “You could go out and read one or two books and you would know 98% of what needs to be done.”

If you are going to go from a meat and potatoes thing to a vegetarian diet, the only damn thing you know about it is lettuce and cheese. The biggest problem that people have in adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet is education. I recommend people learn more about it before they jump into the pool.

Part of the educational process would ideally include advice on how to deal with some of the social difficulties that often emerge when one excludes animal flesh from their diet. For Dwight it took a while for familial relations to heal, but the picture of family life today is one of harmony. He said most family members thought he was “plum crazy.” His entire family, having been “involved in agriculture from the time they landed from England” was ingrained in agrarian social and political networks. His hometown newspaper referred to him as “a turncoat” which, for a time, sullied the family name. He says, “The pressure within the livestock community was unbelievable.” He felt the pressure to “get back in line.” However, as his health improved suddenly members of his family thought maybe he wasn’t as crazy as they suspected.

And the fact of it is today, my wife and I have six kids. Three of them are vegetarian and the other three are careful eaters. I have five grandchildren. Better than half of them are vegan. We end up every year or every other year with a family vacation; this year there will be 15 of us. The house we’ve rented will be entirely vegan.

Reflecting on how the situation has turned, he remarked, “Started out, they looked at me like I was crazy, and now they look at me like I am some sort of a guru. It’s been an interesting travel.”

I began asking, “Specifically address the reaction your friends had...” but before I finished asking the question he was laughing. His laughing stopped when he began his answer, “Well, you know, some friendships, when I did what I did - it severed the friendship. But as far as I was concerned, if that was an insurmountable problem, then they really weren’t a friend in the first place.” Just as his family came around, so have most of his pre-vegetarian friends. Dwight estimates that 90% of the friends he had before he became vegetarian “have finally learned to adjust to it; they have more questions.”

He spoke of attending his 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion at exactly the same playing weight he was when he graduated fifty years earlier with a pride that revealed this accomplishment went deeper than numbers on a scale; it was an objective measure that numerically reflected his personal growth. Many of his classmates had not fared as well with their weight and were shocked by his relatively lean build. He stated with a Clint Eastwood kind of seriousness, “People do not speak of my diet in folly anymore.”

How did his wife feel about his new eating habits? He spit out the answer like a cowboy spits tobacco juice, “Oh shit, she was light years ahead of me. She became a vegetarian before I did.” Due to her lifelong struggles with weight she had always been a very careful eater, though prior to her converting to a vegan diet she used to laugh at Dwight’s veganism, thinking vegetarianism was good enough. However, she heard a

lecture by T. Colin Campbell and by morning she was vegan. Dwight says being vegan together the past 15 years has “absolutely” strengthened their relationship: “We actually floated the Grand Canyon on a vegan cruise; we went to Africa on a camera safari and it was vegan. There is nothing we have been excluded from because of our diet.”

He noted, “The change in society during the past five to ten years has been remarkable. There is not a restaurant that I walk into that the service person does not know what vegan is today. Ten years ago they thought you had a communicable disease.” He assessed the state of the animal rights and vegan movement as follows: “This train has left the station; there’s no doubt about it.”

There has been a societal shift since he first predicted mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE) was on the horizon only to be greeted by laughter. After enduring disparaging newspaper coverage from his hometown newspaper, attacks from the Cattleman’s Association, and many of the people he dealt with during his farming career he felt a powerful sense of vindication when BSE cases began showing up. This feeling, which is still present, is diminished by a sense of melancholy that animals continue to die, and the system remains largely unchanged.

During the interview I sensed a certain dichotomy, a yin-yang emanating from his words. As I sat in the chair next to him in a line of connected chairs, holding the recorder, I tried to put together what I knew from his booming, preacher-like lectures. It struck me that in an odd way, the vegetarian and vegan community, despite abhorring violence, has a sort of admiration for the maleness of his former work, though not the

work itself. He has seen darkness, yet prefers the light. He is accorded the respect given to rugged men.

Today, he considers himself to be “much more low-key” with not “near the temper” he once had. He said, “I am much more forgiving with people. I realize that I have made choices that are uncomfortable for other people and when they make choices that are uncomfortable for me I need to be forgiving of them.” Dwight attributes these changes to embracing the tenets of veganism. Socialized in the maleness of death, he now values the feminine of life.

He scoffed at the notion that it requires fortitude to maintain a vegan diet:

If you want to be a half-assed vegan yeah, boy what a lot of difficulty; but if you understand why you are doing it, for me it’s the animals, the planet, and my health – in that order. I would go without a meal if I could not get something that doesn’t have a face, liver or mother in it. I am not going to die from missing a few meals but its going to absolutely destroy what I believe in if I do, and so for me there is no discipline to it. That’s the way I am, that’s how I live, and that’s what makes my motor run.

Dwight attributes his openness to vegetarianism to his belief in “following the facts” and the recognition that the facts were clear about the benefits associated with vegetarian diets and the problems associated with the typical meat laden diet. He said, “I could no more go back to a meat based diet than I could go back to smoking cigarettes. If you really believe in truth, it is the easiest thing in the world.”

Those who continue to eat meat and animal products do so because “when you don’t put all the pieces together it is very easy to vacillate.” He doesn’t insist that everyone become a “purist” like he is; “this is about someone doing better tomorrow than what they did today.”

And if somebody came to me and they said you can have two choices; you can have 20% of the US population vegan or you can get all of the American population to eat a vegan meal each day, I’d take the one vegan meal a day because if somebody is doing something that is good for them, they are going to do more of it in the future and its all about learning and education and if you can understand in your own mind why you are doing what you are doing it’s much easier to make the change.

His point is that once a person is engaged in pursuing good health they will begin to feel better physically, psychologically, and spiritually, and want more of it and this inertia would move the entire country towards veganism. Interestingly, even at the outset of the scenario he provided, fewer animals would be eaten with the one meal a day option. Assuming the entire U.S. population (rounded to 300 million persons) currently eats three meals per day, each containing the same amount of meat, the 100% of the population option, would translate to 300 million vegetarian meals and 600 million meals with meat. The 20% option would equate to 180 million vegetarian meals and 720 million meals with meat.

Because of his extensive travels, mostly to talk with vegetarian, vegan, and animal rights groups he estimates that he has met 30,000 to 50,000 vegans. He thinks

people come to veganism “from 1,000 different places” but he thinks the best place to come to the diet is at home, “putting your feet under the table with your family. A family that starts children out eating a vegan diet for the most part will be with them for a lifetime.”

And what if someone fails to thrive on a vegetarian or vegan diet?

I would say the biggest thing is lack of knowledge. There are a lot of lousy vegetarian and vegan diets. Just because somebody is a vegetarian or a vegan has nothing to do with them having a good diet. So it doesn't surprise me a bit when somebody doesn't thrive on a vegetarian or vegan diet. If they come to my house and eat with my wife and I and they don't thrive on it then I would really be concerned.

I asked if he was willing to share any insights about his experiences in animal agriculture. He solemnly remarked, “Probably the most difficult thing for a kid to learn is how to harness their love of animals to the economics of seeing them killed. There is a very large segment of animal agriculture that is impressed in that.” Kids are taken to state fairs where they show the animals only to have them taken and put up for sale. They are sold for far more than market value so that the kid will look at it and say, “Well, geez, I loved old Jake but I got to go to college, he helped me there, and he had a good life.” Dwight says, “That is how they get kids over the hump of loving animals, and it is the most difficult thing in the world to be raised with animals, to know them well and to get comfortable with seeing them die.”

He said most farmers “don’t have a clue” about vegetarian diets because “they’ve been brainwashed by the industry with advertising they have perceived to be fact.”

It is very difficult to see the forest from the trees when your economic future is tied to not seeing the trees. And most people involved in animal agriculture are totally unwilling to see the truth until it comes home. It’s when they have a heart attack or end up with cancer. My best friend laughed at me about my diet until he had open heart surgery. You’d be surprised at how quick he became a vegan.

At the end of the interview I asked if there was anything we hadn’t covered that he thought was important, and he replied, “Absolutely!”

The most important thing about being vegetarian or vegan is Joy. Your approach to nutrition should be the joy of eating and living healthy. This is not something that you give up, this is a benefit you get from knowing how to fuel the body that you were given the most correctly and that is with a vegan diet. You need to learn the joy of how to live and once you do that, a key component of that is a vegan diet.

After the interview I caught up to Dwight on a walking path back to his hotel room (we were both attending the same conference). I shared a bit about my personal life including the demise of my previous relationship, the defining moment being our return from the slaughterhouse in Argentina followed by her eating luncheon meats an



hour later, seemingly unaffected. He referred to that as a “non-starter”, something I call a “non-negotiable.” He then proceeded to tell me about a dream he had recently.

He began the telling of this vivid dream, “A man was holding a gun to my head and he was holding a burger in his other hand. He said, ‘Eat it or I’ll pull the trigger!’” Dwight said it was a no-brainer and stopped walking in order to demonstrate the way he picked up the burger in his dream and brought it to his mouth, only to lift it a few inches higher, steadying it at eye level. Fixated on the burger a foot from his face, he told the gunman, “You better pull the trigger”, and woke up in a cold sweat.

### ***Wendy***

Wendy and her husband are both vegan and former dairy farmers, who now tend to “cows, pigs, chickens, goats, llamas, horses and many other individuals who had once endured miserable lives of fear and suffering.” Their sanctuary provides “a safe and loving refuge for farmed animals given a second chance at life.” Wendy has gained nearly as much peace as the animals have.

The day of the interview Wendy had been tending to a goat who had “not been quite right” for a few years. She fed him grass which was the only thing he had a taste for when he was feeling ill. Though working long, hard hours with the animals she was excited to have the interview.

While she knew from the youngest of ages that she wanted to work with animals, it took her “time and several life lessons” before she “found a job that truly benefited them.” One of her first jobs was working for a drug manufacturer, as both a histology technician and autopsy room technician. She says, “I was told the research

benefited mankind and that the killing of test animals was called 'sacrificing.' In the logbooks where we recorded autopsy room data, we didn't kill anything - we 'sacrificed numbers.'" She shared a heart-wrenching story about caring for dogs at the lab:

I remember early in my employment, walking to where the dogs - sweet little beagles - were caged and routinely dosed with compounds such as growth promotants, antibiotics, dopamine and a multitude of others. I would talk with them, reach through the cages to pet them, all the while looking into their trusting, unknowing eyes. I did this for only a few days before I was caught and reprimanded for this behavior. I was told test animals were to have no human contact other than dosing, examining, cleaning and feeding since any expression of affection would cause the animal to have a will to live and adversely affect their reaction to the compounds they were given. Well, I tried living with that justification for about four years before I left. My life of discovery had begun.

Wendy then worked at an aquarium as an aquarist where she "fed and monitored the health of the thousands of fish and a few marine mammals, monitoring the quality of the water, helping the staff care for the marine mammals and assisting with autopsies." Unfortunately, she experienced another traumatic event, this time with a dolphin.

The aquarium had received four bottle-nosed dolphins and Wendy was thrilled to swim with them and help them "during their adjustment to captivity." But

management did not listen when a trainer warned that the nylon netting that divided a satellite pool from the main pool “was an accident waiting to happen.”

Early one morning, I heard the high-pitched screams. We may not speak their language, but anguish, sadness and frustration are easily translatable. One of the male dolphins had caught his nose in the netting and in trying to free himself, actually twisted tighter, trapping himself underwater. In the wild, if a dolphin is sick or injured, the others come to his aid and push him to the surface for air. In this captive setting, the other dolphins could only watch as their companion slowly drowned.

Her sad story continued:

A fellow worker and I dove in with a knife hoping to cut the netting but it had tightened so severely around the dolphin's nose we couldn't get it off. We could only cut the section free and bring the lifeless body to the surface. Shortly thereafter, the dolphin was replaced with another caught from the wild, the netting replaced with metal chain link, and the show went on.

Before she was diving in a pool with a knife or hardening herself to the realities of lab animal hell she was a little girl growing up mostly with her Canadian grandparents, both of whom were from farming families. They usually had a roast on Sundays. She loved vegetables, but through coercion she eventually developed a taste for meat. Recalling one of her earliest memories, she said, “When I was four or five, I distinctly remember my grandparents pressuring me to finish my food and one thing

that was usually left, that was very difficult for me to get down was the meat, for whatever reason.”

In a post-interview email I wrote to Wendy and explained that after reading through the transcript I was left wondering about her mother and father (though I wondered during the interview also) and suggested that if she were comfortable discussing them it might help the reader get a better feel for where she is coming from.

She wrote back:

My grandparents raised me for the first eight or so years of my life, and then I spent summers with them for years after that. I don't know where my mom was in my younger years but the man who I was told was my dad actually wasn't and I learned that when I was in my early twenties. Being with my grandparents was a nurturing environment where having animals and allowing me to have loving relationships with them was allowed. We still ate meat but there was that "pull" in my young mind of pet versus food. As I got older and spent time with my mom I was mentally and physically abused so I always clung to my animal friends. Perhaps this gave me insight into what other humans and animals go through.

During the interview, Wendy explained that once she was out on her own and had completed her associate's degree in liberal arts she tried a macrobiotic diet full of brown rice, legumes and vegetables, and devoid of animal flesh. Despite enjoying the

diet itself, she felt alone, had few restaurant options available to her, and so “gradually drifted back” to the food she ate as a child.

Today she is 58 years old, and has been a vegan for eight years. She has discovered an ability to prepare a variety of delectable dishes and says her diet feels more natural. Like the 60’s teen she was or the environmental steward she is, Wendy said, “I feel more one with the earth rather than taking so much from the earth.” She takes pride in being vegan and what it means for the animals and the planet, relishes being amongst her plant-eating friends, but admits that carnivores often look down upon vegans or think of it as being “very odd” and there is discomfort in that dynamic.

Wendy no longer has family members, but her husband has two brothers who think they are “nuts for not farming anymore other than growing hay for the animals” and because they don’t eat flesh. The brother’s initial reaction was “almost horror”; they couldn’t imagine that they could remain healthy and not eat meat. Presently one of her husband’s brothers is “somewhat accepting” while the other is “completely baffled and has a hard time tolerating it.”

Most of Wendy’s close non-vegetarian friends were very accepting of the decision she and her husband made. She had some vegetarian friends in the beginning and this group has continued to enlarge so that “now it’s like a little community of vegans and vegetarians.”

The origins of this community began at the gates of their then dairy goat farm and with a vow between husband and wife. But before this miserable, yet glorious day, they had been producing goat milk, and on most days were happy.

Shortly after meeting her husband, a dairy cow farmer who came from many generations of dairy farmers, he decided to get out of the business because it was no longer economically viable. They decided to get into dairy goat farming because it was more lucrative, but Wendy “hated giving up the baby goats that usually went for ethnic groups that ate baby goat for Easter.” She feels “baby goats are even more precious”; she would “bottle raise them” and “unfortunately it is the same type of affair that dairy cows go through where the babies are taken from the mothers and the mothers are milked, but they never get to bond with their babies.”

So, the babies would bond with me, and I with them. I would try to keep as many as I could but we did have to get rid of some and for several years we would have various people come and they would pick out their goat for Easter and we would weigh it and as the baby goat would be weighed it would be looking at me with eyes that just sunk deep into my soul and then the person who bought the goat would hogtie it, and during the hogtied process the little goat was on its’ back looking up at me and I can’t tell you how many times I would cry through that process of watching the goat watch me and I the goat.

Although her husband wasn’t generally involved in the weighing and hogtied process, he didn’t like the effect it was having on his wife, or the treatment of the animals, and he “eventually stopped the people from how they put the baby goat into their vehicle because they would pick the goat up like a piece of luggage and throw it into their trunk or into their truck.”

Even my husband had bonded with these little babies and the defining moment was one day when we stood at the goat gate where people would pick up their goat and drive away and my husband and I looked at each other and we both had tears in our eyes and I just started crying more and more and he was the first to say “We can’t do this anymore!” and I quickly agreed.

They knew they needed to figure out how they were going to conduct their lives and earn an income, and began by contacting a sanctuary in another state which wound up taking some of their goats, reducing the number of mouths they needed to feed. However, they kept many goats and decided to become a sanctuary themselves. They soon questioned their meat eating ways.

If we are not farming animals how can we even eat them because we can see they are these sentient beings and they have such feeling? We just became so close to these animals that they reached into our heart and our heads and made us recognize what we were doing.

While they gave up meat, her husband still drank milk and they both ate cheese. But they, and their diet, “continued to evolve” in part because they knew these products still involved suffering and death, and because they discovered more vegan products and conditioned their taste buds. Within two years from that day at the gate, they were vegan.

And even though we rescue chickens and they lay eggs we can’t even bring ourselves to eat them - we tried when we were still vegetarians,

but we cannot even tolerate the smell of eggs; I can't even cook them to feed to the pigs; I can't handle it; so that is how we evolved from carnivore to vegan.

Wendy says that because they made the decision at the same time, "it was as if we were in each other's mind", this "soul searching experience" has brought them closer together. They have never had arguments or differences of opinion about it. She describes it as being like "the ebb and flow of the tides" – a very beautiful and natural process.

She and her husband have enjoyed numerous benefits since becoming vegan: they feel their health is much better, they feel stronger, have lowered their cholesterol without drugs, and find they have more energy when working around the farm and taking care of the animals. She added that her husband has also lost quite a bit of weight. But being vegan has provided betterment beyond the physical: "The inward aspect of our hearts and our minds are much happier that we are not taking life, and we are not taking the earth away from future generations."

I wondered if she views herself any differently now.

Well physically I don't look at myself differently but spiritually I look at myself much differently. I think I am... I don't want to say a better person - a more whole, complete person, a person with more compassion – a true compassion. I just view my spirituality differently than I did before. It was as if there were holes in my heart when we ate meat but now I feel



empowered, I feel compassionate, I feel that I can do more good for people, animals, and the planet than I ever could before.

It requires no willpower for Wendy to abstain from animals products because she has “stared into the eyes of the animals that were to be butchered.”

For the average person that doesn't get to have that experience, that doesn't know that there's a spirit behind that cellophane plastic in the butchers case, I think it's harder because they have the taste of the flesh and they like it, and some people don't want to hear the story of the animal that has gone to slaughter, and the pain that they suffer. They don't want to know. So, I would assume that it would be very difficult if they made an attempt to become vegan when they have not held a sentient being or gazed into its eyes when it was going to slaughter or about to be slaughtered.

Although she and her husband, along with many volunteers, have created this sanctuary, a sanctuary in every sense of the word, the world at large is still a violent place and it seems there's no escaping it. She recounted a story with a hunter in the killing fields behind her home. Their farm has 120 acres of land, some of it for the sanctuary, but much of it is wooded land; land that has been in her husband's family for years.

She said that for years hunters have trespassed on their land, even though it is thoroughly posted, but since the word got out that that they don't eat meat, she has

noticed an increase in those who trespass on their land “to take life.” She spoke of her encounter with a deer hunter.

One day, while working outside, she heard a shot ring out, and saw that a \*deer had been shot. Instinctively, she followed.

...there was snow on the ground and I tracked the footprints, and the blood, and found the deer dying at the base of a tree and I held him in my arms, and after he passed away, I stood up because there was no one there, I didn't know who it was; the person walked off into the woods, and I screamed - I don't know if you want this in your dissertation - I screamed, “God damn you for shooting this deer on posted land!” and I heard the squeaking of snow and feet coming towards me and I looked up and fortunately I didn't get killed myself, but this fellow looked down at me, because I was kneeling back with the deer, holding him, and the man simply said, “Are you crazy?” and that's pretty much how he's treated us from that point. He almost taunts us....

This hunter, a selectman (an elected official who, along with other selectmen carry out similar duties as a mayor, including enforcement of no trespassing laws, in towns that don't have a mayor) and another hunter, a man who lives on a property bordering theirs, continue to hunt deer and turkey without regard for the law, life, or her feelings.

Wendy does not view herself as being any different than these two men, or any more capable of giving up animal products than present day omnivores. She says, “We

are all the same, we all have the same potential. It is just a matter of opening your heart and your mind and seeing what's happening." But she knows it is a difficult decision to make that change when "the animals that are so damaged and so abused" are "so distant from most people."

She believes that if "people had to raise that cow or baby pig in their back yard when they were young" and society did not exert such influence, "they would not choose to slaughter that animal, they would choose to grow something in a garden and eat it and share it with that animal." Having executed transactions that dealt in death, herself a product of farming culture, Wendy knows from experience what it takes to be in the business of brokering lives.

A person really has to harden themselves in order to go through any business that deals with the raising and the slaughter of animals. You really have to have tunnel vision and harden yourself and the few people that I still know that are in the business - they won't talk about veganism or vegetarianism. They are very defensive about "You have to eat meat" and "What's going to happen to the economy if you don't eat meat anymore." And they are just very, very defensive.

I wanted to know if she had actually witnessed her precious kids being slaughtered. Matter-of-factly she stated, "As we got closer to making the decision to not farm any more..." but as she realized it was summoning memories and emotions she slowed, attempting to enunciate each word more clearly. Steadying herself, she

continued, “I made myself watch a baby goat get slaughtered.” Tears were flowing, yet she continued, taking deep breaths along the way:

And it was the most horrific thing that I’ve seen. I’ve seen a lot in my life and I’ve done a lot in my life that is not very good for animals but to see any animal, but in my case a baby goat, have its throat cut – it’s fully conscious, and to see the fear in its eyes and to watch it gasp for breath...and they don’t die right away. People think you cut their throat and they die right away but they don’t; they have a consciousness that lingers for seconds or a minute, but you can see life in their eyes and the blood flows from their neck and their tongue hangs out trying to make noise and you can see them gasping and their trachea has been cut. It’s... I made myself watch and that certainly helped me make my decision.

Wanting to comfort Wendy, but knowing only the work she does has that power, I awkwardly asked the last question, “Is there anything else you feel is important to the topic of being vegan that we haven’t covered?” Having just relived the depths of suffering, it seemed fitting that she concluded with a vision of hope:

I think the most important part of being vegan is that it has the potential to bring peace, because having the ability to kill an animal gives you the ability to kill anything if you harden your heart and your soul. You can see that with the war that we have, with the anger people have with one another, but within the small community that I know that are vegan and vegetarian, while certainly human beings have tempers, I can’t imagine

any of them having the potential of taking a life because life is cherished - that's why we don't want to eat meat.

\*Note: Wendy later told me that the "little deer" she held was a "button buck" in his "first year of his life; he had no horns yet, just the buds or buttons."

### **Research Questions**

The fourth research question, "What is it like to be vegan?" was actually the first interview question posed to each participant. Allen, the 51 year old philosophy professor, described it as a "double-sided thing" that involves "pulling and tugging." He said, "as you're growing and evolving you are also moving away from people." This would explain why it can be experienced as a rewarding, joyful, affirmative practice that feels good while it can also feel like being from another planet or living in a subculture. It also becomes second nature and not something that is thought about a lot, yet it is a central component of self-identity.

Being vegan involves occasional confrontations with people who are hostile and ask ridiculing questions, and enduring unflattering stereotypes. Feelings of social isolation may occur, especially at the beginning of one's transition when they have not yet found their eventual support group or find themselves in social situations where they are the lone vegan. Yet, despite the challenges, especially the social implications, being vegan is experienced as a natural, loving choice that endows their life with considerable meaning.

What are the reasons a person chooses to become and remain vegan? The first major step towards becoming vegan was the decision to become vegetarian, and 13 of

the 15 participants made that decision based upon health reasons or for the welfare of the animals. For those who became vegetarian for health reasons, becoming vegan was the result of a combination of learning about factory farming practices and its impact on animals, as well as learning about the health advantages of vegan diets in literature, at potlucks, through other vegans, or at conferences/lectures. For those who became vegetarian for animal welfare reasons the decision to become vegan was often the result of learning and believing that the dairy and egg industry caused intense animal suffering.

Seven out of 15 of participants in this study cited ethical or animal welfare/rights issues to be the primary reason for the initiation of their dietary changes while another seven cited health reasons. However, all recognized the health benefits associated with eating a vegan diet, and all gained a sense of well-being that came from living in accord with their belief that to act to lessen suffering by abstaining from animal products was a moral imperative.

Perceived physical, social, psychological, and spiritual benefits assisted in their efforts to maintain their vegan practice. While health benefits were cited by everyone these advantages were now mostly seen as a welcomed byproduct of their diet and were no longer the primary motivator they once were. Benefits included having more energy, feeling healthier, cleaner, and more alive, feeling more sexual, experiencing unintended, but desirable weight loss, less fluctuation of weight, prevention of future weight gain, living longer, decreased cholesterol levels, reduced stomach upset,

elimination of headaches, improved athletic performance, and catching fewer colds, and recovering from them more quickly.

Socially, participants generally gained a new set of friends who shared similar beliefs, values, and practices, and this provided a sense of belonging. These friends were often viewed as compassionate, committed to high ideals, and supportive of their choices. Psychological advantages consisted of feeling more at peace, having a sense of comfort due to their belief that they are living an ethical and moral life, the absence of guilt related to eating animal products, gaining a stronger identity as someone who is compassionate and/or seeing themselves as one who puts their compassion more fully into practice. Additionally, their beliefs and their actions, in terms of what they choose to eat, are more congruous and thus their diet acts to reduce cognitive dissonance. The thought “I love animals” was formerly dissonant with the thought “I eat animal who have been slaughtered for food.” Spiritually, they gained a feeling of being connected with all of nature, that they were involved in something greater than themselves, and being vegan, especially for those who are atheists, provided a moral framework that, while not religious, felt spiritual.

What elements are important in the behavior change process that enables one to adopt such a relatively drastic diet? Thirteen out of 15 transitioned from omnivorous diets to vegetarian diets to vegan diets, a gradual process that involved education, experimentation, mentoring and social support from other vegetarians and vegans. Age was an important factor as well. The average age at which the 13 individuals adopted a vegetarian diet was 25 with a range from nine years old to 51. Eleven out of 13 had

become vegetarian on or before their 35<sup>th</sup> birthday. The average (mean) time from vegetarian to vegan was 6.5 years with a range from one to twenty-three years. The median number of years was two. Seven out of thirteen vegans who transitioned from a vegetarian diet did so within two years or less while it took four participants 11 years or more. Of the entire sample of 15 vegans, ten became vegan during their 35<sup>th</sup> year or before. The average (mean) age upon which participants became vegan was 31 years with a range from 17 to 52.

Among the 15 vegans in this present study, the average age at which participants (n=7) became vegan for health reasons was 30 years of age while it was 22 for those motivated by animal rights reasons (n=7). According to The Vegan Research Panel survey (2003) of 1,201 vegan panel members, the age at which members became vegan were as follows: 13% under age 15, 50% ages 16-24, 25% ages 25-34, 8% ages 35-44, and 3% ages 45-54, and 1% ages 55+. In a quantitative survey, MacNair (1998) found that health concerns increased with age, while animal welfare concerns as an initial motivation decreased with age; "The lines intersected at about 50 years, with health becoming a more common motivation as people age" (MacNair, 2001, p. 65).

Seven cited health as a primary (or co-primary) reason for their change to a plant-based diet, while seven were motivated by animal welfare or animal rights issues. Sam did it for "fun." An additional motivation for becoming vegan, mentioned by three participants, was disgust at eating meat, due to connecting the meat to the animal.

Animal rights, vegetarian, and vegan literature and other media such as video, advertisements, and the Internet not only raised initial awareness, but also assisted in



their continuing education; a process that seemed to illuminate the advisability of transitioning from a vegetarian diet to a vegan diet. Learning also occurred as a result of meeting vegetarian or vegan friends, sometimes at pot luck dinners, educational events, or other vegetarian gatherings. Being exposed to the treatment animals face through video (*Faces of Death Volume I, Schwartz, 1981*), audio (a PETA album), or books (*Animal liberation, Diet for a new America*) was instrumental in this transformative process. With the images burned into their consciousness their commitment was secure.

Education about nutrition and the treatment of animals was sought for its own sake, but it was also frequently sought as a means of providing the ability to defend against attacks on their beliefs. Participants knew that their choice would come under scrutiny and so they chose to arm themselves by becoming informed. However, for those who became vegetarian due to health reasons learning about nutrition was insufficient. They would encounter those who brought up arguments against animal rights and so they would seek information to address those points. This also happened for those who chose to become vegetarian or vegan for the animals; they realized they had to be knowledgeable about nutrition to become a better advocate, and simply to defend their decision. This educational process added breadth and depth to their understanding and strengthened their commitment.

While there may have been one or more motivating reasons for their initial change, all stated that they continued to add new motivations as they learned more. For each of the seven who stated health as their primary motivation, along with Sam,

animal welfare/rights had become important, in some cases superceding all others. For example, Dwight, the former farmer turned activist, started as a closet vegetarian for health reasons, but today would not eat animals even if he learned that doing so was important for his health; he is vegan because of the animals. In terms of sustaining motivation, all agreed that multiple, reinforcing reasons make their choice to refrain from consuming animal products an unchangeable decision.

A change in identity was not found to play a role in behavior change process. Most did not think their self-image changed drastically as a result of their diet. They viewed themselves as compassionate and sensitive to human and animal suffering before their dietary makeover and this perception continued afterward. For many their self-image had been “wrapped up in animals” (Jeff) prior to changing their diet, but once they became more aware of how they contributed to animal suffering they understood being vegan was a functional way to put their compassion into action.

What was the transitional experience like (socially, intra-personally, and physically)? There were social ramifications to their decision to become vegan. Social difficulties and being part of a small minority in a dominant meat eating culture were the most cited and significant difficulties. These difficulties included tension at holiday meals, feeling left out at work parties, not being invited to social functions, encountering stereotypes, jokes, and criticism, loss of some friendships and a deterioration of some family relationships, arguments over their diet or beliefs related to their diet, being viewed as strange or as “the vegan”, and being unable to connect easily with omnivores.

Difficulties with family members were the most commonly mentioned social challenges participants faced. The practical aspect of feeding oneself was generally only problematic in the beginning. However, travel and living in an area with few vegan options at restaurants or grocery stores presented hurdles, but these were often overcome by planning ahead.

Family responses were generally more negative and difficult to navigate than those of friends, co-workers, or acquaintances. Responses varied considerably and included: encouragement, accommodation, acceptance, disapproval, rejection, and antagonism. More so in the beginning, vegans were mocked and thought of as “weird.” Insults ranged from simply not partaking of vegan foods prepared for family gatherings to siblings limiting vegan’s contact with their nieces and nephews, fearful of their influence.

Gradually most family members came to accept the participant’s choice to be vegan. Acceptance occurred once it was obvious to family members that their attempts to lure vegans back to eating meat were futile, years passed and the vegan’s conviction to vegan ideals and practices only grew stronger, and as the vegan became a respected author, speaker, or advocate. Also, acceptance or accommodation was a means for omnivorous family members to reduce conflicts or become more supportive, and/or they noticed the vegan family member was healthy as were their children and so their concerns diminished. Although most experienced a growing acceptance among non-vegetarian family members, being vegan was still sometimes a point of contention and

falling on different sides of the issue left many vegans feeling less connected with their omnivorous family members.

Many created their own sanctuary by creating their own vegan family. Four participants spoke of taking great comfort in being surrounded by their immediate family who share in their beliefs. For some, friends became more like family.

Friends were generally accepting of participant's transition to vegetarian and vegan diets. While these vegans still encounter some jokes, it is not something that greatly bothers the majority of vegans in this study. Several participants spoke of educating and influencing their friends to adopt plant-based diets or convincing them to choose animal products that involve less suffering, such as cage-free eggs. Nearly every participant spoke of how being vegan affected their choice of post-vegetarian friends. They tend to gravitate towards this new set of friends whom they share similar values with, in part because, as Allen says, he "can't get close with carnivores."

The majority maintained a "before" and "after" set of friends, but some, mostly socialized with vegetarian or vegan friends. It is not accurate to say that friendships were not affected by the choice to become vegan. However, friendships were affected less than relationships with family, co-workers, or acquaintances. For many it involved the acquisition of new friends while holding on to old friends, though feeling less of a connection with meat eating friends. For some, the change in their diet resulted in the complete loss of friends who were not accepting.

The respondents overwhelmingly, and unexpectedly, indicated they have received a very high level of support from their significant others. William, Linda, Greg,

Dwight, Jeff, and Wendy are all in marriages with a vegetarian or vegan spouse who is extremely supportive. For them it has strengthened their relationships and been a journey they have been able to enjoy and grow in together. For those who are single, diet is a “major issue” (Allen).

Although nearly each participant described some prejudiced encounters, most did not describe their experiences as involving a great deal of prejudice or discrimination. They did, however, mention being thought of as a “weirdo” and experiencing a number of stereotypes and social challenges. Most seem to have been able to navigate or ignore prejudiced encounters, and thus determined that prejudice is not a major issue for them. However, Allen was vocal about encountering stigma or prejudice-like treatment, and said he experiences it “all the time.” He and two others mentioned their concern that it can jeopardize careers.

On the other hand, Greg the physician and father of three vegans, believes that “we live in a special time and place” with many of the battles and victories having taken place years ago. He cites airline’s understanding of vegan fare as an example of the progress that’s been made. He also mentioned that schools are now more likely to view a child’s vegan diet as a diversity issue.

How do vegans explain why most people continue to eat animal products? Participants provided essentially mirror opposite answers to the question, *Is there something about your personality or how you approach the world that you think influenced your becoming vegan?*, and the question pertaining to why omnivores reject plant-based diets. Each participant thought there was something about them that

predisposed them to become vegan and that something, in most cases, was a compassionate and sensitive nature that encompassed caring for human and non-human animal suffering. Every participant gave an explanation that posited a positive trait or tendency. However, Shabazz was the only one who said that his tendency to be controlling, a trait generally considered to be a negative quality, may also have been a factor. Those who reject vegan diets are those who, according to the vegans, may have a lesser degree of the favorable qualities mentioned.

Dwight spoke of “following the facts” and Phillip always had a desire to understand the operations of the world. The common denominator among many was the desire to seek the facts. Jeff thinks vegans have an “ability to see outside of themselves” and possess “a certain kind of empathic quality” or “pro-social behavior” that gives them their “altruistic impulse”

They had little concern about whether they were conforming to societal expectations; they were, from an early age, confident in their decisions and did not depend on validation from others. Other participants struggled more with the social implications of their diet, but nevertheless made the choice. All participants were willing to sacrifice comfort foods and relationships in their desire to extricate themselves from a system built on animal oppression. In William’s words, they chose to “care.”

Twelve out of fifteen indicated that it required some degree of discipline, either for themselves, or others to maintain a vegan diet. They said it required more in the beginning, but that it also requires ongoing discipline, especially to avoid small amounts

of dairy and eggs in prepared foods; a sometimes difficult challenge when hunger pangs attempted to override ethics.

Bill said what is now true for each participant; he cared more about the animals and his convictions than the dissenting opinions of those around him. An ability to endure in the face of ridicule, isolation, and an unsupportive social and food environment are the hallmarks of being vegan. And, to get to this place they had to be willing to leave behind what they knew and the foods most of them enjoyed. The vegans believed that those who continue their omnivorous practices were not inclined to empathize as greatly with animal suffering, did not seek the truth, or were unwilling to weather social or dietary obstacles.

Two male and two female participants talked about the ridicule they or other vegans took due to the gendered nature of meat and their refusal to eat it. It was either stated or implied that a man is less of a man if he doesn't eat meat and a woman has little need for meat, due to her femininity.

The idea that individuals were too lazy to make a change was mentioned by two participants, and was insinuated by others. It was suggested that some individuals were reluctant to try "new things" or maybe just hadn't been exposed to different ways of eating, such as a vegetarian diet, or they just hadn't had a chance experience that led to new ways of thinking about food were hypothesized as contributing to the maintenance of a meat-centered diet.

The vegans in this study provided thoughtful and diverse explanations for other's rejection of vegetarian and vegan diets. Each participant had obviously given this

question a lot of thought over the years, some had written extensively on the topic. Most cited multiple reasons. Meat eaters might have developed a love for the taste of animal products or lack an appreciation for the abundance that is possible on a vegan diet. They may fear the “social rupture” that might result, be too selfish to change, use a variety of justifications to allow the practice to continue, not be able to overcome peer pressure, not have a supportive family, not be at the right time in their lives, be unwilling to accept that what they’ve been told or what they’ve been doing is wrong, or they simply did not want to offend other humans. They may have seen a practicing vegan, especially one who was motivated by animal rights and not concerned about health, eating an uninspired, unhealthy meal and may have thought this diet is not for them. Another reason was proffered by Mitch who said, like smokers, omnivores might think they’ll be the lucky ones and not get heart disease or cancer. The power and influence of advertisements and big business were also discussed.

Jeff believes there are a number of “ideological barriers” that act to block empathy such as “linguistic structures, social structures, political structures, cultural structures that would lead one away from” an empathetic response. Without these in place he believes vegetarianism would be more common. Jeff said “it’s irreducibly complex and probably singular from person-to-person and depends on issues.” Consistent with their belief that their compassionate nature played a role in their becoming vegan, many mentioned a lack of this trait as a cause for individual’s rejection of this dietary choice. During the interview Shabazz said eating meat just “isn’t nice.”



Jill and Bill remarked that some people are not exposed to the images or arguments, while others spoke of being indoctrinated in a culture in which meat eating is the norm so the practice is never questioned. Greg suggested that humans are “social animals” who look to others to see if what they are doing is right and since most people eat animals they conclude that it is okay or good to do so. Sam said vegan and vegetarian diets are still outside of the mainstream and when people hear of these diets they think, “That’s a certain kind of person who eats that kind of diet and I’m not that kind of person.”

What perceptions do participants hold in relation to their meat eating colleague’s knowledge and beliefs about vegan diets and food production related to animal products? The philosophy professors, registered dietitians, and medical doctors basically agreed that those in their field were not much different than the average American in terms of their eating habits and attitudes towards vegetarian and vegan diets, while animal activists and farmers were polar opposites with nearly all activist colleagues embracing veganism and all current farmers being strongly opposed to the idea, according to respondents.

The three philosophy professors believed their meat-eating colleagues should be “tortured” (Allen) by the issue, but they are not because philosophy professors face the same ideological barriers that confront the rest of society, some are ignorant of animal rights literature, and those who are informed are able to argue in defense of meat eating.

The colleagues of animal activists, numbering in the hundreds, were nearly all vegan. The three activists were proud of this fact. All three noted a difference in the dietary practices of those involved in animal rights versus animal welfarists, such as workers at various Humane Society shelters who tended to still consume animal products.

The three registered dietitians all differentiated between “old school” or “classically trained” dietitians and the younger generation of dietitians who, they believe, are more open to vegetarian and vegan diets. The younger generation were viewed as more open, knowledgeable, respectful, and possessing an interest in plant-based diets. Old-school dietitians were seen as being uninformed, feeling threatened, and still erroneously viewing vegetarian or vegan diets as dangerous.

The farmers all thought that their meat eating counterparts were too blinded by the financial incentives of their business to be open to learning about pro-animal, vegetarian, or vegan arguments. Many farmers, the group felt, remained intentionally ignorant, and bought into the communications promulgated by the animal agriculture industry and organizations such as the Farm Bureau that portray animal rights people as terrorists and lunatics. Each agreed that to be in the business of raising or slaughtering animals a person had to “harden themselves” and have “tunnel vision” (Wendy), and this necessitates remaining defensive about the rightness and necessity of meat.

The physician’s responses ranged from thinking most doctors are “very ignorant” about nutrition (Phillip) to believing they at least know the basics about vegan diets.

None was impressed with the nutrition training or nutrition knowledge of their meat eating peers.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The choice to be vegan is seen as reinforcing their beliefs and values; making their actions consistent with their beliefs. They tend to enjoy eating; the act of nourishing oneself holding gustatory, health-enhancing, psychological, spiritual, political, and ideological significance that can make each meal a powerful and satisfying experience. A meal is much more than a meal - it is a way to make a statement, lessen suffering, and feel at peace. Each meal is a step on an experiential journey that feels good and allows one to eat without a sense of guilt that they have contributed to a system that oppresses animals. It feels right.

Being vegan is itself an act of activism and those who adhere to this life choice generally expend a great deal of thought and effort to save animal lives. To greatly varying degrees, each participant is engaged in some form of animal activism. Their activism ranged from living as an exemplar of non-violence, talking to friends, family, acquaintances, or students they teach, creating documentaries, publishing books and articles, giving professional lectures, blogging on the Internet, organizing vegan pot luck dinners and educational events, to handing out flyers on college campuses. While the

hours spent on activism differed greatly and the effectiveness of what they were doing can be debated, each was doing something for the animals.

As was found in previous studies (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; MacNair, 2001), vegan's reasons for becoming vegan and remaining vegan were multifaceted. Additionally, the 15 vegan participants revealed similarities to Herzog's (1993) findings and Taylor's (2004) ethnographic work with animal sanctuary workers which revealed "a level of moral certainty drives and justifies many of the workers' actions and belief." (p. 317). Taylor found animal welfare workers to be similar in their "missionary zeal" to that of animal rights activists and potentially as "radical" in one respect – "their adherence to the overriding principle of being 'in it for the animals'" (p. 317). However, Taylor's conclusion that welfarists see the world divided into "two neat categories: good for the animals and bad for the animals" (p. 317), differs from my conclusion. While all 15 vegan participants are clearly *in it for the animals*, the majority expressed an ability to see shades of grey, admit the impossibility of perfection, and welcomed any help provided to animals, even if that meant people fell short of practicing veganism. Yet, despite being generally accepting of others who did not embrace veganism, they all believed in animal rights and the correctness of choosing a vegan diet.

How were their lives affected by their choice to become vegan? The vegans in this study were not the result of a random sample of vegans; they were chosen in large part due to their knowledge and contributions to benefit animals. Therefore, they may have experienced fewer difficulties than many vegans, protected by their professional success or the characteristics that helped make that success possible. Evidence of this is

that most said their experience has been better and involved less harassment than many of the other vegans they know, and most knew many vegans. They also described less prejudice than the 11 vegans I interviewed during the pilot study. It is important to emphasize that all had experienced prejudiced encounters, most had learned to negotiate relationships with omnivores in such a way to decrease this occurrence, and most were clear that their experience was far more socially pleasant than other vegans they knew. Therefore, this indicates that prejudice is still an issue for vegans, but with education, experience (including successes and failures), visibility management (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003), and selective engagement in discussions, prejudice and discrimination can be managed.

In terms of intrapersonal changes, the vegans displayed a tendency to see themselves as agents of change and people making a difference in the world. It can be inferred that self-image improved for the majority as a result of seeing oneself as a person who is working to make a difference and is succeeding. Being vegan transformed their lives, and it felt good, but it did not revolutionize their self-image. Most felt they had loved and cared for people and animals their entire lives; they were simply now more effective in that pursuit.

Why don't more people opt for vegetarian or vegan diets? Vegans tended to be continually surprised by omnivore's reluctance to adopt plant-based diets. People who are vegan have such a strong sense of certainty that they have chosen the logical, obvious, compassionate, and moral choice that it is perplexing that those in the meat eating majority don't flock to it in droves.

Research (Gustafsson & Sidenvall, 2002) has shown that learning to cook different foods does require effort that may lie beyond an individual's desires and this may partly explain the perception of some vegans in this study that omnivores were too lazy or unmotivated to change. Some vegans pointed out the gendered qualities of diet, and their experiences reinforce the concept that meat is perceived by the masses to have masculine qualities (Adams, 2000). For example, Kennedy, Stewart-Knox, Mitchell, and Thurnham (2004, p. 125) in a study of consumer perceptions of poultry meat among university students in the United Kingdom found, "Chicken meat was perceived as a 'feminine' food, and this view was expressed by both genders. Males in the U.K. described red meat as a more 'macho' food."

Whether someone has an adventurous approach to life or is really eccentric may play a role as well in trying vegetarian or vegan foods. Also important in one's food choices are convenience, which also may correspond to "laziness." Fast food restaurants, grocery stores, and society in general cater to meat-eaters and that built-in convenience may seem irresistible.

A number of participants essentially stated that many people don't seriously consider a vegan diet because they think that meat is essential for good health. Fortunately, studies continue to confirm the adequacy of vegan diets. A recent review of the health effects of vegetarian and vegan diets showed that vegetarians and vegans have a relatively low BMI and cholesterol levels, a moderately lower risk of death from ischemic heart disease, but little difference in other causes of mortality when compared to similar (i.e. similar smoking and exercise patterns) meat-eating individuals (Key,

Appleby, & Rosell, 2006). Although the vegans in this sample were generally not inclined toward nutritional hyperbole, some vegans or vegetarians might be disappointed the results were not more favorable. However, the omnivore, concerned about the nutrient adequacy of a meat-free diet, might be reassured that these diets support, not compromise health.

It was also suggested that some gluttonous omnivores might think they will be lucky and will be spared the fate of having heart disease or some other debilitating illness. The person may take a passive role in the health care system or look to God for relief. In fact, religion may play a role in American's approach to taking care of their health. A Gallup poll (2007) showed that 78% of Americans believe in God, and in a study titled, "The doctor as God's mechanic?" the authors found that 80% of 1,052 households surveyed in North Carolina believed "God acts through doctors to cure sickness" (Mansfield, Mitchell, & King, 2002, p. 403). If one believes "God will cure me" why engage in primary prevention efforts such as eating a health-promoting diet and exercise?

Some don't seek a cure at all. Those who develop chronic illness often adjust to their new condition by accepting it, tending not to view it as negatively as they did when they were healthy. This is the exact conclusion drawn by Kane (1996):

It appears that many people readjust their definitions of health to create new norms based on their underlying steady state. Many people who become seriously ill learn to accept a condition they previously thought unbearable. Thus what might be judged as healthy for a group of persons



with a chronic condition might be judged as ill for those unimpaired (p. 707).

Therefore, individuals who develop diabetes or heart disease may not seek to make significant changes. Instead they might think, “It’s not so bad – I’m still pretty healthy”; an assessment they would not likely have made years earlier, prior to developing disease, about someone with these same conditions.

Vegans choose not to conform in the highly social realm of eating, something that is done multiple times per day and often marks important moments in life. Why are vegans the exception while most Americans tend to follow in their meat eating parent’s footsteps?

Conformity tends to be reinforced and magnified from generation-to-generation. According to Henrich and Boyd (1998), “Conformist transmission implies that individuals possess a propensity to preferentially adopt the cultural traits that are most frequent in the population.... At the population level, conformist transmission causes more common traits to increase in frequency” (p. 219). So, with each succeeding generation the cultural practice becomes more solidified.

Fear of criticism and harassment, and a reaction to prejudice (Pinel, 2002; Stephan, & Stephan, 1996; Swim, & Stangor, 1998) may lead to the tendency towards conformity. However, the vegans in this study seemed highly capable of navigating the social terrain, and their skills had improved over the years. But for the uninitiated, overcoming the inertia of habit, tradition, and social pressures may seem overwhelming.

Although their study did not involve food choices, Epley and Gilovich's (1999) description of why people tend to go along with the group, has clear implications for those who choose (or do not choose) a vegan diet:

Conformity pressure often produces a strong feeling of internal conflict.

On one hand, a person may feel that the opinions, attitudes, or behaviors of others are incorrect or, even worse, immoral. On the other hand, nobody wants to be ostracized by their friends or peers. Deciding what to do often requires considerable conscious deliberation, as one sizes up the costs of caving in versus the pain of eating lunch alone for weeks on end (p. 578).

Individuals may also follow norms out of our sense of identification with the norm source, such as parents, teachers, or a particular ideology. Norm following may also derive from a sense of self-respect.

There are certain things we do not do and certain things we do, regardless of what other people are doing. Otherwise we would have feelings of disgust, revulsion, and self-contempt, not to mention shame and guilt. These 'don'ts' may range from eating 'dead animals' to...exploiting people in distress (Therborn, 2002, p. 869).

Azar (2004) states that "People internalize norms through three main channels: vertical transmission (from parents to children), oblique transmission (through socialization institutions such as secular and religious rituals, schools, and communications media), and horizontal transmission (from peer interactions)" (p. 50).

Taken as a group, vegan's answers reflected their early influence by these three channels and their ongoing challenge to swim against their current.

Coultas (2004) aptly captures the idea proffered by vegan physicians Greg and Phillip that people disregard vegan diets because they think that if it was a healthy diet those around them would be practicing it, and medical authorities would be promoting it widely.

If we are unsure of ourselves we are more likely to look around at what other people are doing and imitate the most common behavior. From this perspective the directive 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do' can be seen as an adaptive shortcut (p. 330).

Answering the question of why we often do what the mob does, Pendry and Carrick (2001) write:

We look to others to determine how to behave in situations which are new or alien to us, or in some way ambiguous, in times of crisis, or when we feel another person has more expertise in a situation.... Informational social influence seems to play a significant role in conformity effects. The second major reason we conform is because we need to be accepted.... Social groups evolve certain expectations about how group members should behave, and as a group member it is often easier to go along with such beliefs to avoid ridicule, punishment, or ostracism. We are social beings and in general, we crave social companionship and acceptance. This need pervades many social settings and can exert a strong effect upon our behavioral responses (p. 84).

For example, concern for the host's feelings, and not following Adams' (2003) advice to talk with the host well in advance of the event or bring a delicious vegan dish to pass, may lead some who believe in the rightness of forgoing meat to put aside their beliefs and join in the feast of meat eating. About this particular form of conformist behavior, philosophy professor Kristin Aronson (1996) asks, "Is it right to do as the Romans when in Rome? Does it matter what the Romans are doing? If the Romans re-created the Circus Maximus, would we attend?" (p. 184). She then recounts a tale of cultural accommodation in a foreign land told by her favorite anthropology professor at The Ohio State University which she believes illustrates the importance of staying true to one's ethical beliefs, even in the face of social pressure.

Her professor "told a class of squirming students that he had eaten live maggots to avoid grave offense. As a married man doing field work, he was offered not only food, but also women. He admitted eating the bugs, but declined to talk further."

How far do we go? Are we not allowed to keep our commitments?

Should we be accommodating abroad if it would hurt the feelings of the host if we refused a hospitable offer of sex ("as is customary") with his spouse? What if we were in a village where AIDS or ebola were endemic? What if refusing this "meat" was a greater insult than refusing the other? If it is a greater insult to refuse this "flesh," than the principle on which vegetarians sometimes act ("Do not hurt the feelings of the host") will be found wanting. The more committed we are to our vegetarianism, the more analogous unsought steak is to unsought sex. We could set an

example by standing up for our beliefs, even if we're sitting down at the table. (Aronson, 1996, p. 185)

Including the specific case of food choices, but extending beyond them, there is a generalized, competing belief system that seems to have gone undiagnosed: while it is important to be an individual, there is a simultaneous imperative to be a team player, for the sake of the group. People tend to deny being influenced by others and this may be due to their recognition that conformity is "culturally stigmatized." In countries that promote individualism as the U.S. does, "there is something heroic in resisting the influence of the group, and resistance is seen as a way of maintaining individual freedom. Conformity in contrast is often seen to reflect an uncritical, malleable mind" (Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006, p. 163).

Our historical narrative as independence fighters, westward explorers, and innovators is so ingrained in our self-concept that many Americans have the delusion that they have been imbued with non-conformist tendencies too; yet actions tell a different tale. Two examples that highlights the proclivity to conform is the tendency of Americans (and others) to follow the same religion as their parents (Dawkins, 2006), and to eat the same foods they grew up with.

Therborn (2002) explains that "normative action, following norms for their own sake" occurs for a variety of reasons:

At one pole we have subconscious habit or routine, whose origins of learning we may have lost, or at least we do not usually think of them.

Many of our most frequent, everyday actions are of this sort; our way of

speaking, our body care and comportment, our diet and our style of work. In other words, we do a number of things because we take them as the right thing to do, without thinking much, or anything about it (p. 868).

While our actions would seem to indicate otherwise, Americans purportedly value freedom, the ability to choose for ourselves and decide what path to take, and abhor conformity: “Conformity – typically cast as giving into collective pressure - is considered an undesirable tendency that directly violates core cultural ideals and threatens the self as a worthy individual....” (Kim & Markus, 1999. p. 786). Yet I disagree with the conclusion reached by Kim and Markus that the message to not conform is so strong that, ironically, “people follow the norm not to follow the norms” (p. 787). I believe most are unaware of the multitude of ways in which they conform and how often this occurs. It is interesting that in a society that values rugged individualism, conformity is often the norm, not the exception.

While about a third of the vegan participants seemed to be born non-conformists, the rest developed the fortitude to go against the grain and go with grains and vegetables, instead of meat. Food choices, regardless of what one chooses, affect identity. Beekman (2000) states:

The construction of a coherent self is a process of integrating one’s practices by a narrative of self-identity. All consumptive choices are not merely decisions about what to consume but also about whom to be.... Eating meat has become a leading thread in many contemporary

narratives of self-identity. To put it bluntly, consumers express their self-identities in their burger (p. 189).

Or, as with the vegans in this study, their positive self-concept is fostered by choosing a variety of foods that reflect their empathy, the value they place on health and environmental protection, and their primary goal of effecting a reduction in the suffering animals experience. The vegans experienced a deepening of their spirituality that can be directly attributed to synchronizing their behavior with their beliefs in this important domain.

Transformative learning played a major role in participants becoming vegan, and their continued personal and dietary evolution. Dirkx and Mezirow (2006) state transformative learning experiences “are usually associated with profound change in one’s cognitive, emotional, or spiritual way of being.” (p. 133) The 15 vegans in this study clearly experienced transformative learning. While they may have always been empathetic and becoming vegan did not change this characteristic, the experience of being vegan caused them to learn a lot about themselves and helped them to clearly differentiate who they are in the world. Deep learning most often occurred as a result of a disorienting dilemma, followed by formal and informal study, and introspection. This led to a greater sense of self and belief they have an important purpose in life, and this influenced their sense of being complete and at one with nature, if not with the majority of the human race. Two studies (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) discuss the spiritual component associated with transformative learning, though only a fraction of

participants in the first study discussed experienced a profound increase in their sense of spirituality compared to all 15 vegans in this study.

Curry-Stevens (2007) conducted a qualitative study that explored “how to assist the transformation of privileged learners on issues of race, class, and gender” (p. 33) and wrote about the spiritual changes that occurred in about 25% of the participants in her study (p. 40):

Deciding to work against relations of domination was understood as a spiritual conversion from an individual orientation to an interdependent connection with concerns for all of humanity. Although this is somewhat similar in construct to the ideological shift towards the common good and away from individualism, it really is speaking about a spiritual awakening that allows learners to expand their circle of compassion while at the same time feeling profoundly interconnected with others.

Kovan and Dirkx (2003) examined the lives of environmental activists and found their experience was similar to the concept of individuation proposed by Carl Jung; a process during which a person is “called awake”, becomes who they truly are, and “becomes ‘whole’, through recognition and integration of conscious and unconscious elements of oneself....of learning who one is apart from yet intimately interconnected with the collective in which one’s life is embedded.” (p. 103). These environmental activists, with an average of about 14 years paid experience working for non-profit organizations, viewed “their work as a calling or vocation”, found “periods of overwhelming stress became episodes of deep learning” which required “a turning



inward and learning about the self” which was “a process of juggling hope and despair” (p. 113). Their stories “represent a deeply personal journey, a kind of spiritual pilgrimage through which they come to see and understand deeper and different aspects of themselves” (p. 113). Although they experience moments of doubt, “they are sustained through a kind of faith in the deep meaning of the call and the passion they associate with it.”

The findings of Kovan and Dirkx (2003) are similar to the findings in this study, possibly due to the level of commitment and duration of time the environmental activists and the vegans have been at it - the environmental activists averaged about 17 years (when volunteer work is included) while the vegans averaged 20 years since their first dietary change. Ettling (2006) states, “we need new eyes and new hearts to truly address the ethical demands of education for transformation” (p. 66). These vegans appear to be leading the way, and their experience and thoughts may open other’s minds and hearts.

The Titanic provides a metaphor for how change occurred. It seems that for those who became vegan many had a jarring event or thought that awoke in them a desire for change, possibly due to their proximity to the event; they had witnessed the slaughter (iceberg) or somehow connected the meat to a once living animal. While for others, who continued to dance, nearly oblivious, they barely noticed a change was occurring and the transformation process was a gradual one. However, as one compartment (psychological defense) was breached another compartment was beginning to fill (with new information). At a certain critical moment, the ship (meat

eating) was pulled under. Those who survived marked this moment in their life as “before and after.” They were able to look back at the horror and understand their experience in a way that others could not.

Challenging assumptions lies at the heart of transformative learning and, in the case of vegans, avoiding the consumption of animal products flies in the face of the dominant speciesist ideology. The 15 vegans in this present study found they were up against a powerful ideology. As with the study by McDonald (1999), et al. these fifteen vegans “never became completely free of the normative ideology of speciesism” (p. 21). Although due to their passion, commitment, education, and years of experience these leaders are now admittedly less affected by this dominant ideology, they are still unable to extricate themselves from it. A metaphor illuminates their travel.

Imagine each vegan participant as they began their journey years ago, paddling upstream in a canoe. When they first began they sometimes looked and felt awkward, were unskilled, and moving forward took great effort. There were times on the journey when the wind bore down on their chest, the current sped up, and rapids jarred their vessel, as when family members or others attempted to impede their forward progress. There were also times when the environment changed, and the wind was at their back like an encouraging friend or mentor, and paddling was fun and easy. As the years passed they became experts at navigating the waters, regardless of the environment they found themselves in. They are so accomplished now that it appears moving through the stream that flows against them is effortless. Yet, they are still working,

however imperceptible it may appear to the uninitiated observer on the river bank who is frying their day's catch.

### **Conclusions**

It was obvious that every participant gained considerable benefit from being vegan. Health benefits mentioned were diverse and potentially life-saving. But greater than the physical benefits, participants found that being vegan imbues their life with meaning; each meal is significant, and symbolically and practically expresses their values. Though there were challenges, especially during the first months and years following their adoption of a vegetarian or vegan diet, they expressed unwavering certainty that this diet was right for them spiritually, psychologically, and physically. Their sense of sacrifice varied, depending in part on the social consequences of their choice, their appreciation for the taste of animal products, the availability of vegan foods at grocery stores and restaurants near their home, whether they were in a committed relationship or were looking for love, and whether they enjoyed preparing food.

These were not stereotypic, angry vegans; these vegans were happy. Which raises the question, what makes for a happy life? What makes life feel like it is worth living? Research conducted on happiness often focuses on hedonia and eudaimonia. Bauer, McAdams, and Pals (2008) describe the difference between the two

Hedonic well-being primarily involves pleasure. It tends to be more individualistic and based upon how good one feels about one's life....

Eudaimonic well-being also involves pleasure but emphasizes meaningfulness and growth – a more enduring sort of happiness (p. 82).

Phrased another way, in the hedonistic tradition “the focus is on happiness, generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect”, while in the eudaimonic tradition “the focus is on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 1). “This activity gives me my strongest feeling that this is who I really am” is an assessment item used to measure eudaimonia, while a hedonic item would be, “This activity gives me my greatest pleasure” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 4).

It appears “eudaimonic living is associated with a wide array of wellness outcomes,” includes “hedonic happiness” and is a “more stable and enduring type of happiness than that obtained when one’s goals are more directly hedonistic” (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 163). The vegans in this study appear to be happy and living well. Therefore, being vegan, it seems, has the potential to increase happiness. None of the vegans doubted whether the sacrifice was worth it. The “work” involved was a source of pleasure and meaning.

In a journal article titled, “Is the good life the easy life?” Scollon and King (2004) write:

In general, people want happy and meaningful lives. Dedication to difficult work may have its most important impact on the good life via its relation to pleasant affect. Apparently, happiness has the capacity to transform even onerous tasks into desirable and morally good occupations. Quiet simply, individuals who enjoy the difficult work in

which they are engaged are seen as leading desirable lives. Happy individuals who opt for the easy life, in contrast, take a less desirable and even morally questionable path (p. 157).

Although the interviews were nearly void of moralizing, each participant directly or indirectly communicated that they recognized food choices to be an area with moral implications. Furthermore, they gained a sense of peace knowing their choice acted, if only in a small way, to reduce the suffering of animals and lessen their ecological footprint. Some even recognized the human suffering that workers who kill animals all day long must endure, and appreciated not contributing to their suffering.

These fifteen vegans might be viewed by some as moral exemplars for their dietary commitment. However, a major motivation for pursuing this research and sharing their stories is to provide a different perspective on food choices by adding their voices to those of agribusiness, fast food chains, and family food traditions that dominant, not to hold these vegans up for their morality. Most of the vegans interviewed would agree that they are not morally superior as a result of their diet. However, they would also likely concur that when there is an option to avoid animal products, a choice most Americans have available to them, choosing to forgo the animal products is a choice with numerous moral implications, and is in fact a morally superior choice.

Those contemplating a dietary change might consider looking to these vegans for ideas, but then look into their own heart and mind to decide what choices to make. In a discussion of virtue ethics Merritt (2000) states, "The ideal life is supposed to be the life

of having the virtues, not the life of thinking about other people who have the virtues” and how they would act (p. 371). This is so because, “We don’t imagine that the exemplar in turn is using the method of reflection on an exemplar” and wondering how they would act; the exemplar is virtuous at their core and acts accordingly (p. 371). Therefore, readers should not question, “I wonder what Allen would do?” or anyone else, but instead, ask “Based upon all I know, what is right?” The vegans interviewed provided thoughtful views on food choices, but everyone must grapple with what is morally and practically right for them. Merritt (2000) concludes that “In the Aristotelean perspective, having the virtues is the way to be fully capable of getting it right, throughout one’s life, about what is truly worthwhile among objects of choice” (p. 378).

So why should someone choose to adopt a vegan diet? It feels good to know you are not taking part in a system that inflicts suffering and intentional murder upon sentient beings, that you are not asking anyone to do the physically and psychologically difficult job of killing animals for 40 or more hours per week so that you may eat the products of their labor and the animal’s unwilling sacrifice, and this choice brings a sense of peace and spirituality that is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve when one is still choosing to participate in the causation of the death of animals. This desirable state will be even more elusive when one’s meal means that humans will suffer and die.

Although the details regarding the contribution animal agriculture makes to environmental problems, including global warming, have been discussed previously, it is worth stressing that we are nearing a time when choosing to consume inefficiently produced calories may have even more dire consequences, even if someone doesn’t see

the causal connection. Presently food shortages contribute to the malnourishment of over three billion people in the world; 800 million of whom suffer from protein or calorie deficiency. Sixteen million deaths are attributed to iron deficiency and protein or calorie deficiency (Pimentel, et al., 2004) which makes predictions of an upturn in the consumption of animal products, an inefficiently produced class of calories, even more alarming. In developing countries meat consumption is expected to increase from 25.5 to 37 kg per person during the 30-year span from 2000 to 2030 while developed countries will see an increase from 88 to 100 kg. Dairy and egg consumption will increase at nearly the same rates (Steinfeld, 2004). The rate of suffering, death, and environmental destruction will increase as well.

Thompson (2001) notes, "Although sustainable agriculture is growing rapidly, as yet it represents only 4 to 8 percent of the food that is purchased in the U.S. and Canada" (p. 217). Furthermore, he believes, "the industrial model of agriculture embodies a form of cultural and political one-dimensionality that crushes human creativity, and promotes an unsatisfying portrayal of human potential, social purpose, and the meaning of the natural world" (p. 227).

Thompson (2000), in his critique of conventional farming, writes:

The kinds of agriculture that would emerge from a philosophically grounded alternative approach go well beyond the health and environmentally oriented provisions of organic agriculture. They would, at a minimum, demand that food consumers devote some degree of attention and deliberative thought to the production of their food (p. 227).

The more individuals learn about food production practices and their consequences, understand the numerous compelling reasons to boycott animal products, and engage in *deliberative thought*, the more likely they will come to see being vegan as a moral, practical, and necessary choice. The pursuit of education related to food choices, combined with contemplation, would likely lead to a radical paradigm shift, that would provide the lens to see veganism as an obvious choice.

When considering the fate of the animals, is being lacto-ovo vegetarian enough? Is it, at least in the short-term, better for the animals? Zamir (2004) argues the answer is “yes” to both questions.

Veganism is a much more difficult lifestyle than ovo-lacto vegetarianism and raises many more nutritional concerns, especially when one is making dietary decisions not only for oneself. Prudentially, animal welfare will lose many potential advocates if nothing less than highly demanding personal measures are made. Ergo: evaluated as a form of protest against existing conditions, tentative veganism is counterproductive to animal welfare (p. 376).

Zamir (2004) defines “tentative vegans” as those who “agree that eggs and dairy products can be produced without exploitation. Yet they cannot see how it can be justified to cooperate with such practices as a consumer given their present immoral nature” (p. 367).

Zamir (2004) seems to be aware of the slippery slope that is possible when he writes that demi-vegetarians (people who eat meat only rarely) may claim that



“vegetarianism demands too much and is counterproductive to their own milder form of protest” (p. 376). Zamir notes that both lacto-ovo vegetarians and vegans tend to agree that eating eggs is essentially moral and eating flesh is not. Zamir writes, “Demi-vegetarianism is thus perhaps strategically prudential, but like occasional molesting, it is an occasional participation in a morally wrong act and is hence unjustified, whereas vegetarians that eat eggs and dairy selectively participate in a move forward” (p. 376). Zamir believes “there are limits to what is required of vegetarians” and that “the best a moral vegetarian can do is to eat only products that come from free-roaming breeding” (p. 378).

Matheny and Chan (2005) believe “more consumers may be willing to become conscientious omnivores than are willing to become vegetarians” (p. 590) and thus, striving for the goal of moving the masses from omnivores to conscientious omnivores may produce greater welfare gains for animals than attempts at producing vegetarians. While this approach may seem more palatable to the masses and may, at least in the short-term, produce more benefit for the animals, this approach would not lead to a fundamentally different view of the supposed righteousness of using animal’s bodies for human purposes and this is an unacceptable long-term outcome for anyone who supports the animal right’s view. However, conscientious omnivorism may cause those individuals who would not immediately consider vegetarianism to learn about issues related to the treatment of factory farmed animals, environmental problems associated with agribusiness, and all the other issues discussed in this text and may cause some to become vegetarian or vegan at a later date.

Although there is risk in including a potentially transient, current event topic such as the NFL star quarterback Michael Vick dog fighting case in a document that I hope has some staying power, I will refer to it since it delineates the shift of thinking that must occur if there is to be a food revolution. Remarkably, the perceptual shift required is only a minor one – people already possess an affinity for many animals – but the result of that shift would be enormous.

During the early morning hours of August 18, 2007, I took a break from working on my dissertation and watched the sports highlights of the day on ESPNEWS. Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank was being interviewed about the day's legal proceedings in which two of Vick's co-defendants testified that Vick had helped hang and drown eight dogs who had not done well fighting at one of his homes, which was the center of a dog fighting ring. Mr. Blank said, "Could anything be more disturbing? Probably not."

I thought about the ten billion animals who are killed for food in the United States each year and thought he, and most Americans, are blind to their own contribution to animal cruelty. Inhumane slaughter occurs everyday, on a massive scale, and the majority of Americans participate in it. Animals raised and killed for food face a fate that is just as grisly as those dogs who fight to the death. Is taste more valuable than entertainment?

Two days later a friend told me about an Internet post by philosopher Gary Francione (2007) titled, *A note about Michael Vick*, in which he wrote, "the Vick case is rather dramatically demonstrating what I call our 'moral schizophrenia' about animals. That is, if one thing is clear, it is that we do not think clearly about our moral obligations

to animals.” Francione expanded upon the irrationality of criticizing one form of brutality while engaging in another:

There is something positively bizarre about condemning Michael Vick for using dogs in a hideous form of entertainment when 99% of us also use animals that are every bit as sentient as dogs in another hideous form of entertainment that is no more justifiable than fighting dogs: eating animals and animal products.

Francione thinks, “There is something bizarre about Reebok and Nike, which use leather in their shoes, suspending products endorsed by Vick. They’re not going to allow a guy who allegedly tortures dogs to endorse products that contain tortured cows.” Ironically, it wasn’t possible to watch the seemingly round-the-clock coverage of the Vick case on ESPN without seeing a commercial for *Dial For Men* (2007) body wash with a man rolling up his sleeves and saying “Here’s to your man-suit; your hair-covered, meat-powered man-suit.”

Francione discussed some of the disturbing details of the case and the similarities to standard production practices in animal agriculture: “According to reports, the authorities removed from Vick’s property a ‘rape stand’ used to hold dogs for mating. And ‘rape racks’ are used to hold cows for impregnation. When a dog is involved, we are troubled; when a cow is involved, we ignore it.”

Michael Vick may enjoy watching dogs fight; someone else may find that repulsive but see nothing wrong with eating an animal who has had a life as full of pain and suffering as the lives of the fighting dogs. It’s strange

that we regard the latter as morally different from, and superior to, the former. How removed from the screaming crowd around the dog pit is the laughing group around the summer steak barbecue?

Why is this case relevant? If Americans, who are capable of feeling intense compassion for dogs and cats, become aware of the similarities between animals raised for food and those who are raised for human companionship, the nature of farmed animal's lives and deaths, the adequacy of a vegan diet, the spiritual and psychological benefits of the diet, and the positive impact it has on the planet they may decide it is time to expand their circle of compassion to include cows, pigs, chickens, and other farmed animals. The vegans I have interviewed are mostly hopeful that despite the struggle, there is hope. They are convinced in the soundness of their decision, and they are hopeful that as more people become aware, society and our diets will be transformed. As William, the sensitive former farmer stated, individuals must be willing to step out of line, take the nose ring out, decide to care, and open their hearts. Radical change is possible – it is a matter of choosing it.

### **Limitations**

This study involved a small, non-random sample that was ethnically fairly homogeneous. There were only two participants who were in their twenties and none in their teens, yet many younger people are adopting a vegan diet. Participants were sought based upon their occupation (or former occupation) and this, along with their professional accomplishments and standing and their years of experience with

vegetarian and vegan diets, may greatly affect their present day experience as a vegan. The biases I brought to this project should be considered.

### **Recommendations**

Future research might focus on two distinct questions. How successful can brief interventions be in causing individuals to adopt a vegan diet? A survey could be designed to measure attitudes and practices related to animal product consumption, the treatment of farmed animals, self-concept related to animals (i.e. animal lover), environmental protection, support of safe and humane working conditions for employees, and non-violence. Participants would then be shown a video(s) detailing factory farming practices, the environmental implications of animal product consumption, philosophical arguments opposing the use of animals for food, nutritional information highlighting the benefits of vegan diets (and the potential pitfalls), and other pro-vegan arguments. Post-intervention testing, both immediately after the intervention and again weeks later would seek to explain what message was successful in creating change and why the message did not effect change in others.

Psychological defenses employed by omnivores might be explored in more detail. Future research might be directed towards investigating the impact of an educational intervention aimed at exposing the use of these psychological defense mechanisms to individuals who use them and determining whether increased awareness leads to a lessening of psychological defenses and a subsequent reduction in behaviors that are discrepant with one's beliefs regarding the use of nonhuman animals.

A second survey might be created to test attitudes about vegetarians, vegans, omnivores, and animal rights activists. While it is common for vegans to believe they have been the recipient of prejudice from omnivores, it would be interesting to assess whether omnivores would indicate that they hold prejudicial attitudes towards vegetarians, vegans, or animal rights activists. This study would provide a clearer picture of the degree to which prejudice exists among omnivores in relation to vegans and animal rights activists.

Additionally, the effect language has on omnivore's perception of issues related to vegan diets and animal rights would be informative. For example, in relation to diet, would an omnivore rate their desire for cooked cow flesh or the chest muscle of a male chicken as highly as they would filet mignon or broiled chicken breast? When offered cow flesh or chick peas, which would they prefer? Questions such as these, along with follow up questions could flesh out the role language plays in continuing or discontinuing the consumption of meat.

### **Implications**

Omnivores might consider all the factors that have influenced their dietary choices and reevaluate whether their current diet supports their physical, psychological, and spiritual health. If their present diet fails in any of these three domains they may want to consider moving in the direction of a plant-based diet. The omnivore who is planning on transitioning may want to record their weight, body fat percentage, cholesterol level, and other health measures to provide accurate before and after data.

Additionally, omnivores may want to note how they feel in these three important areas and include the social domain of health to help assess the changes that occur, if any.

Educators may see food choices as another area in which there is a need to be sensitive to diversity, and for which there is an opportunity to use language and practices which include rather than exclude. Additionally, nutrition is a topic which need not be limited to a discussion of calories, vitamins, minerals, fat, carbohydrates, and protein; it provides fertile ground to discuss philosophy, morality, environmental issues, our relationship with animals, politics, food safety, human diseases caused by the domestication of farmed animals, and the impact on animals. These are worthy academic issues, imbued with psychologically rich material, that challenge students to think more deeply and engage in critical thinking.

Policy makers, including politicians, should consider the health care and environmental implications of animal product production and the negative externalities associated with this industry (Barnard, Nicholson, & Howard, 1995). Reconsideration of subsidies that support animal agriculture and the assessment of taxes for foods laden with saturated fat are warranted.

Capitalism has no doubt allowed trade to flourish and great wealth to be generated and accumulated. However, as Ornish (1996) notes, it can be difficult to obtain research funding when all you are “selling” is lifestyle or nutrition therapy and there is no possibility of creating a new drug to market. Also, the influence of capitalism effects nutrition advice (Nestle, 2002) and impacts what the media reports. News outlets that depend on advertising revenue have an incentive to cater to companies that

spend millions of dollars enticing consumers to visit their restaurant or purchase their food product. There is a strong disincentive to air or publish ideas that attack the powerful animal agriculture industry and all the industries that are connected to it. Animal products are ubiquitous and are a “value added” food which enables producers to charge more for those products. When the bottom line is profits and losses, it is the animals who lose. However, business and compassion are not mutually exclusive. An ecofeminist approach to capitalism “embraces the possibility that humans can use self-determination to bring about a planet pervaded on all levels with moral and psychological excellence” and not become “insatiable egocentric consumers.” (Crittenden, 2000, p. 61)

Parents may want to question why consuming animal products is the default mode of feeding their children. Since the taking of life is a serious matter and involves important moral decisions which young children are incapable of making, parents might allow their children to consume animal products only after their twelfth or fourteenth birthday or later. Just as children are not seen fit to consent to sex, enter the military, or drive an automobile they might be prohibited from eating animals slaughtered for their consumption. Although this is a radical idea which will most likely not be widely adopted, this suggestion could cause individuals to question the belief that vegetarians or vegans should feed their children meat until they are old enough to decide for themselves.

Vegans enjoy a diet that satisfies their gustatory desires and provides health advantages and psychological satiety. While a vegan diet has numerous benefits,



anyone considering this diet should take seriously the relationship issues that often surface as a direct result of this choice. For the vegan's sake, those they care about, and the animals, vegans should inform themselves about how to navigate an environment that is largely unsupportive of this decision (Adams, 2003) while also attempting to become the most effective advocate (Ball, 2004), which will help the animals, and begin to shape the world into the kind of world they want to live in.

Animals stand to benefit the most from the dissemination of the ideas contained within this document. Unfortunately, this will take time and hundreds of billions of animals will live mostly miserable lives and die violent deaths before widespread changes occur. Yet there is something heroic about saving even one life, and on that measure this movement and the vegans in this study are making a difference.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

Participants will be asked to complete a form detailing demographic information:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Employment status / occupation
5. Degrees completed / education level
6. Ethnicity
7. Number of months/years as a vegetarian/vegan?
8. Did you grow up in an urban, suburban, or rural environment?
9. Do you eat any food with dairy products?
10. Do you eat any food with chicken or fish products?
11. Do you eat any food with any bee (honey) products?
12. Do purchase any non-food products that contain animal products, such as leather belts, shoes, purses, or other items?

#### Interview Questions:

1. What is it like to be vegan? Please share your thoughts and experiences with me.
2. Describe your experiences with food at home while growing – what was served? What was that like? Did your family eat meat? Was meat a central component of dinner?
3. Did you enjoy the taste of foods that contained meat?
4. Please describe the process that led you to adopt a vegan diet (motivation, influences, defining moments).
5. Describe any difficulties you encountered after adopting a vegan diet (health, body weight, comments, food choices, etc.).
6. Describe any positive aspects to adopting a vegan diet.
7. Specifically address the reaction your family had to your adopting a (vegetarian, then) vegan diet. How has being vegan affected your family relationships?
8. Specifically address the reaction your friends had to your adopting a (vegetarian, then) vegan diet. How has being vegan affected your relationship with friends?



9. Specifically address the reaction your significant other had to your adopting a (vegetarian, then) vegan diet and/or - how has being vegan affected your dating/significant other relationships?
10. Describe any prejudice/stigma/social difficulties you've experienced (if any) due to being vegan.
11. How (if at all) has your self-image changed since adopting a vegan diet?
12. Do you think it requires discipline to maintain a vegan diet?
13. Is there something about your personality or how you approach the world that you think influenced your becoming vegan?
14. Many people are exposed to vegetarian or vegan diets, yet they do not adopt them – what do you think explains this?
15. Do you know anyone else who is vegan? How would you compare what you know about their experience to yours?
16. What are your thoughts about meat eating colleague's knowledge, practices, and beliefs related to vegetarian and vegan diets?
17. If someone fails to thrive on a vegetarian or vegan diet – what do you think is the most likely explanation?