

Societies 2014, 4, 623–639; doi:10.3390/soc4040623

OPEN ACCESS

societies

ISSN 2075-4698

www.mdpi.com/journal/societies

Article

Vegan Killjoys at the Table—Contesting Happiness and Negotiating Relationships with Food Practices

Richard Twine

Centre for Human Animal Studies (CfHAS) & Department of Social Sciences, Edge Hill University, St. Helens Road, Ormskirk L39 4QP, UK; E-Mail: richard.twine@edgehill.ac.uk; Tel: +44-(0)-1695-584623

External Editors: Chloe Taylor, Kelly Struthers-Montford and Bryan Hogeveen

Received: 4 September 2014; in revised form: 31 October 2014 / Accepted: 3 November 2014 /

Published: 5 November 2014

Abstract: This article reports upon research on vegan transition, which I bring into dialogue with Sara Ahmed’s figure of the killjoy. Ahmed’s work on affect and the feminist killjoy is found to be apt for considering contemporary vegans and their transgression of normative scripts of happiness and commensality in a dominant meat and dairy consuming culture. The decentring of joy and happiness is also found to be integral to the critical deconstructive work of the vegan killjoy. Ahmed’s ideas further complement the frame of practice theory that I draw upon to understand the process of transition especially in the sense of opposing the meanings of dominant practices. Although food and veganism are not commented upon by Ahmed, the vegan subject constitutes, I argue, a potent further example of what she terms an “affect alien” who must willfully struggle against a dominant affective order and community. Drawing upon interviews with 40 vegans based in the UK, I illustrate examples of contestation and negotiation by vegans and those close to them. The article finds in the figure of the killjoy not only a frame by which to partly understand the negotiation of relationships between vegans and non-vegans but also an opportunity for further intersectional labour between veganism and feminism.

Keywords: feminism; food relationships; killjoy; happiness; practice theory; Sara Ahmed; veganism; climate change

1. Introduction

“To be ‘estranged from’ can be what enables a ‘consciousness of’. This is why being a killjoy can be a knowledge project, a world-making project.”—Sara Ahmed [1]

After spending some time researching specific protective technoscientific responses to the various ways in which the hegemony of meat culture is being contested—such as attempts to breed farmed animals with less environmental impact [2]—I switched focus to examine more closely food *consumption* practices and their capacity for change [3]. For three reasons this shift has begun by examining veganism. Firstly there is a scientific argument that veganism can constitute the lowest carbon eating practice [4–6] and there is thus a duty to investigate it further, especially given the urgency of climate change. Secondly there is a social-scientific interest in examining minority practices, such as veganism that contest habitual social norms. Thirdly, as a sociologist constructed in part out of intersectional investments and narratives of ecofeminism and critical animal studies (CAS) I see vegan practice as part of a broader politics of resistance against routinized norms of commodification and violence. It might not be the only alimentary practice worth researching within the broader context of climate change but it is clearly deserving of sociological focus.

This is all very well except when approaching veganism we are confronted, still, with something of a chasm of unintelligibility. In Western countries in recent years we have witnessed a chorus of ecological and health based media aired calls for *reductions* in meat consumption, a compromise discourse without any signposts and a frame, which acts to arguably exclude veganism. As a potential sustainable transition vegan eating represents a practice that on the one hand may be available to significant populations yet is also hindered by the dominance of ‘meat culture’, what we might call omnivorously normative practices.

In this article I draw upon the insightful work of Sara Ahmed to read this dominance in terms of the relationship she identifies between affect and social norms.¹ Her positioning of feminists (diversely construed) as killjoys resistant to a dominant affective community has an abundant resonance with that of vegans in contemporary culture. Writing in his blog “Critical Animal” fellow CAS scholar James Stanescu has also independently seen this resonance [9], which, I think, rather than representing a difficult conceptual move says more about Ahmed being under-read in CAS. Here my aim is to bring her ideas into contact with empirical research I have recently carried out with 40 vegans based in the UK. I want to consider *via* their narratives the extent to which we might also think of vegans as occupying a killjoy position. This research identifies for most participants that the relationship dimensions of becoming vegan constituted the most difficult part of transition. Bringing Ahmed’s work into the question of vegan transition allows for a better understanding of both the dominance of meat culture and the lack of intelligibility that vegans often encounter. If the estranged killjoy is also involved in world-making, in producing new meaning and practice, then my research also shows, I think, how forms of negotiation are themselves implicated in the re-doing of affective community and thus the nascent normalisation of veganism.

¹ For a comprehensive overview of her recent relevant work see [7] and [8].

2. Feminists (and Vegans?) at the Table

In articulating her position as a feminist killjoy Ahmed recounts a personal narrative of sitting around the family table. The table as she acknowledges has symbolic importance to her story and early feelings of tension at conversations found problematic. Tables are part of the materiality of family, of community. They are also where food is typically eaten and shared. This commensality, this practice is part of doing family [10]. For all the emphasis on the table food is absent from Ahmed's narrative. Nevertheless the emphasis on the table, and conversations inclusive of sexism one assumes, illustrates well how Ahmed, as apprentice killjoy, punctured the performance of family by speaking out. She draws upon this experience to reflect upon what is going on affectively in such situations arguing that killjoy discursive practices act to destabilize an assumed shared sense of happiness. The feminist killjoy "makes sense if we place her in the context of feminist critiques of happiness, of how happiness is used to justify social norms as social goods" [1]. We might think of the assumed happiness of traditional gender performance, the assumed order of the patriarchal heteronormative family. Specifically Ahmed evokes feminist critiques of the "happy housewife" as a docile caricature of complementary patriarchal society. Thinking intersectionally Ahmed also discusses anti-racist critiques of the "happy slave" and queer critiques of heterosexual domestic bliss. This is to highlight that oppositional politics advance through a contestation of happiness and that this has consequence for how others perceive activists and how activists experience themselves. She phrases it as follows: "To be willing to go against a social order, which is protected as a moral order, a happiness order, is to be willing to cause unhappiness, even if unhappiness is not your cause" [1]. This is reminiscent of sociological pedagogy when there is often a need to take students into an uncomfortable space to reflect upon social norms and practices. In the understanding of happiness that Ahmed puts forward it is an affect that is political and may evoke denial and control.

Moreover, the killjoy in contesting a specific happiness order deals in other types of feeling. In willfully speaking up the killjoy may engender anxiety, discomfort, guilt, and risks exclusion for doing so. The order of happiness is contested as reciprocity is disrupted [1]. The killjoy in effect refuses membership of the normative affective community. Ahmed points out that it is feminists themselves who are attributed as the origin of bad feeling [11] (p. 581) rather than normative sexism. So at the micro level there is already quickly dispensed punishment for challenging the happiness order. The feminist is a troublemaker, is joyless [1] and from here it is not too far to the broader array of negative stereotypes typically directed toward feminists—ugliness, humourlessness and so on. Feminists and other killjoys she terms "affect aliens" [11] (p. 581) are strangers to the dominant happiness order. What Ahmed helps to make clear is a process by which even at the point of being challenged specific hegemonies and their practitioners try to consolidate and limit damage by making the killjoy herself the object of bad feeling. She writes, "To be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty" [11] (p. 591). This might also partly explain why so few people are enrolled by overtly political practice since it seems to carry with it an affective and alienating risk. However in their struggles over the definition of happiness political killjoys have other joys in mind and I will return to their creative agency later.

In spite of Ahmed's exclusion of food from her discussion and her narrow humanist reading of intersectionality vegans will see themselves in her narrative. I contend that vegans constitute a further

“willful subject”, in her words, in such a way as to add to her theoretical reflections on affect and happiness. Perhaps ever clearer in the case of vegans, the table is materially and symbolically central for those reiterated performances, disruptions, inquisitions around counter normative eating practices, around counter hegemonic ways of valuing other animals. I want to consider then before moving to empirical examples, the notion that vegans are also killjoys in Ahmed’s sense and moreover, where these practices and politics have historically intersected (e.g., [12]) that vegan-feminists constitute an especially poignant killjoy position.

Arguably the table, the restaurant and the presence of food derived from animals invite a more obvious social conflict. Gendered food practices notwithstanding, the table is a more obvious site for the vegan killjoy than the feminist killjoy.² In contrast to feminism, it is easy for vegan performance to be outed, not just in the refusal of “omnivorous happiness” but, in the need to actively refuse offerings of non-vegan food. The intention is not to oppose the two since from one perspective veganism is also undermining of hegemonic masculinity and allied to feminism. However the overt presence of animals especially in the form of “meat” invites disruption of the everyday “normality” of animal consumption. There is a perceptual politics here that is part of the affective politics. For in the omnivorously normative happiness order it is precisely the point that animal products and the violence that is inherent to their journey there do not constitute an overt presence at the dinner table. Instead animals are what Carol J. Adams has referred to as an “absent referent” at the table [13] (p. 40) rendered invisible through language and material fragmentation. The killjoy does not have much time for commodity fetishism. The vegan contests this process, re-imagines the animal, recalls the relational violence and, sometimes, speaks out. Politeness constitutes another social norm that is the enemy of the killjoy. Sometimes a vegan will preserve the “happiness” exactly by deciding not to speak out. Like the feminist the vegan might feel that “they are the problem” and do not want to speak, to “ruin the atmosphere” [1] as Ahmed phrases it. Like the feminist, the vegan is also assigned to a category of difficulty and sometimes will want to avoid being outed, not to be difficult, or to cause a fuss. The vegan does not even have to purposively engage, by arguing against someone’s animal consumption, to be a killjoy. Often the known presence of a vegan will be enough to trouble the prevailing happiness order and vegans soon become aware of the repetitive scripts that omnivores call upon in such situations (“why are you vegan?”, “what do you eat?”, “I could never do it” and so on).

In an interesting parallel to Ahmed’s narrative, the vegan also encounters discourses of the happy oppressed [9]. Most obviously the figure of the “happy cow”, or “happy meat” but generally also the view that animals are treated “humanely” and are “happy”. In this case, the “happiness” of farmed animals is linked by producers to more productive animals and the notion of “better welfare” [14]. In all cases the construction of the “happy oppressed” helps assuage discomforting affect from those holding power in a particular relationship. In the lively debates over “welfare-friendly meat” animal activists play killjoy to the happiness order undermining its very possibility and questioning the co-existence of “happiness” with violence. Like the feminist, vegans risk having unhappiness projected back on to themselves. Perhaps they “can’t take a joke”, are overly dour and serious. Furthermore, the vegan body, like the body of the feminist, becomes a potential target of devaluation. It is noticeable in the discursive practices of vegans that potential accusations of gauntness, paleness or skinniness have

² For a brief discussion of the “embattled conversations” of both feminists and vegetarians, see Adams [13] (p. 87).

shaped a countermove in the portrayal of vegan fitness, health, vitality and strength. For some there is a concern that this might move veganism toward its own potentially oppressive form of body normalization (see [15]) and risk detracting from animal ethics or ecological reasons for veganism. It is however an understandable response to negative stereotypes of vegan embodiment.

3. Researching Vegan Practice

After outlining this affinity and applicability of Ahmed's conceptualization to veganism I now move to examine this further within the context of research I have carried out with UK-based vegans. In this section I will also briefly introduce practice theory as an approach that I call upon to better understand both transitions to veganism and the reproduction of omnivorous food norms. This research is premised upon the assertion that engaging with vegans is vital to improving our understanding of vegan transition. Listening to vegans talk about their narratives of transition better locates the practice within the ethical, political and relational complexity of everyday life providing lived knowledge that might not emerge from abstract philosophical discussion. This research is intended to contribute to the nascent scholarly consideration of the everyday lived realities of vegan practice (e.g., [16,17]). I pay special attention to the recursivity between vegan eating practice and social relationships. For example, how do friends and family respond when one first becomes vegan? What types of social negotiation take place both by vegans and those in their immediate social life? I am also interested in how these specific modes of negotiation might *themselves* be active in the normalisation of the practice.

Treating practices rather than individuals or institutions as the primary unit of enquiry, considering how they consolidate and change is the focus of practice theory. Here I follow the conceptualization by Shove *et al.* [18] (p. 14) of practices comprised of three elements: *competency*, *materials* and *meaning*. Competency refers to skills and know-how, materiality to the body and broad array of objects, technologies and infrastructure that comprise a practice, and meanings refer to ideas, aspirations, norms and symbolic meanings.

This is a simplification of previous definitions, e.g., [19] (p. 249) and perpetuates the practice theory ontological shift that elements are "qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual" [19] (p. 250). In this posthumanist inflection people are reframed as "carriers" of practices [18]. Shove *et al.* argue that "practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when *connections* between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken" [18] (pp. 14–15, original emphasis). This outline of the elements of practice is important because it provides initially a way of potentially thinking about how new practices surface and grow, and how old practices either remain in place or might come to gradually erode. Moreover the dynamism of these connections between elements of a practice is importantly played out through our social relationships and networks that bring us into proximity with new meanings, materials and competences. Equally the sort of "happiness orders" that Ahmed refers to are as important for stabilizing pre-existing meanings. Introducing a focus here on the relationship context of vegan transition is, I contend, especially important in thinking about the capacity of the practice to break through the dominance of meat culture. Relating this to the notion of the killjoy underlines the affective context of contesting meaning. Ahmed asserts that the killjoy is involved in creatively making new meanings [1] and new forms of happiness. If we embed this assertion within practice theory we could assume that these new

forms of meanings might have the most success of social reproduction when new ways of “doing happiness” are performed in close linkage to forms of materiality and competences.

4. Method

Between June and December 2013 forty vegans in three UK cities—Manchester (14), Glasgow (14) and Lancaster (12) were interviewed. After research ethics approval was obtained, participants were recruited initially through an advert in the magazine of the Vegan Society, through local vegan organisations and word of mouth. Once a certain momentum was reached the sample was simple to obtain *via* the snowball technique. The interviews were semi-structured and open but were guided by three main questions areas. First participants were asked to narrate their own story of transition to veganism. Secondly, participants were asked about their everyday doing of veganism, which was approached by asking questions about the materials, competences and meanings of the practice; as well as participant’s involvement in forms of vegan social organisation. Finally, participants were asked a set of questions about transition and relationships. It is this latter area that I focus upon here. Interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes and took place either at the participant’s home, my home, in my office or in a vegan friendly cafe.

Participants were aged between 18 and 72 years, with the average age 36.8 years. Twenty-nine participants (73%) were female. Thirty-nine participants (97%) were self-defined white British, one was self-defined mixed race British. Thirty-one participants (77%) either had a first degree or were studying for one. Although this study makes no pretence toward a representative sample and is instead focussed upon what can be learnt from rich in-depth accounts, the sample did reflect common assumptions about the broader vegan community as disproportionately female, educated and white. Clearly if only a narrow demographic is disposed toward and captured by the practice then that may be instructive for examining the meanings of veganism and those of animal consuming practices. Such analyses can potentially inform strategies of vegan mainstreaming.

The areas of interview data I shall focus upon here were in response to questions asked around social relationships and vegan transition. These included asking participants “Can you remember what sort of reactions you experienced from those close to you?”, “Did any friends or family disapprove of you becoming vegan?”, “Does your veganism become a problem when you eat with your family?” and “Has your veganism been a problem with partners or close relationships?”. In some cases answers to these questions arose earlier in the interview when participants were narrating their transition stories. In presenting results from this study here I focus only upon two related themes that emerged from the data. Firstly, initial reactions from friends and family and, secondly, modes of negotiation between vegans and omnivores.

5. Becoming Vegan in a Normatively Omnivorous Meat Culture

Veganism constitutes a direct challenge to the dominant affective community that celebrates the pleasure of consuming animals. It questions the assumption of shared happiness around such consumption raising the prospect of a cruel commensality. This implicit or explicit questioning shapes much of the troubled interaction between vegans and omnivores. To have this happiness reunited with its inherent violence through the killjoy discourse or mere presence of the vegan invites a troubled

self-conception for the omnivore. It is unsurprising that omnivores indulge in defensive discursive practices with the aim of consolidating the normative meanings of animal consumption, human/animal hierarchy and the hegemony of their affective community. We can note such defence of practice in the initial reactions to those in my sample upon their initial decision to become vegan.

A majority of participants in this study reported negative reactions from friends and family in their decision to become vegan. Thirty-three of forty participants (82.5%) reported at least some examples of negative reaction. This tended to dissipate over time, a point that I shall return to. Some had a support base of vegan friends and a smaller number came from families with some history of vegan or vegetarian practice. A small minority went vegan with friends, which resulted in a more supported transition. However in the majority negative response we can see a lack of support for the positive meanings of veganism and a heightened need for social and emotional competency for those becoming vegan. This negative response materialised in various ways, which I now review. The following represent articulations from participants of responses from friends and family to vegan transition. Only a couple of participants had transitioned directly from omnivore to vegan so some answers also include discussion about the first transition to vegetarianism. All names are pseudonyms.

“I think with family there’s more confusion, it had taken them a long time to understand what vegetarianism was and my sister isn’t happy because the only thing that she would ever cook is cheese and onion pie and now she’s like, what can I cook you?”—Laura

“...over the years I’ve had a lot of mickey taking.”—Rebecca

“...there were a couple of occasions early on where I didn’t get invited to family events because they said, well we only will have meat, so you can’t come.”—Fiona

“You know what is interesting; I didn’t actually get an honest response from my best friend. She just kind of went, oh right ok. And I could tell she wasn’t happy and she said, oh well you be careful what you’re eating sort of thing and then it was a bit of a closed book and she didn’t really want to talk about it and she didn’t want to know why and I found out that she’d gone straight to my wife with all of her concerns and all of her questions and all of her, oh my God, what the heck is Natalie doing and all of this business.”—Natalie

“I remember my gran saying, cos obviously I went vegetarian, and I wasn’t seeing her very often because I was away at university and she said, oh so you’ll only eat egg sandwiches, and now you won’t even eat the egg sandwich, ‘what am I going to put in your sandwich?’”—Kate

“Family’s not very supportive of it because none of them are even vegetarians so I don’t think they really understand...My mum just thinks I’m too extreme.”—Bridget

“My mother was horrified, my nana was horrified and a couple of my friends were horrified and my mum just refused to cook for me. She’s probably cooked for me about four times in the last five years.”—Janet

“My mum would cook, but because she’s vegetarian and my dad eats meat so she told me straight out that she wasn’t prepared to let me be vegan while I was in the house cos it would mean cooking three separate meals and she didn’t want to lose that family time of having a sit down meal together...initially they said, no you’re not being vegan while I was living there and then when I moved out they didn’t have a choice but, not very supportive, not happy.”—Annie

“Friends, well a couple were just like why, just why? Some I think, if ever I talked about it or whatever I think they would feel threatened, as though, oh I don’t know how to explain it. Like it was an attack on them if I was to, like a personal attack if I was to talk about it.”
—Carrie

“My mum said ‘don’t forget we do need to eat meat, to get vitamins.’”—Don

“When I went veggie my parents went completely up the wall about it. Went I went vegan three years ago, my girlfriend at the time she was completely anti it. That played a role in the relationship not lasting.”—Patrick

“Family totally took the mickey and they were actually quite nasty at times. And they still say stuff like “just have a steak, just have a steak”. They are not very sensitive at all. For a while they thought it was some kind of hipster thing that I was doing, some sort of trend. And they thought ‘oh, you’ll be over it in a week’.”—Bob

“I don’t recall getting massively positive responses. Certainly my husband at the time was just like ‘Oh no, no, no, no, no, no’ (laughs), to the point where he was just like ‘please just be vegetarian’. Whereas if I’d said I was going to be vegetarian, he would have been like ‘no, no, no, no, no’. My mum was quite concerned when I eventually told her.”—Joanna

“My granny even after 5 years thinks I’m insane, because she was brought up on this traditional diet. It’s not really within her sphere of thought why would you want to live without eating meat.”—Tanya

“My dad told me I was being ridiculous.”—Diane

“My dad said ‘you’re spoiling yourself, why are you denying yourself all these things?’”
—Mary

“My mum was probably the person who had the biggest over reaction ever. She was really concerned about my health. She was really worried that I was going to waste away.”
—Nicola

“My best mate told me that he’d never cook for me again, that I was being really ridiculous, over the top, couldn’t believe that I was doing it. I’d never be invited to dinner parties again. And just went mental about it. He just thought it was like massively extreme.” —Emily

“Not disapproving, but not understanding. Their (friends) understanding of it is, we’re meant to eat meat.”—Anthony

“Most people were quite negative, constantly asking why and that was just annoying after so many times... Mostly school friends were shocked, they used to shove ham sandwiches in my face which was just odd.”—Alexandra

These extracts represent much of the negative social response that the majority of participants experienced when becoming vegan. It is potentially significant that so many of the participants did encounter this kind of response. If this is typical for people becoming vegan or trying to become vegan the interdependency between the practice and relationships could be an especially important site for examining the tension between meat culture and a counter hegemonic practice like veganism. It is worth highlighting that here we see articulations of responses by people vegans are already in relation with—friends and relatives. Although we might think of a stark cultural opposition between dominant omnivorous practice and minority vegan practice, when we begin to research within the context of relationships the situation is more nuanced and complicated. Although tensions and conflict arise pre-existing relationships are often important and rather than simply falling apart are more likely to enter a process of negotiation as people become vegan. Communities of affect here are fractured, overlapping and co-existent. Furthermore there is a possible tension within some of the responses that express concern over the healthiness of veganism. It is worth reflecting upon whether these can be seen as genuine expressions of care or whether they might be better seen as protective responses for the pre-existing happiness order and omnivorous normativity.

Framed through a practice theory lens that sees strong connections between competences, materials and meanings as necessary for the reproduction of practice we can note in this sample a distinct lack of know-how of vegan practice (nutritional knowledge, knowledge of, and how to cook, vegan meals) amongst the friends and family of those who themselves were trying to become competent in the everyday doing of veganism. A lack of competency in those close to vegans in turn impacts upon the availability of the right materialities (vegan foodstuffs and knowing where to buy them) especially where responsibilities in the home for shopping and cooking are shared with omnivores. Furthermore responses from significant others that devalue vegan practice introduce a sense of failed reciprocity around the positive meanings of veganism that have been important in drawing people to the practice. Above we note in people a lack of understanding and confusion and I would suggest this can refer to all three elements in the practice but certainly to a lack of empathy over the affective lure and meaningfulness of performing veganism. It is not difficult to see how social environments could mitigate against the uptake of vegan practitioners. In effect this introduces the need for a form of additional competency that involves skills of emotional and social negotiation that would be less necessary in a more supporting environment.

Furthermore those responses above can be organised thematically around the omnivore's defensiveness and a construction of the vegan as awkward. Awkwardness is a quality of the killjoy. They are constructed as awkward and as producing practical and affective awkwardness. Vegans introduce a sense of embodied questioning, a discomfort to the habitual normativity of meat culture. In parallel to this there is a response that could be read as arising out of defensiveness over the implicit questioning of animal consuming practices. In a sense the violence that meat culture more or less successfully sequesters to the spatial and class margins of society is brought back into uncomfortable

proximity by the presence of the vegan. Meat/dairy practitioners then work to defend their practice through uses of humour, “mickey taking”, and in labelling vegan practice negatively as “extreme” as in some of the extracts above. It is also arguably possible to place within this theme of defensiveness particular discursive strategies of naturalisation that seek to consolidate the normativity of meat culture. These are sociologically interesting moments because the taken for granted practice of meat/dairy consumption is forced to bring what are often its unreflected meanings into play. We can see this above in Don’s mother’s view that “we do need to eat meat, to get vitamins” and in the view of Anthony’s friend that “we’re meant to eat meat”. These are moments in which animal consuming practices rehearse and reproduce their meanings in competitive tension with vegan practice. Such statements evoke an essentialism of the human and place meat culture as part of an imagined fixed natural order rather than a political, economic and social norm. Less blatant but related to these forms are expressed concerns for health received from friends and relatives. This is not to deny genuine relations of care and the importance of nutritional competency for vegans and also for the wider population. Naturalisation strategies also seem able to ignore the evidence of healthy vegan performances, which undermine their own credibility.

The vegan killjoy as awkward also relates to the potential lack of vegan competency amongst omnivores in that either it is not known what to cook for vegans as in Laura’s extract, or cooking an extra dish might be seen as impractical and time consuming as with Annie who also introduces the point of a threat to commensality and being controlled by her parent. Although the awkwardness of veganism is a product of the normativity of meat culture it would make little sense to dismiss it for that reason. In social situations where vegans live with omnivores there is a social disruption such as a threat to eating together not just due to practical reasons but because of the way in which vegans begin to see animal consumption, which is their process of affective alienation from normative associations between food consumption and happiness. For many vegans, including many in my sample, eating alongside omnivores becomes affectively difficult. Becoming vegan can create social distance which can change the quality of relationships and in some circumstances include the breaking of some relationships and the seeking out and forming of new relationships with other vegans. It can shape social exclusion as well as self-imposed exclusion. As well as a good example of the recursivity of practices and relationships, these relational dimensions deserve further research since they can be crucial to the everyday performance of veganism. Emerging from the data were forms of boundary maintenance and co-habitation strategies, which seemed to act as forms of negotiation that maintained social relations whilst accommodating conflicting affective frames around animal consumption. However some forms, as I shall outline, were more “separatist” than others. In contrast to the extracts above there were examples in my sample where the omnivore’s response was notably more open and positive and most of those negative responses were seen to adapt, change and accommodate over time. I will also identify two themes from the data—non-practising practitioners and demonstrative veganism—that can be seen as potentially successful vegan activist strategies that attempt to bring omnivores into the vegan affective community.

5.1. Boundary Maintenance and Co-Habitation Strategies

As I have indicated it is problematic to speak of wholly separate affective communities and this holds true if discussing feminism or veganism. There are in practice few examples of separatist modes of living and vegans in their everyday life routinely encounter the materiality and meanings of the dominant affective community. My sample included narratives of vegans whose partners were not vegan, or who lived with omnivores and ended up drawing upon specific micro-practices that created separation and facilitated co-existence. These practices centred upon materialities associated with food and with the spatial micro-geographies of food storage and preparation. However, I argue that boundary practices constituted a continuum and in some cases spoke to a desire not of co-habitation but for a clearer separation from the omnivorous affective community, in the form, for example, of a desire for vegansexuality [16], only having a sexual partner who was also vegan. The following extracts present some examples firstly of boundary maintenance and co-habitation strategies—

“In the house we had a very strict kind of separation of all of our cooking implements and he had his own frying pan and all that kind of thing and he tended not to cook anything that was smelly or smoky or anything like that.”—Janet

“We kind of cook at different times.”—Bob

“We have a kind of an understanding. We were living separately and then my boyfriend moved in with me. And a little bit because it was my flat, and a little bit because, it had to be that way, well he actually said, ‘I’ll be vegan in the house’. And at the same time I kind of accepted what he did outside of the house was, that’s fine. And that actually works well for us.”—Judy

“My partner is pescetarian so I do get a bit irritated by that. I send him loads of information and he always ignores it. He eats way too much processed food. He’s not that interested in cooking or food really. But he’s been really supportive of me being vegan. He tries to cook fish when I’m not in the house, with all the windows and doors open. But I can always tell because I can smell the tiniest whiff and then it’s freezing ‘cos he’s had everything open. He’s got a George Foreman that he cooks that in ‘cos I’m a bit militant in that he’s not allowed to cook with any of the stuff I cook with. The frozen fish goes in the bottom drawer of the freezer.”—Emily

“I was very adamant I wasn’t going to mix my foods, certainly in the fridge, absolutely clear not to put anything on my shelf. I would go mad. My shelf is at the top because I can’t bear the thought of meat dripping onto my food. They always have meat in the fridge, bacon, they still do. You know, dripping carcasses.”—Lucy

“When you’ve lived with someone for 30 odd years you learn that you have to compromise on things. He would have his shelf in the fridge where he kept his dead animals, and I would have mine.”—Rosemary

“In the community where I was living there were meat eaters, vegetarians and vegans, and because that was my home, I was definitely the vegan police there, because that was my home. I don’t want you cutting up your bacon on the bread board.”—Neil

“My Nan will eat vegan food, but my grandfather likes his steak. So often we’ll make something separate for him. My Nan will have the vegan food but sometimes have the meat as well. I really don’t like it but I sometimes prepare the meat, I would only ever do that for my grandparents. I would not do it for a friend. I wouldn’t do it even for a husband if I ever got married. I just find it wrong, but as they are kind of set in their ways, it’s not often though and usually if my Nan has been there the whole day then she will make it. And I will just run upstairs because the smell horrifies me.”—Alexandra

These extracts speak to temporal and spatial strategies in order to perform the co-existence of morally divergent eating practices and affective attachments. They illustrate a transition from a naturalised view of (some) animals as edible food to a stark divergent resistance to their commodification which now sensually and affectively evokes violence. Smells that once were part of the commensal happiness of routine animal consumption come to evoke disgust and horror. What was once food is now “dead animals” and “dripping carcasses”. Such meanings, if communicated, cannot but help contest the joy of omnivorous practitioners. As these examples make clear my sample included several mixed omnivore/vegan relationships, but also relationships that had over time become vegan and single people who expressed a desire for a vegan partner (*i.e.*, vegansexuality). Others were confident that their non-vegan partner would eventually become vegan. As an expression of preferring shared values in a lover vegansexuality [16] is not exactly surprising but it is of interest here for the attempt to create a safe separate space in which to construct an alternative vegan affective setting and potentially a broader vegan social community. Alongside the examples of co-existence several respondents expressed a strong preference for a vegan partner—

“I’ve been on dates with people where at some point I’ve mentioned veganism and they’re like ‘Oh I could never do that, I just love meat too much’, and that instantly kind of puts me off them a little bit. So probably wouldn’t actively pursue someone who ate meat I guess. Though I feel like if I met them and got to know them, and then found out that they thought like that it wouldn’t be a problem. If you’re in a date situation, and this could go either way, it’s a definite, you know, they lose points (laughs).”—Mary

“I wouldn’t be able to have a long term relationship with somebody who wasn’t a vegan. Like definitely. For the short term it doesn’t matter, but long term it would really upset me.”—Nicola

“It would definitely be a problem in the future to be in a relationship with someone who wasn’t vegan. I don’t think I could do it. Because you’ve got a choice then about finding like-minded people, it would actually be a problem, I have to say.”—Lucy

“I don’t think that I could ever go out with someone who wasn’t vegan. You really narrow your field down when you become vegan (laughs). A colleague at work said the other day something about she’s got this new guy, he sometimes likes to go fishing, and I think ‘How

could you?', you know what I mean, how do you cope with that? So yeah it does make it, definitely a barrier and you can relate so far to a lot of people, and then that crops up and it's just this sort of unbridgeable gap really. Yeah I've found that quite hard."—Grace

"I don't think I could date a meat eater, I mean I have in the past, now when I think about it, just no. I just stipulate vegetarianism. I've used it a couple of times not exactly to reject guys but, just kind of, well I guess I have. I would say to them rather than say I don't like them, I would say that I wouldn't go out with a non-vegetarian."—Alexandra

As these extracts illustrate some vegans have a strong preference for vegansexuality, which might serve to counter the affective alienation of living as a vegan in an omnivorous society. This is sometimes replicated in the sense of a preference for vegan friends although this sort of separatist boundary making arguably discounts the dynamism of the social which was underlined by several in my sample who reported friends, family and partners either becoming vegetarian or vegan *after* they had.

5.2. Non-Practising Practitioners

In contrast to such boundary making negotiations two further forms of social negotiation were identified as thematic within my data. These act as forms of bridge-building and serve to lessen social distance between vegans and others and, importantly, I argue, further embed and normalise vegan practice. In spite of the negative initial reaction most participants reported that the situation improved over time. The first of these is the emergence of what I term "non-practising practitioners". Although this sounds oxymoronic I suggest that friends and relations of vegans are more likely to become "non-vegan vegan advocates" who inadvertently promote the practice. As a demonstration of care friends and family members will often start to perform certain aspects of vegan practice. Several examples of this emerged from participants.

"It's great now because my dad cooks a lot of vegan food anyway."—Fiona

"...now my mum will go out of her way, I think she kind of enjoys it in the shop, she'll come back and she'll have bought me a vegan yoghurt or something or different kinds of chocolate milk and stuff and I think she kind of enjoys that now."—Annie

"...she (mother) tries to experiment with vegan baking now, she tries to adapt recipes so they'll be vegan or try out vegan recipes. Yeah she's embraced it a lot more, in fact I think her eating habits have changed as a result."—Carrie

"After I'd told him (partner) of my decision whilst on holiday, he made me the most fantastic dessert on my return, this chocolate rice pudding dessert, totally vegan."—Leslie

"...next week I'm going down to meet them (parents), and I'm meeting them a bit away from where we'd usually meet. And my dad's been onto the internet checked out the restaurants, and phoned up one of them."—Leslie

"My mother is a very good baker, and she always makes something for me when I visit. She no doubt has to adjust her style for me, so I probably set an example in a way. She has

expanded her repertoire as it were. She exactly now thinks that the vegan margarine alternatives are as good if not better.”—Paul

“...she (mother) was quite interested in how easy it was and she’s been really really supportive and I’m going to stay with her next week and she’s researched all these vegan things and got me in all this stuff to eat which is fantastic and lovely.”—Natalie

These extracts represent examples of non-practising practitioners who support the veganism of those close to them. Although not (yet) vegan themselves they are nevertheless reproducing elements of the practice. Specifically, they have developed forms of *competency* in vegan cooking, the sourcing of vegan food, the definition of vegan food, engaging with non-vegan restaurants and in eating vegan food more of the time. They are clearly also then engaging with parts of the *materiality* of vegan practice. In practice theory terms they are not making strong links between these elements and the *meanings* of veganism, which is one explanation of why they have not become vegan themselves. However relations of care and affinity draw them partly into the practice and they provide a peripheral, ambassadorial support for the normalisation of the practice. This could be important for practice theory to note that the boundary of those within a community of practice is not wholly clear and peripheral non-practising practitioners may also be important to the trajectory of a practice. Further research could look at whether particular modes of performing veganism are more likely than others to draw people in and what could shift such “ambassadors” to become fully fledged vegans.

5.3. Demonstrative Vegan Practice

A second form of social negotiation which also builds bridges and this time comes more obviously from vegans themselves pertains to the mode of performing veganism in a *demonstrative* manner that draws omnivores or vegetarians into the sensual experience of vegan food. The example of vegans cooking for non-vegans arose several times in the sample. This had the effect of bringing vegan eating into a familiar space and as a known, appreciated aesthetic experience once again expressed *via* relations of care. Here are several examples—

“I think ever since I found out how much more stuff I can eat and now I cook and bake a lot for them to kind of showcase it and they appreciate it a lot more now.”—Annie

“There was a friend at school who was in my German class. She was just like, how do you eat anything, how do you eat anything, so the next day, it happened to be that my mum had made a vegan chocolate fudge cake the night before so I brought her in a slice and she had it and she was like oh my God. That’s the way to do it is to give people food I’ve noticed. Everyone who I’ve cooked vegan food for has been so much more receptive to new ideas or whatever. In fact now she’s working towards veganism. She’s from a family that eat meat but now she’s going to uni she says now that she’s got this autonomy over what she eats, she is going to be vegan, so I’m really happy about that. It made me so happy.”—Carrie

“Other people at work were interested, when I cooked things and took them into work, they enjoyed them. Some people said they were starting to eat more fruit and vegetables than they had before.”—Sonia

“They still ask (why I’m vegan) but because they saw me cooking that really helped. Even after a year I’m still not used to cooking for one person, so if I make a meal it would usually be enough to feed 3–4, so people would always eat my food. And then they’d be like ‘Ah Alexandra, you make such amazing food’. That’s really good because they know vegan eating isn’t something strange or horrible.”—Alexandra

“I think what helped enormously was me cooking for her (mother), I think that helped massively and I just had to bite my tongue and invite her round for dinner and make like a big three course meal. She was very surprised that it actually tasted nice, very surprised and especially when I made cakes and things and eventually she became quite proud of me doing that.”—Janet

This mode of performing veganism with non-vegans, which is sometimes scaled up in the example of the vegan potluck, can serve to restore a sense of commensality and social connection with food. Here a vegan is able to demonstrate their cooking competency and skill and the material agency of the food is, in a sense, allowed to do the talking. In her book *Living Among Meat Eaters* Carol J. Adams refers to such demonstrative veganism as akin to the work of a magician in that the vegan cook “shows but does not tell” [20] (p. 196). To tell would be to open the door to the likely negative meanings an omnivore has of vegan food (materiality). In such re-crafted practice eating assumes familiar form *via* vegan innovation, experimentality, creativity or substitution and the meanings of veganism are allowed to transition from near pathological to a new normal. The very creativity of vegan cooking competency overlaps the reinvention of both materiality and meaning. In the doing, the sharing, of veganism a fractured relationship or affective community can be re-made and brought close again. Community itself can come to include the more-than-human.

6. Conclusions—Killing Joy to Re-Make Joy

This final example of social negotiation is especially illustrative of how vegan practice can circulate new meanings around food, and around human/animal relations. Within the safe bubble of the vegan community its practitioners are noticeably joyous, especially about food. This can be seen at forms of vegan sociality such as potlucks, vegan fairs or CAS conferences. I think this is comparable to the joy felt at feminist and/or queer gatherings. This is not to suggest a false homogeneity. Just as Ahmed highlights the diversity of the feminist community, Stanescu is sure to underline the possibility for vegans to be killjoys to each other, speaking out over many other forms of privilege [9]. For example, the history of the vegan feminist as a willful subject has simultaneously involved being killjoy to both animal activists/studies and feminism; and there have been notable discussions of veganism and racism (e.g., [21,22]). Moreover, the sample reported here were overwhelmingly white and middle class which will likely have shaped the social dynamics reported and the meanings of food present. We might then wonder what the future of the killjoy figure could be? From one perspective the killjoy is a temporary figure working to create a new happiness order but I prefer to see “killjoying” as a continual process and as integral to the reflexivity of (intersecting) social movements and prefigurative politics.

In spite of these significant points around intersectionality and difference this paper adds to Ahmed’s analysis that oppositional politics, in contesting the social order, are in struggle with a

normative affective community that embeds happiness norms within the status quo. In the case of the vegan killjoy and the vegan-feminist killjoy happiness is exposed as anthropocentric. Since the vegan feminist is contesting an *intersecting* set of entrenched social norms this subject constitutes an especially poignant and potentially threatening killjoy position. As a world-making project that contests the human/animal dualism found within most academic meanings of “intersectionality” vegan feminism enables a more systemic critique of the political uses of “happiness” and “joy”. This paper also underlines how sociological and civil society projects to understand and help change high carbon food practices come up against a happiness order that is protective of a status quo of omnivorous normativity but indicates ways in which this order is being contested.

Writing on animal rights in 1989 Brigid Brophy drew upon a similar language of the killjoy—

“Undismayed by being a crank, I will make you a free gift of another stick to beat me with, by informing you that I am a vegetarian. Now, surely, you have me. Not only am I a more extreme crank, a member of an even smaller minority, than you had realized; surely I *must*, now, be a killjoy. Yet which, in fact, kills more joy: the killjoy who would deprive you of your joy in eating steak, which is just one of the joys open to you, or the kill-animal who puts an end to all the animal’s joys along with its life?” [23] (p. 159)

This decentring of joy and happiness is the critical deconstructive work of the vegan killjoy. In performing a practice that attempts to *re-construct* happiness, pleasure and politics the vegan killjoy does what all politically willful killjoys attempt to do: create new meanings and practices that underline the shared joy in living outside and beyond social norms once thought fixed.

Acknowledgments

This article was written whilst a Research Fellow at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London and as part of the NOVELLA (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches) Project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). I also thank the three referees for their helpful comments.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Ahmed, S. Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects). Available online: http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/ahmed_01.htm (accessed on 15 July 2013).
2. Twine, R. *Animals as Biotechnology: Ethics, Sustainability and Critical Animal Studies*; Earthscan: London, UK, 2010.
3. Twine, R. Negotiating social relationships in the transition to vegan eating practices. In *Critical Perspectives on Meat Culture*; Potts, A., Ed.; Brill Publishers: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2015, forthcoming.

4. Hoolohan, C.; Berners-Lee, M.; McKinstry-West, J.; Hewitt, C.N. Mitigating the greenhouse gas emissions embodied in food through realistic consumer choices. *Energ. Policy* **2013**, *63*, 1065–1074.
5. Berners-Lee, M.; Hoolohan, C.; Cammack, H.; Hewitt, C.N. The relative greenhouse gas impacts of realistic dietary choices. *Energ. Policy* **2012**, *43*, 184–190.
6. Scarborough, P.; Appleby, P.N.; Mizdrak, A.; Briggs, A.D.M.; Travis, R.C.; Bradbury, K.E.; Key, T.J. Dietary greenhouse gas emissions of meat-eaters, fish-eaters, vegetarians and vegans in the UK. *Clim. Change* **2014**, *125*, 179–192.
7. Ahmed, S. *The Promise of Happiness*; Duke University Press: Durham, NC, USA, 2010.
8. Ahmed, S. *Willful Subjects*; Duke University Press: Durham, NC, USA, 2014.
9. Stanescu, J. Vegan Feminist Killjoys (another willful subject). Available online: <http://criticalanimal.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/vegan-feminist-killjoys-another-willful.html> (accessed on 20 February 2014).
10. Morgan, D. *Rethinking Family Practices*; Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, UK, 2011.
11. Ahmed, S. Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness. *Signs* **2010**, *35*, 571–594.
12. Adams, C.J. An Animal Manifesto—gender, identity, and vegan-feminism in the twenty-first century. *Parallax* **2006**, *12*, 120–128.
13. Adams, C.J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat*; Continuum: New York, NY, USA, 1990.
14. Cole, M. From “Animal Machines” to “Happy Meat”? Foucault’s Ideas of Disciplinary and Pastoral Power Applied to ‘Animal-Centred’ Welfare Discourse. *Animals* **2011**, *1*, 83–101.
15. Dean, M.A. You are *How* You Eat? Femininity, Normalization, and Veganism as an Ethical Practice of Freedom. *Societies* **2014**, *4*, 127–147.
16. Potts, A.; Parry, J. Vegan Sexuality: Challenging Heteronormative Masculinity through Meat-free Sex. *Fem. Psychol.* **2010**, *20*, 53–72.
17. McDonald, B. “Once You Know Something, You Can’t Not Know It”—An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan. *Soc. Anim.* **2000**, *8*, 1–23.
18. Shove, E.; Pantzar, M.; Watson, M. *The Dynamics of Social Practice—Everyday Life and How it Changes*; Sage: London, UK, 2012.
19. Reckwitz, A. Toward a theory of social practices. *Eur. J. Soc. Theor.* **2002**, *5*, 243–263.
20. Adams, C.J. *Living Among Meat Eaters: The Vegetarian’s Survival Handbook*; Continuum: New York, NY, USA, 2003.
21. Kim, C.J. Slaying the Beast: Reflections on Race, Culture, and Species. *Kalfou* **2010**, *1*, 57–74.
22. Harper, A.B. *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*; Lantern Books: Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2010.
23. Brophy, B. The Rights of Animals. In *Animal Rights: A Historical Anthology*; Linzey, A., Clarke, P.B., Eds.; Columbia University Press: New York, NY, USA, 1990; pp. 156–162.