

**Friends, Food, or “Free Egg Machines”? A Qualitative Study of Chicken Owners’
Perceptions of Chickens and Chicken Meat.**

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Abstract

How people who keep household chickens, and also eat chicken meat, balance perceptions of chickens as companion animals and as meat products is unknown. This is because human-animal bonds research has neglected inquiry into relationships with domestic chickens, despite increasing rates of urban chicken ownership in Australia. People may form strong attachments to their companion animals. Conversely, people tend to enjoy eating animal meat while preferring not to think about the slaughter of meat animals. This phenomenon is called the Meat Paradox, and often produces cognitive dissonance, which people may resolve by morally disengaging from meat animals and believing that meat animals are less capable of suffering. How people view chickens is unclear as they have the potential to be both companion animals and meat products. The present study aimed to fill this gap in the research by interviewing participants (N = 10) who kept household chickens and ate chicken meat about their attitudes and behaviours regarding chickens. Thematic analysis was used to generate five themes from the data, which were *Chickens are pets*, *Chickens are meat products*, *Chickens are utilities*, *Chickens have varying levels of individuality*, and *Inconsistencies and changes in perceptions*. Themes were overlapping, dynamic, and contradictory. The results suggest that people can consciously attempt to control processes of empathising for, or disengaging from, animals, depending on animals' perceived status as companions or meat products. These findings have implications for further research into cognitive dissonance, empathy, and objectification in bonds with animals, and meat attitudes.

Presentation based on the data from this thesis

Macauley, L. (2018) *Friend or Food? A Qualitative Study of Chicken Owners' Perceptions of Chickens and Chicken Meat*. Presentation at the 2018 University of Adelaide Undergraduate Research Conference, Adelaide, South Australia. (See Appendices A and B).

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide’s digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time. I also give permission for this thesis to be made available for photocopying.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1: Human-animal bonds

Companion animal ownership in Australia is high (Franklin, 2007), and Australian suburban backyard chicken ownership is increasing (Elkhoraihi, Blatchford, Pitesky, & Mench, 2014; Ritzman, 2015). Research has found that chickens are kept in similar backyard contexts in the United States for reasons such as fun, food production, and lifestyle (Garber, Hill, Rodriguez, Gregory, & Voelker, 2007). However, despite the rising prevalence of chicken ownership in Australia and other Western societies, human-animal bonds research has neglected study of the human-chicken relationship. Studies on human-animal bonds are based on a relational theory of interactions and relationships between humans and companion animals. It is important to note the difference between the terms ‘companion animal’, which is used in human-animal bonds literature to refer to animals that live close to humans and are predominantly kept for companionship, and ‘pet’, which is predominantly a lay term that represents individuals’ perceptions of household companion animals. Therefore, this paper will use the term ‘pet’ only when describing people’s perceptions of companion animals.

Human-animal bonds research has focussed on the study of companion animals conventional in Western contexts, particularly dogs (Hosey & Melfi, 2014). Inquiry into human-avian relationships is limited and has emphasised relationships with birds that are traditionally kept as companion animals in Western contexts, such as parrots (Anderson, 2003, 2014). Study of human-chicken relationships is particularly limited, and whether chickens can be companion animals like traditional companion animals is complicated by their potential roles as agricultural animals and meat products. Furthermore, human-bird

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research findings rarely distinguish between different bird species, despite research demonstrating differences between perceptions of parrots and chickens (Abel, 2008), and between companion animals and meat animals more generally (Clement, 2011).

Human-animal bonds research is important because empirical research has argued for multiple mental and physical health benefits of bonds with companion animals. For example, companion animal bonds may have cognitive, emotional, and educational benefits for children and adolescents (Purewal et al., 2017), and may contribute to owners' effective management of mental health conditions (Brooks et al., 2018). Human-animal bonds have such potential for therapeutic benefits that they are structured into animal-assisted therapies for use in therapeutic practices (Friedmann, Son, & Tsai, 2010). However, given the lack of research into human-chicken relationships, it cannot be ascertained whether chicken owners experience any benefits as a result of their relationships with their chickens, or even whether owners have relationships with their chickens at all.

Extensive research of human-animal bonds with conventional companion animals might shed some light on human-chicken relationships. Human-animal bonds have the potential to be stronger than inter-human familial relationships. For example, participants in one study rated their relationships with their companion animals as stronger than those with their siblings (Meehan, Massavelli, & Pachana, 2017). The nature of the relationship varies according to the species of animal. For example, one study found that the most important features of relationships with dogs as rated by owners were human-focussed, such as emotional and social support gained through the human-animal bond, while the most important features of relationships with cats were animal-focussed, such as the cat's personality (Hoffmann, Lagerkvist, Hagberg Gustavsson, & Holst, 2018). Additionally,

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Wilkins, McCrae, and McBride (2015) found that the level of emotions attributed to animals corresponds to their perceived function, with companion animals attributed more emotion than working animals. Levels of empathy for and perceived communicative ability of companion animals also vary according to their phylogenetic relatedness to humans (Harrison & Hall, 2010). Thus, human bonds with animals are complex and can vary according to species and perceptions of animal types. Therefore, research needs to expand beyond bonds with conventional mammalian companion animals to examine nuances in bonds with animals of different species and different types.

1.2: Meat choices and attitudes

Australia is the third largest consumer of chicken meat per capita in the world (OECD, 2018), and Australians consume more chicken than any other animal (Wong, Selvanathan, & Selvanathan, 2015). Therefore, chickens appear to play multiple roles in Australian society as egg producers, meat products, and suburban domestic animals. This is despite people from Australia and other Western cultures often condemning the consumption of conventional companion animals in other cultures, such as dog meat consumption in some Asian cultures (Podberscek, 2009).

Research into the phenomenon called the Meat Paradox may explain apparently opposing attitudes towards chickens as both meat and companion animals (Joy, 2009). The Meat Paradox refers to the contradiction between enjoying animal meat consumption while not wanting to kill animals or think about their deaths and suffering (Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010), and may cause cognitive dissonance (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015). The Action-Based Model of Cognitive Dissonance (Harmon-Jones et al., 2015) states that individuals will change attitudes to rationalise and continue performing cherished

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behaviours. In the case of cognitive dissonance caused by the Meat Paradox, research has identified particular strategies used to change attitudes and continue meat consumption. One is *denial of mind* - believing that meat animals are less intelligent, and therefore less capable of suffering (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2012; Loughnan et al., 2010; Rothgerber, 2014). Another is *denial of moral status* - believing meat animals are less deserving of concern and humane treatment (Bastian, Loughnan, et al., 2012; Loughnan et al., 2010; Piazza & Loughnan, 2016). This is particularly relevant to the present study, as chickens tend to be denied mind more so than other animals. In one study, participants rated chickens low in communicative ability and emotional experience compared to mammals such as dogs and apes (Harrison & Hall, 2010). Likewise, respondents in another study rated chickens as 29% similar to humans in cognitive ability (compared to 66% for dogs and 75% for chimps) (Eddy, Gallup, & Povinelli, 1993). Furthermore, denial of mind can shift depending on particular factors. One study showed that prompting participants to categorise animals as meat reduced how much participants perceived those animals as capable of suffering (Bratanova, Loughnan, & Bastian, 2011). In another study, participants empathised less with animals they were told were edible (Bilewicz, Michalak, & Kamińska, 2016). Research has shown individuals use these disengagement strategies when faced with dissonance that threatens their enjoyment of eating meat (Graça, Calheiros, & Oliveira, 2014; Piazza & Loughnan, 2016).

1.3: Present research

Although many Australians accept chickens as companion animals that may also be eaten, they may also react with discomfort and moral revulsion to the consumption of conventional companion animals in other cultures. This apparent double standard raises theoretical questions relating to selective empathy for animals of the same species. Limited

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research has examined differences in attitudes towards animals depending on animal type (Signal, Taylor, & Maclean, 2018; Taylor & Signal, 2009). If people tend to form attachments with their companion animals and attribute them mind, but tend to disengage from meat animals and deny them mind, how are domestic chickens, who may also be meat products, regarded? Literature on the Meat Paradox suggests that people who own chickens and eat chicken meat are likely to experience dissonance and discomfort due to inconsistent attitudes towards companion animal chickens and meat chickens (also called broiler chickens). However, their perspectives and strategies of resolving dissonance have not yet been studied. Therefore, this exploratory study aims to fill this gap in the literature through the research question: how do suburban Australians who keep chickens and eat chicken meat view chickens?

CHAPTER 2

Method

2.1: Participants

The inclusion criteria for participation in this research were: being at least 18 years old; eating chicken meat; having backyard chickens or having a history of keeping backyard chickens; and speaking fluent English. The exclusion criterion was keeping chickens in a commercial egg- or meat-farming capacity. This focussed inquiry on domestic companion animal contexts where participants’ proximity to chickens allowed the possibility of human-animal bond formation with chickens, and thereby explore the intersection of human-chicken bonds and attitudes towards chicken meat. Additionally, this paper aimed to extend inquiry into human-chicken interactions beyond agricultural contexts where chickens are kept as livestock, because these contexts have been substantially researched (Hosey & Melfi, 2014; Serpell, 2004). Furthermore, research has identified that rural and urban populations tend to have significantly different attitudes towards meat and animals (Bray, Zambrano, Chur-Hansen, & Ankeny, 2016; Serpell, 2004; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005). For example, rural populations are more likely to think of animals in terms of profit and productivity (Taylor & Signal, 2009). Therefore, this study aimed to explore individual experiences relating to human-chicken interactions in depth by sampling from suburban populations where chickens have the potential to be companion animals, agricultural animals, and/or meat products.

Purposive sampling (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) was employed to ensure at least one female and one male were interviewed and therefore enrich the results, as gender differences in human-animal bonds and meat eating attitudes have been observed in prior literature (Herzog, 2007). Participants were recruited through flyers, online posts on

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Australian poultry forums and Facebook pages, and passive snowballing wherein participants and the researcher’s contacts were asked to give the study details to peers who met the criteria.

2.2: Procedure

The University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Subcommittee approved this study (H-2018-18/41). Thematic analysis of open-ended interviews was chosen as an effective method of data collection because it is suited to gaining insight into areas with minimal previous research. Additionally, the open-ended interview structure allowed the researcher to explore participant attitudes with breadth and depth, and adaptively respond to participant insights that emerged during interviews and interim analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Participants received an Information Sheet (Appendix C) which contained information regarding the method and aims of the research, the potential uses of the research results, and their rights to voluntary participation and withdrawal. All participants consented to be interviewed and for the interview to be digitally audio-recorded. Participation was not rewarded or reimbursed.

An interview guide (Appendix D) was developed that consisted of prompts and probes relating to attitudes towards, and practices involving, chicken meat consumption and household chickens. The interview guide was based on recommendations by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), tested in a pilot interview, and continually refined throughout data collection, based on areas of interest identified in preliminary analysis of prior interviews. This approach was in line with the recursive method of data collection and analysis

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considered best practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). The researcher transcribed all interviews to ensure accurate reporting of participants' accounts and to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Data were deidentified during transcription by removing personal identifiers and identifying place names, and replacing names of participants and names of their household animals with pseudonyms, thereby ensuring confidentiality and privacy for each participant.

A second researcher cross-checked deidentified interviews and themes generated by the primary researcher to guarantee rigor and trustworthiness, thereby reducing the impact of individual biases on the results (Green & Thorogood, 2004). The researcher maintained an audit trail throughout the entire research process in which he recorded possible themes, links to research, potential biases and how they may influence the generated themes, and reflections on the data and collection process. Tracy (2010) recommends audit trails as a means of ensuring sincerity through self-reflexivity and transparency in qualitative research. The researcher also used the audit trail to compare results continually throughout data collection and analysis, and thereby refined themes based on earlier participant contributions. For further reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher has biases stemming from his own perspective of food choices and animals. To address this, the researcher expressed to participants that he also ate meat, and in doing so contributed to building rapport by identifying as an in-group member (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This was important as people who eat meat may feel judged by people who do not eat meat (Minson & Monin, 2012).

2.3: Analysis

Data were analysed at inductive and deductive levels using thematic analysis, which is used to generate themes from raw data that answer research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). A theme is “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). Themes are generated based on their relevance to the research question, rather than prevalence or representation within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Thematic analysis was suitable for the present study due to its ability to summarise key features in large bodies of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Analysis followed the six stages of thematic analysis: data familiarisation, initial code generation, generating candidate themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Collection and analysis involved moving back and forth between stages to refine results. At all stages, the researcher followed guidelines for qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), enhancing the rigor and trustworthiness of results and claims.

CHAPTER 3

Results

This study aimed to explore and examine how people who keep chickens and eat chicken meat view their chickens. Five overarching themes were generated: *Chickens are pets*, *Chicken are meat products*, *Chickens are utilities*, *Chickens have varying levels of individuality*, and *Inconsistencies and changes in perceptions*. There was extensive overlap between themes, as shown in the thematic map that represents interrelationships and overlap between themes and subthemes (see Figure 1 below).

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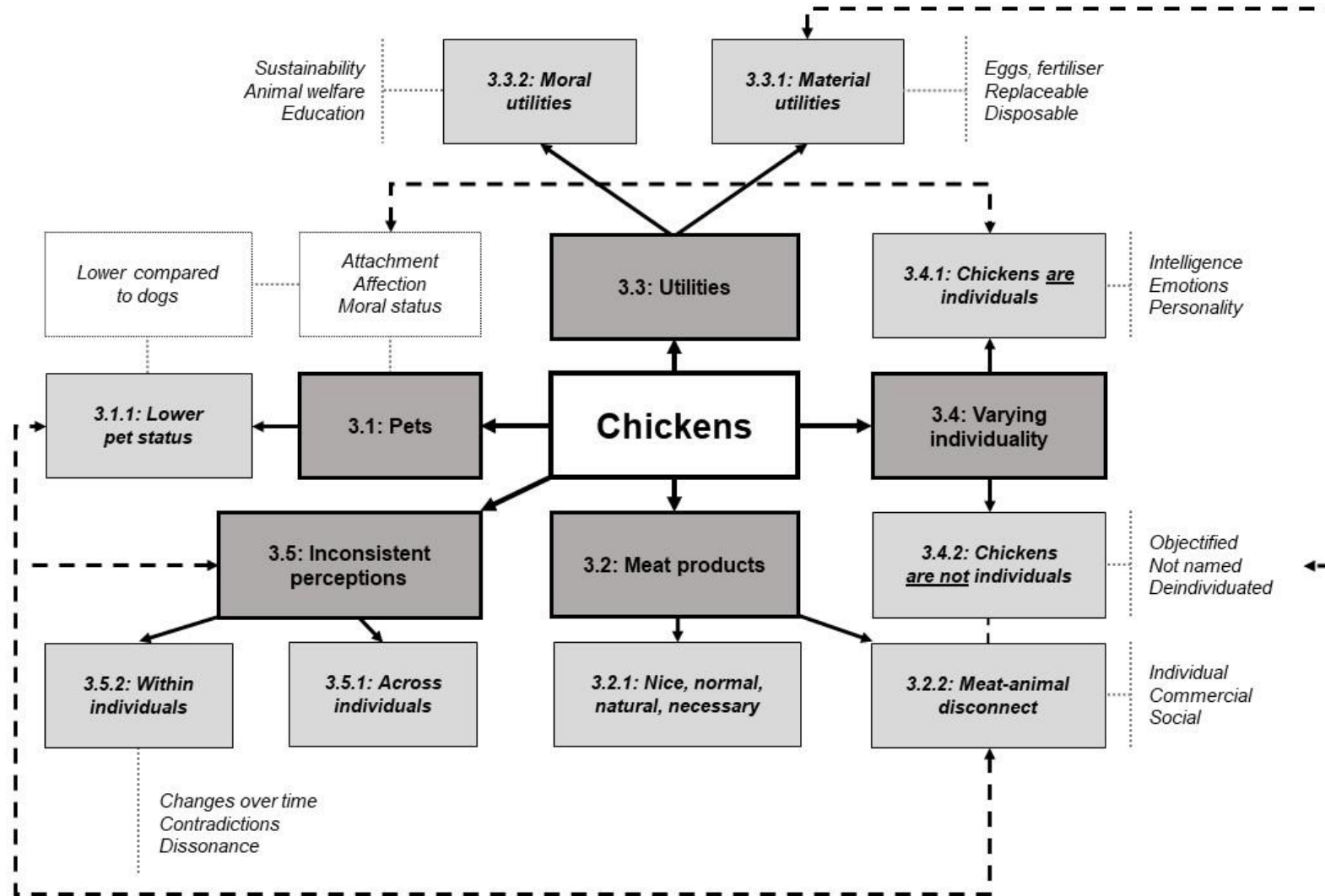


Figure 1. Thematic map representing relationships between themes and subthemes.

3.1: Chickens are pets

Household chickens were sometimes thought of as ‘pets’. However, how participants justified chickens being pets was highly individual and subjective. For example, participants saw chickens as ‘pets’ based on engaging in social and emotional relationships with them. These relationships were expressed through personifying chickens, physically and verbally interacting with them, and affection:

...you can just hold it and they’re like - I will take videos of my chicken where I’m patting them and they actually sleep on me. And so when people go like, “no chickens don’t love people” I show them that video, like they can. They love to be touched. Like she actually, that chicken, loved to be patted (Balqees Bibi, lines 151-154).

Views of chickens as pets overlapped with utilitarian views of chickens as egg producers. However, one of these views might be more emphasised than others. For example, chickens might be thought of as pets foremost, and egg production seen as a convenient benefit of keeping them. Additionally, chickens that were seen as utilities *and* as companion animals were personified rather than objectified as egg producing machines. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt in which Jessica frames collecting her chickens’ eggs as a mutually beneficial and consensual relationship:

...like I’m saying thank you to the chickens for what [eggs] they’ve *given* me by giving them a life that is better than the one [they] might have had if they happened to have been brought up in a chicken farm (Jessica, lines 259-261).

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Participants were uncomfortable with killing household chickens that they viewed as ‘pets’. This points to individuals’ standards of ‘appropriate’ treatment of companion animals. For example, domestic animals that are *not* considered ‘pets’ can be killed without causing discomfort. In the following excerpt, Gloria recounts ‘saving’ ‘pet’ chickens from being slaughtered. The other chickens are not considered pets and therefore do not receive concern or special treatment:

[friends] said it’s time for these, this batch of chickens to meet their fate and be killed [for meat]. And their granddaughter didn’t want the two chickens that she had made friends with [...] to be killed and treated the same way as all the other chickens. [...] they had nowhere to keep two pet chickens, so they came and they are living with us now (Gloria, lines 560-564).

Views of chickens as ‘pets’ were also expressed behaviourally. For example, different emotional and practical reactions to chickens’ deaths demonstrated the nature and strength of relationships that participants held with their chickens while alive. Ceremonial burial practices for dead household chickens suggests that owners viewed those chickens as being somewhat human-like and possibly as having some kind of ‘personhood’:

...we were sad and that was the first chicken that died so we had a burial ceremony for it. [...] we dugged a big hole, put it in, said some prayers [...] it was the first pet that died so we were very emotional (Balqees Bibi, lines 82-87).

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3.1.1: Lower pet status

Although participants considered their household chickens as ‘pets’, they also saw them as less ‘pet-like’ than dogs and other conventional companion animals. For example, they described less attachment to their chickens, and did not grieve for them when they died. Low emotional attachment to chickens was emphasised when chickens were compared with dogs:

So it’s not quite that same connection as a dog. I think, you know ‘cause you hear of people when their dogs pass away, they’re devastated. We’re never devastated that the chickens have died (Chelsea, 101-103).

Weaker emotional attachment to household chickens was based on chickens being less interactive or engaging than cats and dogs. Further, chickens were seen to spend less time with humans than other companion animals might. Here, the distinction between domestic animals kept outside and those kept inside was crucial:

They don’t share your life 24/7. [...] if I had a dog or a cat, they do. They’re in the house, you know might sleep in their bed beside the bed. Might be you know, on occasions I must say, the dog has been in the bed with me, in the small hours of the morning when it’s cold or something, yeah. I wouldn’t have a chicken in. No, I would never consider taking a chicken into my room (Stella, lines 674-678).

Lower pet status was reinforced through specific language and naming conventions. For example, participants effectively deindividuated and objectified household chickens by not naming them because they considered it “generally not a good idea to name these *things*”

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(Jackson, line 93). Participants also objectified chickens by naming them using physical descriptors, rather than using human names or references to chickens' personalities:

We've got the black ones, the brown ones- the young brown ones, the old brown one, and two black ones [...] we've had a dog, had dogs, we've given them names [...] they [chickens] don't have names, they've just got descriptors really (Gillian, lines 390-391).

3.2: Chickens are meat products

Participants saw chickens as meat products in the sense that they were accustomed to seeing and eating chicken meat. However, they did not necessarily look at living chickens as if they were meat products.

3.2.1: Chicken meat is natural, normal, necessary, and nice

Views of chickens as meat products were based on the perceived virtues of chicken meat and benefits derived from eating it. These benefits included taste and versatility, health and nutrition, and chicken meat being acceptable and endorsed in Australian culture.

However, sometimes one characteristic of chicken meat was a more influential motivator than others:

...it [chicken meat] helps our diet and gives our bodies nutrients and you know, energy that we need. That's why we eat anything isn't it? Well it, there is a little bit of enjoyment there as well. But the main focus is to give us energy (Gloria, lines 453-455).

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The effect of cultural norms on what animals were considered acceptable to eat was apparent. Social and/or familial upbringing shaped individual perceptions and enjoyment of meat:

I know it's, like hypocritical if, you know, dog meat was on the table it would be like, “oh,” like “no I'm not eating the meat,” or whatever. But again, it's a cultural thing, like some cultures do eat those animals and our culture like thinks it's acceptable to eat chicken meat or whatever. So I don't know, it's more of a normality sort of thing (Gemima, lines 392-396).

Chicken meat consumption was seen as ‘natural’, and humans were argued to be superior to chickens and other meat animals with meat consumption considered “a fundamental part of what makes us humans” (Jackson, line 205). Thus, chickens and other meat animals were seen as being created by humans and therefore existing to serve human needs:

... [chickens] sure exist nowadays to do that [be exploited by humans]. I mean there are more chickens in the world than humans and that's solely because we use them. So yeah, they don't... technically they don't exist for that [consumption]. But that's what they've come about to be (Jackson, lines 605-607).

3.2.2: Meat-animal disconnect

Participants expressed and maintained contradictory attitudes regarding chickens as companion animals and chickens as meat products. They managed this by conceptually

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disconnecting the meat from the animal, and thinking of animal chickens as entirely and fundamentally different ‘things’ to chicken meat:

...this bird of mine was bitten by the dog the other day [...] the feathers had all been taken off, and it went right through my brain, it just looks like the chicken that we eat, the skin, you know? I wasn’t terribly surprised but I just thought, that’s what it looks like. This is a chicken but like we eat [...] ‘cause I’d never looked at my chickens as though I’m going to eat them, or they could be eaten (Stella, lines 486-490).

Chicken meat was disconnected from living household chickens through selectively muting favourable and empathetic views of chickens that might prevent enjoyment of chicken meat consumption:

...they perhaps didn’t really want to think about eating chickens when they were looking at these cute fluffy things in front of them. Yeah, and I think perhaps in the industry that there are a lot of unpleasant things about that that people don’t necessarily want to face (Gloria, lines 326-329).

Participants also reflected on giving chickens lower pet status to morally and mentally support their chicken meat consumption, whether in relation to their household chickens or store-bought chicken meat:

...you wouldn’t become attached, you could not “peticise” [sic] anything that you were raising [for food] [...] if it was your business on a farm, you couldn’t have them

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[chickens] as pets. You would need to be removed to know that they're all going off next week, you know. In a truck to the abattoirs (Stella, lines 592-594).

The above excerpt also shows chickens develop pet status through the owner taking an active process of 'peticising' particular animals and not others.

Participants saw businesses as using commercial means of disconnecting chicken meat from living chickens. They achieved this by visually objectifying chicken meat through packaging, effectively obscuring the once living animal:

...you're just picking up something, another different type of food that's packaged, you know. Compared to almost like a pack of biscuits or a tin of something (Gloria, lines 481-483).

The meat-animal disconnect was seen as the result of modern society moving away from agrarian farming practices which were idealised as 'natural'. By contrast, modern industrial farming practices were believed to disguise meat production processes and the suffering of meat animals to promote guilt-free meat consumption. This resulted in most of the population being 'disconnected' from and ignorant of meat production:

...it's just simple, farming's getting more efficient, we're getting new jobs in other areas. We don't need two thirds of the population farming anymore, we can get away with 10%. So the other 90% never deal with that side of the thing (Jackson, lines 215-218).

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The distance between the population and meat production was seen as a result of people’s unwillingness to acknowledge the inhumane treatment of meat animals involved in mass food production. Participants accepted that knowledge of inhumane processes would make them uncomfortable about meat consumption, and reduce their enjoyment of eating meat:

...it’s [chicken meat production] been turned into a business, and once it becomes a business they don’t want people getting in there to see it happen. Because you know, they put these birds through machinery to take their feathers off, and - when they’re dead - and if we actually saw an abattoir we might be a bit more squirmish. But we don’t, it’s all nice and clean and squeaky, wrapped up in plastic (Stella, lines 478-482).

Living chickens were not constantly or consistently disconnected from chicken meat. Sometimes participants connected their chicken meat consumption to the treatment of the once living chickens in factory farms. Knowledge of chickens suffering in those farms overlapped with views of chicken meat as unnatural and distasteful:

...I just got really sick of the blandness of it, because those fillets that you buy, you know? The chicken fillet that is mass produced, probably the chicken’s had hormones pumped into it to get it all plump, it really is tasteless. It, it’s just bland (Jessica, lines 437-440).

3.3: Chickens are utilities

Both household chickens and meat chickens were seen as ‘tools’ that were bred and owned to fulfil human needs and desires.

3.3.1: Chickens are material utilities

Chickens were explicitly objectified as tools that performed a certain function or occupied a certain practical role within the household. For example, chickens viewed as utilities were considered “free egg *machines*” (Rihanna, line 235), rather than living animals. Furthermore, utilitarian chickens had no intrinsic value. Instead, their value was determined by their ability to fulfil their function. Accordingly, chickens that did not perform to owner satisfaction were disposable and replaceable:

...once a chicken stops laying then it doesn’t have a value or a purpose, so they’ll take the chicken that has stopped laying to the fodder store [...] then they’ll buy new ones that will lay an egg a day (Chelsea, lines 223-227).

Similarly, ‘useless’ chickens might be killed and eaten. This suggests that people do not form attachments to chickens kept as utilities, and that views of chickens as utilities are compatible with views of chickens as meat products:

So when our chickens would get old and stop laying, my father would wring their necks and then my mother would pluck them and the chicken would be cooked (Jessica, lines 148-149).

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Chickens were also used as utilities when they died, such as for fertiliser and compost. This is starkly different to ‘pet’ chickens that were ceremonially buried, as discussed above:

...when they die of old age they go in the compost. Extra blood and bone, buried under a tree, so they’re more useful to us that way (Gillian, lines 149-150).

Household utility chickens were seen as financial investments:

We lost one to a fox a few weeks ago [...] All that was left was a little pile of brown feathers, haha. [...] Cost me \$20 and it’s gone, it was one of our best layers (Gillian, lines 201-205).

3.3.2: Chickens are moral utilities

Chickens were used to support and represent their owners’ moral or ideological beliefs relating to lifestyle, sustainability, and animal welfare. For example, participants sometimes demonstrated moral concern for broiler chicken welfare, and kept chickens to address welfare issues associated with intensive farming:

Well, the overwhelming reason for having a chicken would be, yeah. That you know the animal is treated well, that it’s better for the environment, that it’s the whole sustainability issue [...] that’s the primary reason we have chickens (Chelsea, lines 362-365).

Participants also used household chickens as educational tools to teach children about food production. Chickens were considered less relatable, which allowed participants

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sufficient emotional detachment to then slaughter them as a way of educating children about life and death:

...it's probably good for them to see it [children to see chickens killed] once or twice, you know. Done in a humane way, manner, and for a purpose. [...] it's part of your world, isn't it? It's real. [...] Part of life. Life, death, the cycle (Gillian, lines 374-379).

Using chickens for educating children and to support sustainable living lifestyles related to notions of unnatural and unethical modern meat production. Participants sought independence from these processes by producing their own food. This was seen as a way of 'returning' to idealised pre-industrial farming practices and social ways of being within close-knit communities:

I think we've moved away from some of that community engagement, with the killing of the meat and feeding ourselves, you know? I think that might be where a little bit of the disjoint is coming, now that we're a nuclear family and sort of in a consumer society. Part of that community aspect of taking a life for the benefit of the community is missing (Gillian, lines 632-636).

Participants also kept and cared for household chickens to morally offset inhumane chicken farming and/or absolve themselves of complicity in those farming practices:

So you can adopt them and they're chickens that have never been out in the 'wild', haha. You know, just like always been in the cage. [...] that's horrible, that. That's

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why we have our own chickens, because that, that kind of, yeah. That’s yuck
(Chelsea, lines 201-205).

Use of chickens as moral utilities represented and reinforced participants’ altruistic beliefs about sustainability and animal welfare.

3.4: Chickens have varying levels of individuality

Chickens were seen as having different levels of individuality based on their apparent capacities for intelligence, emotion, and/or personality.

3.4.1: Chickens are individuals

Participants saw household chickens as individuals based on perceiving chickens as having intelligence, emotional experience, and/or distinguishable personalities. These factors corresponded with each other. For example, some chickens were considered intelligent *because* they were considered capable of emotional experience:

They’re not as stupid as people think. [...] It’s just, we have this idea that we’re the supreme you know, [mockingly] humans, wow! We’re just animals too, really [...] [chickens] might not sit there philosophising or whatever, or thinking why am I here, but to me, a chicken exhibits happiness, contentment, suffering when it’s ill, cleverness (Jessica, lines 494-500).

Participants represented household chickens’ personalities by giving them personifying names. In the following extract, chickens’ human names represent their

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identities and distinctive personalities, and in turn allowed Rihanna to discuss different relationships she had with each chicken:

...Frank was very fidgety, would not let anyone near her [...] Andre, because of, like I said, she was the most mild-mannered chicken, she'd some- they'd do that thing where they'd kind of crouch down and they'd let you pet them. I got that from Beyoncé as well, not so much Donald, and then out of Sigourney and Fergie, it was Fergie who let me, like, get close to her (Rihanna, lines 86-92).

Seeing chickens as individuals capable of emotional experience, especially suffering, connected to concern for chickens in inhumane farming conditions. Being aware of chickens' suffering in such conditions sometimes led to condemnations of those farming practices:

...those places where they just live, packed into those horrible cages. And they look scrawny and they look unhappy. A chicken needs to be in dirt, that's where it's happiest. [...] these cavernous buildings where it's just chickens, everywhere. And the noise and the feathers and the - it's like a concentration camp for chickens (Jessica, lines 442-447).

3.4.2: Chickens are not individuals

Household chickens were sometimes deindividuated, based on them being not worth naming because “they just look the same” (Chelsea, line 151). Chickens were also deindividuated based on views of chickens as lacking intelligence, emotional experience, and distinct personalities. These attitudes overlapped with views of human superiority over animals. Chickens were objectified as machine-like and/or seen as cognitively inferior to

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humans. This supported the belief that chicken meat consumption is justified by human supremacy:

...for them [chickens] it [emotion] seems more instinctive or primitive. Um, what else... like executive functioning, erm I think animals are probably more likely to exhibit behaviour based on instinct than us being more rational logical creatures (Gemima, lines 326-329).

Participants emotionally detached from household chickens by deindividuating them. They did this when they considered forming emotional attachments as potentially distressing. For example, Jessica attempted to depersonify her household chickens by refraining from naming them, and therefore prevent forming attachments to them:

I just called them C1 and C2 because most of the [previous] chickens I've had [...] have died because a fox has got them. And it's very distressing when you find a headless chicken, a corpse, and this has happened just countless times in our backyard [...] So this time I thought, I'm not going to name them and maybe I won't be so upset when it happens (Jessica, lines 101-122).

Chickens that were explicitly objectified were also seen to be lacking in emotion and intelligence. This view was acknowledged as a way of disconnecting chicken meat from chicken animals, and facilitating chicken meat consumption:

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Again I think that’s just like, you get so used to them being there they're almost *a part of the furniture* outside and to eat it [chicken meat]... just, I don’t know. There’s no emotion kind of attached there (Gemima, lines 390-392).

Participants explained that they did not emotionally engage with chickens because they found it more difficult to empathise with birds than with mammals, and considered birds less human-like than mammals. The lack of empathy for chickens supported their enjoyment of chicken meat despite owning companion animal chickens:

It’s not the sort of thing that you would take your child to an abattoir and see a big brown eyed cow being stunned and then you know, and then killed for your food, and then taken around to get the sausage. [...] seeing a big mammal get slaughtered is a bit different to seeing a bird get slaughtered. [...] Maybe we don’t identify so closely with birds as we do with mammals (Gillian, lines 360-368).

3.5: Inconsistencies and changes in perceptions

Perceptions of chickens were inconsistent between participants and within individual accounts, which represents the changing and ambiguous nature of perceptions of chickens. Chickens served different functions and had different levels of perceived individuality to different participants. Additionally, these categorisations and perceptions sometimes changed over time.

3.5.1: Differences between individuals

Participants reported having different attitudes about chickens to those of their friends and family, and wider society. The differences they reported also represent the

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inconsistencies across participants’ accounts. For example, in the following excerpt, Balqees comments on how she developed an appreciation for chickens’ cognitive capacity over the course of keeping them:

Chickens are not- and they’re not even dumb. Like that’s what I realised when I owned one, they are not dumb. They are pretty, pretty smart. And very curious (Balqees Bibi, lines 243-245).

In comparison, Jackson disparaged chickens because he saw chickens as having no cognitive capacity and limited physical ability:

Well they can’t fly, they can’t move anywhere, they can be pretty stupid when you’re trying to lead them back home to where they need to stay. They’ve got limited sight (Jackson, lines 130-131).

Participants also acknowledged other ways of seeing and treating chickens. Some ways of treating chickens were defended despite participants acknowledging that they might be unpopular and considered unethical by others:

...this is probably a controversial sort of opinion, when they seem to be sick or dying, err, my Nonna will kill them [...] Yeah, I can imagine what some people say (Gemima, lines 239-242).

3.5.2: *Inconsistencies and changes in individual attitudes*

Consciously reflecting on contradictions between attitudes and behaviours towards different chickens sometimes resulted in participants feeling guilt and verbalising cognitive dissonance. For example, Stella acknowledged feeling guilty when witnessing a butchering, and realised that this disrupted her ability to disconnect chicken meat from the live animal:

...they'll chop its head off and give it to them as a take home. I find that awful. Why do you have to have- yeah? Why torment these animals? [...] it's really giving me the guilt for eating something like that. And that's bringing it much more closer than how we see our food (Stella, lines 753-756).

Participants also acknowledged that they would feel dissonance if it were not for the *Meat-animal disconnect*. They believed that businesses hid the inhumane treatment and deaths of meat chickens as it facilitated chicken meat consumption. This allowed participants to absolve themselves of complicity in slaughtering chickens for meat production, and thereby avoid guilt:

...if it's not me being the violent one then like it doesn't really affect me. So I, I think that's why I don't give much thought to chicken still being meat and also being able to be pets, yeah. Like obviously I don't wish violence on just I guess animals in general, but [...] I'm just used to knowing that you know, chickens do end up becoming meat (Rihanna, lines 651-655).

Furthermore, perceptions of chickens were susceptible to change. For example, views of chickens changed to become either more or less favourable after keeping household

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chickens. Participants connected spending time with companion animal chickens to developing an appreciation of chickens’ intelligence and their roles as affectionate companion animals:

...the concept of keeping chickens as pets didn’t, just didn’t even exist to me. And pretty much only saw them as food, and also before that, like I, I rarely had any like I guess reason or opportunity to see even just like photos of chickens [...] running around or being in a field or stuff like that. Like they would always just be food. And over the course of keeping my chickens, like I grew a love for the animal in, in general (Rihanna, lines 309-315).

Furthermore, specific roles of household chickens sometimes changed over time. For example, in the following excerpt, Gloria explains that she initially purchased chickens for egg production reasons, but came to appreciate their other functional roles and companionship. Consequently, she recategorised her chickens from being purely utilities to also being companion animals:

...the reason we got the chickens in the first place was to have fresh eggs! We found after getting them, that ours are friendly animals that are good pets as well, and also great in the garden digging the soil over, eating bugs and fertilising. We didn't get them with the intention of having them as just pets, but they have become that as we got to spend time with them and look after them (Gloria, post-interview correspondence).

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Attitudes also sometimes changed to become less favourable to chickens after participants spent time with household chickens. For example, chickens were objectified and deindividuated to prevent grieving when they died:

...you kind of get used to it, them dying off. And so I just got a little bit less upset about it, I felt that it was unhealthy to become so worked up over all these animals dying constantly (Corby, lines 93-96).

Furthermore, participants expressed conflicting attitudes about chickens without acknowledging that they conflicted. For example, Jessica expressed deep attachment to her first household chickens, and implicitly expressed that she had some form of affectionate relationship with them:

...we got these chickens, Ramona and Maggie were the first two. And I fell in love with them, I just loved them, they were so beguiling (Jessica, lines 158-160).

However, later in the interview, Jessica also stated that she could not form significant or physically affectionate relationships with her chickens. In doing so, she denied seeing her chickens as companion animals:

Other people might have different relationships with birds where they actually think of them as a pet- I mean you know, people have parrots that live with them and sit on their shoulder and whatever. I just, I don't know, for me a bird is different (Jessica, lines 313-316).

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

4.1: Overview

This study explored how people who keep chickens and eat chicken meat perceive chickens. Five themes were generated that capture these perceptions. The first three describe how participants categorised chickens - as being pets, meat products, or utilities. The fourth theme describes how views of chickens' individuality (or lack thereof) were based on chickens' perceived capacities for emotion, intelligence, and distinctive personality. The fifth theme describes how views of chickens were dynamic and sometimes contradictory. The fact that views of chickens shifted supports the idea that “people may shift their moral concern towards other beings - and their attribution of morally relevant mental states - in accordance with their *motivations*” (Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010, p. 158). Therefore, Serpell's (2004) two-factor model of motivational determinants of attitudes towards animals effectively frames the current findings. These factors are: *affect*—the motivation to socially and/or emotionally connect with animals; and *utility*—the motivation to use animals that are beneficial to human interests (Serpell, 2004).

4.2: Chicken meat and the Meat Paradox

The present study confirmed that chickens are seen as meat products. Further, people dissociated chicken meat from living chickens and therefore viewed the meat as a product separate from animal chickens. Participants felt guilty for caring about household chickens while eating unknown chickens, and used various cognitive strategies to reduce that guilt and continue eating meat. Therefore, these findings align with literature on the Meat Paradox phenomenon (Loughnan, Bastian, & Haslam, 2014), which states that individuals objectify

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meat animals as mindless food products to deny their suffering and thereby alleviate cognitive dissonance (Rothgerber, 2014).

Reasons for eating and enjoying chicken meat reported in this study correspond with rationalisations of meat consumption which reduce Meat Paradox-related cognitive dissonance (Dowsett, Semmler, Bray, Ankeny, & Chur-Hansen, 2018; Rothgerber, 2014). These include believing meat consumption is: *normal*—acceptable within one’s culture; *natural*—reflective of and justified by human supremacy over animals; *necessary*—essential for nutritional and dietary reasons to maintain good health; and *nice*—enjoyable due to its taste (Joy, 2009; Piazza et al., 2015). Participants reported eating chicken meat for these same reasons, although they also acknowledged that meat chickens suffer in farms. In this way, participants rationalised chicken meat consumption through *neutralisation* - believing that the benefits of eating meat outweigh the associated ethical issues (Dowsett et al., 2018).

The *Meat-animal disconnect* finding reflects other cognitive strategies for facilitating meat consumption identified by Rothgerber (2014): the disconnect involved using *avoidance* - avoiding information about meat animal suffering that threatens meat consumption; and *dissociation* - disconnecting meat products from living animals so that individuals can reduce how many animals they believe they eat – to continue eating chicken meat. Additionally, the belief that *Chickens are not individuals*, and associated beliefs that they lack intelligence and emotion, correspond with the rationalisation strategies *denial of pain* and *denial of mind* (Rothgerber, 2014). Previous research indicates that chickens are denied mind more than mammals and conventional companion animals. For example, in one study, chickens were rated 29% in cognitive similarity compared to humans (with dogs at 66% and apes at 75%) (Eddy et al., 1993). Respondents in another study rated chickens second lowest in intelligence

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relative to humans, above only turkeys, and below dogs, cats, pigs, horses, cows, and sheep (Davis & Cheeke, 1998). This highlights the present participants’ arguments that chickens are less relatable due to being birds, unlike dogs as conventional companion animals, or cows as mammalian agricultural animals. Participants’ beliefs that chickens are less relatable and cognitively capable compared to other animals contributed to chickens having low *moral status*, which also justifies meat consumption (Bastian, Loughnan, et al., 2012; Kunst & Hohle, 2016; Loughnan et al., 2010; Piazza & Loughnan, 2016; Rothgerber, 2014).

In the present study, there were differences in *which* chickens participants denied mind and moral status. This suggests that individuals deny mind and moral concern to meat animals while exempting companion animals of the same species. This is supported by research showing animal species which are categorised as edible tend to be denied moral concern more so than animals not categorised as edible (Bratanova et al., 2011). Participants caring more about their household chickens than unknown meat chickens supports the pet-enhancement bias proposed by El-Alayli, Lystad, Webb, Hollingsworth, and Ciolli (2006), wherein personally known companion animals are rated more favourably than the companion animals’ species in general. Furthermore, Piazza and Loughnan (2016) found that people are motivated to attribute mind to animals only when doing so does not threaten their consumption of animal meat. This indicates that the present participants may have empathised only with their household chickens as doing so did not threaten their consumption of other chickens.

Participants reported differences between how they viewed chickens and chicken meat, and how older family members with different ethno-cultural backgrounds did. This is supported by research showing that human-animal bonds vary according to ethnic diversity

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(Risley-Curtiss, Holley, & Wolf, 2006). Therefore, generational differences in Australian attitudes towards meat and animals may be due to acculturation over successive generations.

4.3: Chickens as companion animals

Participants reported affection, attachment, and personification in their relationships with chickens as companion animals. This is consistent with wider research showing the same elements in human-parrot relationships (Anderson, 2014) and human-animal relationships in general (Meehan et al., 2017; Paul et al., 2014; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011). Participants’ human-chicken relationships with social and emotional elements may be understood through the second motivational determinant of animal attitudes - ‘affect’ (Serpell, 2004). Views of chickens as individuals that had mind, emotion, and personality correspond with research demonstrating that people attribute mind, and primary and secondary emotions, to companion animal species (Eddy et al., 1993; Epley, Schroeder, & Waytz, 2013; Morris, Doe, & Godsell, 2008; Morris, Knight, & Lesley, 2012; Sanders, 1993). Changing views of household chickens as having minds, and household chickens becoming more ‘pet-like’ to owners, reflects research showing that students attributed more mind, emotion, and personality to chickens after clicker training chickens to peck a target (Hazel, Lisel, & Terry, 2015). The present participants’ attribution of emotions to their chickens also aligns with the finding that owners of companion birds attribute more primary emotion to birds than people who have not owned companion birds (Wilkins et al., 2015). Other research indicates that people anthropomorphise and attribute mind to companion animals to satisfy social needs, such as to alleviate loneliness (Paul et al., 2014). Additionally, one study suggests that anthropomorphisation satisfies the need to predict otherwise chaotic environments, and consequently satisfies the need for mastery over one’s environment (Waytz et al., 2010). Therefore, the finding that some participants personified

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their chickens, while others did not, may be explained by different motivations to satisfy different needs for social connection and environmental mastery.

4.4: Lower pet status and resolving dissonance

Participants managed tension arising from conflicting views of chickens as companion animals and as meat products by giving household chickens *Lower pet status*. Douglas (2006) identified a similar phenomenon in research showing that companion dogs kept indoors received more enriched and luxury care than dogs kept outdoors. Similarly, Redmalm (2015) suggests that when companion animals die, they are more likely to be grieved when they are seen as more human-like, which may explain the ceremonial burials for companion animal chickens reported in the present study. Conversely, Redmalm (2015) also suggests that domestic animals that are not considered human-like are thought of as ‘lose-able’, which may explain the present finding that utility chickens were considered disposable. Chickens were believed to have less intelligence and emotional capacity than dogs, which reflects research showing that meat animals are rated less cognitively adept compared to humans (Bastian, Loughnan, et al., 2012), especially poultry (Davis & Cheeke, 1998; Eddy et al., 1993). *Lower pet status* could also be based on views of chickens as ‘unlike’ humans due to low perceived biological relatedness and behavioural similarity, which has been found in other studies (Harrison & Hall, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2015).

Participants managed opposing views of chickens as mindless meat products and as mindful companion animals through the *Meat-animal disconnect*, which involved not seeing their household chickens as ‘edible’. This is contextualised by research showing that species categorised as edible elicit less empathy (Bilewicz et al., 2016) and are given lower moral standing (Bratanova et al., 2011) than species not considered edible. Accordingly, it is

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possible that participants empathised with companion chickens and therefore considered them inedible, but did not empathise with meat chickens because they were seen as edible. This appears to be *selective* moral disengagement as a means of resolving Meat Paradox-related cognitive dissonance (Graça, Calheiros, & Oliveira, 2016). Taylor and Signal’s (2018) finding that animals classified as pets elicit more empathy than animals classified as profit or meat animals supports this idea.

Euphemistic language was used to semantically disconnect chicken meat from living chickens. Euphemistic language and ways of presenting meat products that disguise the animal, such as removing the head, have been found to reduce empathy and disgust in response to meat products (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). This suggests that participants’ use of euphemistic language to disconnect chicken meat from living chickens supported their chicken meat consumption. The present study also identified beliefs that businesses supported the *Meat-animal disconnect* to encourage purchasing meat. These support the argument that poultry farms use directed discourse and euphemistic language, such as referring to flocks of chickens as ‘crops’ to be ‘harvested’, to hide animal welfare issues that consumers may find aversive, thereby promoting meat consumption (Croney & Reynnells, 2008). The present findings also support research arguing that terms used to describe interactions and relationships with animals can influence perceptions of animals and their motivations (Boivin, Lensink, Tallet, & Veissier, 2003), and ethical stances towards animals (Anthony, 2003).

4.5: Chickens as material utilities

Views of chickens as material utilities corresponds with prior research identifying views of animals, particularly chickens, as utilities that are raised and/or kept due to benefit

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humans (Serpell, 2004; Trigg, Thompson, Smith, & Bennett, 2016). In terms of subscales on the Animal Use Inventory proposed by Templer et al. (2013), views of chickens as individuated companion animals fits with the subscale for ‘loving and affection’, whereas perceptions of chickens as objectified working animals fits with the subscale for ‘working and service’ uses.

Prior research has argued that people are motivated to objectify animals in order to eat them (Gervais et al., 2013). This is similar to motivational determinants of denial of mind (Loughnan et al., 2010), in that both support cherished meat consumption behaviours which involve harm to the objectified animals (Bastian, Costello, Loughnan, & Hodson, 2012). Similarly, participants’ perceptions of chickens as material utilities, as deindividuated, and as meat products all overlapped. This suggest the participants objectified and denied mind to meat chickens to support chicken meat consumption. Previous studies have identified views of animals as objectified and deindividuated utilities. For example, one study examined how media objectifies animals by deindividuating and instrumentalising them, with the aim of resolving viewers’ cognitive dissonance about, and therefore encouraging, meat consumption (Leitsberger, Benz-Schwarzburg, & Grimm, 2016). This aligns with the present finding that chickens conceived of as material utilities were thought of in terms of financial value and were considered disposable and replaceable, and with businesses’ role in promoting the *Meat-animal disconnect*.

4.6: Chickens as moral utilities

The present study identified implicit beliefs that chickens are *moral utilities*, which were distinct from material utilities, in that owners used chickens as moral utilities to uphold moral or ideological beliefs, whereas they used chickens as material utilities to satisfy

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material needs or desires. The concept of ‘moral utility’ has some overlap with the concept of household companion animals as ‘emotional commodities’, defined as living entities that are both loved and objectified, depending on the owner’s social and emotional needs (Shir-Vertesh, 2012). The present study extends Shir-Vertesh’s argument by suggesting that backyard chicken ownership also fulfils cognitive needs potentially relating to ideology and self-image. This is supported by the argument that people may value *feeling* moral, despite acting out of self-interest, and only perform moral behaviours when those behaviours are self-serving (Gino, Norton, & Weber, 2016).

The use of chickens as *moral utilities* corresponds with *perceived behavioural change* as a cognitive rationalisation of meat consumption. This describes how people exaggerate how often they act morally to themselves and others, in order to pre-empt guilt or social reproach for complicity in ethical issues relating to meat production (Rothgerber, 2014). Similarly, participants kept chickens for sustainable egg production, and provided care to their household chickens, to morally offset intensive farming practices considered inhumane and harmful. Likewise, Serpell (1999) identified the tendency of livestock farmers to selectively personify and nurture specific livestock animals, allowing the farmers to “atone or compensate for their treatment of the animal’s less fortunate, and more anonymous, fellows” (Serpell, 1999, p. 29). Similarly, participants in the present study acknowledged that they were complicit in the inhumane treatment of meat chickens by continuing to buy chicken meat. However, they considered caring for their household chickens a moral duty. This inconsistency suggests that participants’ empathy for chickens is based on factors other than altruistic ethical concern. One such factor may be the closeness and perceived individuality of household chickens, which is explained by the phenomenon called *psychic numbing* - the tendency for empathy and concern for people in need to reduce as the number of people in

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need increases (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Slovic, Zionts, Woods, Goodman, & Jinks, 2011). Similarly, participants in the present study expressed feeling powerless or unwilling to address the sheer mass of chickens in factory farms, while deriving enjoyment from caring for their own household chickens (Paul et al., 2014). Therefore, people may be motivated to regulate moral concern to care less for unknown chickens and more for household chickens in order to prevent overwhelming distress (Cameron & Payne, 2011).

The concept of regulating empathy for multiple others in suffering parallels *denial of moral status* and concern for suffering meat animals (Loughnan et al., 2010), considering both function to avoid or reduce distress (Rothgerber, 2014). Similarly, participants reported less care and mind attribution to broiler chickens. This finding is supported by research showing that when people evaluate moral obligation to help others in suffering, their evaluation is affected by informational directness of the suffering individuals, and how much they are able to assist (Nagel & Waldmann, 2013). Therefore, disparities in participants’ concern for household chickens and broiler chickens may be due to differences in informational directness and perceived efficaciousness relating to broiler chicken suffering.

4.7: Strengths

A clear strength of this research was its contribution to the sparse literature concerning human-chicken bonds and chicken meat food choices. To this researcher’s knowledge, this study is the first qualitative inquiry into chicken-owner accounts. Furthermore, the open-ended question format allowed the exploration of conscious experiences of dissonance and strategies of reducing it. Conversely, previous research into Meat Paradox-related cognitive dissonance has tended to rely on quantified measures such as willingness to eat meat (Kunst, Haugestad, & Andres, 2018). These may miss conscious

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attitudes and neglect rich description provided by participant accounts, which this study took advantage of. Additionally, chickens having low *moral status* as meat animals (Loughnan et al., 2010) may have prompted the present participants to more readily express uncaring views of chickens and chicken meat choices. Conversely, participants may have been reluctant to express similar views of more ‘popular’ companion animals with higher moral status, such as dogs. This is especially relevant given the risk of social desirability bias in qualitative research methods (Kelly, Soler-Hampejsek, Mensch, & Hewett, 2013). Therefore, it is likely the current participants’ contributions were open and honest.

Data saturation was achieved, which indicates strong support for the claims made in this study (Tracy, 2010). Additionally, the researcher maintained an audit trail, which increased sincerity and facilitated the researcher’s continued reflexive practice (Tracy, 2010) that contributed to the trustworthiness and rigour of the research.

4.8: Implications

Participants were conscious of distancing from chickens, and even intentionally directed moral detachment to facilitate enjoyment of chicken meat. This finding supports research which found the use of *active and explicit avoidance* of exposure to meat animal suffering to support meat consumption (Graça et al., 2014). In another study, participants were able to actively control emotional regulation, resulting in different levels of concern for hypothetical human individuals in distress (Cameron & Payne, 2011). Otherwise, research on intentional and conscious methods of reducing Meat Paradox-related cognitive dissonance is limited. The present study suggests empathising for individual animals is a conscious ‘choice’ as well as a reactive response to circumstantial factors. Individuals may be able to consciously and actively control emotional regulation in response to animal suffering, and

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may be motivated to do so based on potential benefits of empathising for (Paul et al., 2014; Serpell, 2004) or disengaging from (Graça et al., 2014) different animals. Future research could examine the effectiveness of conscious efforts to morally disengage from meat animals, compared to subconscious processes.

Participants in the current study acknowledged caring more about their household chickens than unknown meat chickens, which may be understood as selective moral concern depending on individual needs and exposure to individual chickens. Prior research has demonstrated denial of moral concern to specific meat animal species (Loughnan et al., 2010), and the effects of framing species as edible on moral concern for that species (Bastian, Costello, et al., 2012). The present study extends this research by indicating that individuals may grant moral concern to specific individual animals and not others within the same species. There is limited support for this phenomenon in prior research. Therefore, the present results provide an important contribution to the literature by suggesting that fine differences in attributed moral concern may occur at the level of individual cognition. This study supports the two-factor model of motivational determinants of attitudes towards animals proposed by Serpell (2004) by demonstrating that the model has external validity and seems generalisable to individual experiences and real world contexts. However, more research is needed to examine how ‘utility’ and ‘affect’ factors can overlap and interact, as demonstrated by overlapping attitudes in the present study.

The present study provides a unique contribution to literature concerning human-animal bonds and the Meat Paradox by exploring the perceptions of people who had reason to view domestic animals as both companion animals and as meat products. The findings show that, between the potentially opposing views of chickens as mindless meat animals

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(Rothgerber, 2014) and intelligent companion animals (Paul et al., 2014), participants compromised by selectively attributing household chickens *limited* mind and moral status. This represented chickens’ dual multiple as pets and as utilities, including their function as meat products. Participants described this as *Lower pet status*, and acknowledged that ascribing lower pet status was an intentional effort to reduce or avoid dissonance from contradictory attitudes.

Human-animal bonds literature has tended to rely on simplistic categorisations of domestic animals as companion animals, while Meat Paradox literature has relied on similarly simplistic categorisations of meat animals. However, the present study contributes to the prior research by demonstrating that animals may be *both* companion animals and meat products. Additionally, participants perceived different levels of companion animal status, which indicates that animal categories used in prior research may not accurately reflect individuals’ perceptions. Furthermore, the present study suggests that individuals can actively alter their attitudes towards animals and/or meat, and morally disengage from household and/or meat chickens. Limited prior research has identified similar active approaches to avoiding thoughts about ethical issues involving meat consumption, such as strategic ignorance of information about meat animal suffering (Onwezen & van Der Weele, 2016). Future inquiry could use mixed methods research designs to connect individuals’ accounts of forced attitude change to quantitative pre- and post-intervention measures of the target attitudes.

The present findings have broad implications for social psychology beyond human-animal bonds. For example, this study adds evidence to the phenomenon of people condemning unethical practices, such as intensive meat farming or sweatshop labour, while

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continuing to support those practices (e.g. by buying meat or cheap clothing). Research has found that consumers use motivated moral reasoning to support their purchases of clothing products produced in sweatshops (Paharia, Vohs, & Deshpandé, 2013), similar to motivated engagement and disengagement from chickens found in this study. Therefore, people may claim to care about others while generally ignoring their suffering. Further, the present study indicates that people more readily care about known individuals than for distant groups experiencing suffering. Research of compassion for other humans has labelled this phenomenon *psychic numbing* (Slovic et al., 2011). The present study adds to the argument that *psychic numbing* also explains why individuals feel less moral concern for distant groups of animals in intensive meat farms (Joy, 2009). The cognitive processes related to empathy and disengagement that underpin these phenomena are clearly complex. More research is needed to examine how these processes affect empathy both for animals and for other humans. The present findings extend the argument that people act on their moral rules and values according to subjective criteria and internal motivations, rather than others' apparent 'deservingness' of moral concern (Nagel & Waldmann, 2013), and show that this argument applies to animals as well as people.

4.9: Limitations and future research

This study undertook exploratory examination of human-chicken relationships and the results will facilitate future directed inquiry into human-chicken relationships in suburban and domestic contexts. Although the ability to examine conscious perceptions of chickens was a strength of the open-ended interview format, this also meant that participants' implicit attitudes were more difficult to access. This was a limitation of the present study, as prior research has demonstrated the role of implicit attitudes in relation to food and disgust (La Barbera, Verneau, Amato, & Grunert, 2018; Verneau et al., 2016), and Implicit Association

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Tests have been used to study objectification of other humans (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Therefore, further research exploring human-chicken relationships and broader human-animal bonds inquiry could combine explicit self-report measures of attitudes with implicit attitude tests. This would produce more accurate and holistic representations of individuals’ attitudes to animals and meat. Prior research has effectively combined implicit and explicit attitude tests to measure impulsivity relating to food choice and consumption behaviour (Friese, Hofmann, & Wänke, 2008). This demonstrates the potential application of a similar approach to human-animal bonds and Meat Paradox attitudes that could shed light on the management of opposing attitudes like those identified in the present study.

The one-on-one interview format did not allow sufficient exploration of differences in attitudes towards chickens within families and/or households. Prior research shows that meat consumption and meat abstinence attitudes are highly socially loaded (Rothgerber, 2014). For example, Roth (2005) found that the way vegetarians and meat-eaters negotiate family relationships relates to power, belonging, and exclusion in family structures. Therefore, future research may extend the present findings by interviewing families that keep chickens or other meat animals in suburban contexts in focus group formats. This would allow the examination of untapped differences in family member attitudes towards household companion animals. For example, how might one family member who planned to kill and eat household chickens negotiate this with another family member who had deep attachment to those chickens?

Participants’ views of chickens as ‘pets’ corresponded to some degree with definition of companion animals as domestic animals kept for companionship and/or interactions. This suggests that human-animal bonds research findings is to some extent generalisable to

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human-chicken relationships. However, the peculiarities of views of, and relationships with, chickens identified in this study indicate the need for more research examining how human-animal bonds vary depending on animal type, species, and nature of relationship with the individual animal. The *Lower pet status* and *Inconsistencies and changes in individual attitudes* findings also indicate that categorisations of chickens are not necessarily mutually exclusive and static. Rather, chickens moved between categories and along continuums of attributed mind and moral status, which may have been due to owners’ motivational determinants (Serpell, 2004). Research into attitudes of animal types and uses has predominantly used distinct and static categories (e.g. Knight, Vrij, Cherryman, & Nunkoosing, 2004; Phillips & McCulloch, 2005; Templer et al., 2013). Taylor and Signal (2009) argued for the need to develop a scale aimed at isolating differences in attitudes towards animals, and suggested the categories of companion animal, pest, and profit/utility animal. The present findings align with their suggested categories and support their argument. However, participants’ changing and overlapping categorisations of chickens suggest that the proposed scale may benefit from allowing respondents to report the degree to which specific companion animals are considered pets, pests, or profit animals. This corresponds with Chur-Hansen and colleagues’ (2008) suggestion that the distinction between ‘pets’ and ‘non-pets’ are overly simplistic and do not accurately represent individuals’ perceptions of and experiences with companion animals.

Previous research has shown that household companion animals may be considered members of the family (Shir-Vertesh, 2012). However, in the present study, participants ‘demoted’ chickens below the status of conventional companion animals. This points to the need for a model of companion animal categorisation that accounts for fine differences in perceptions of companion animals, which range from machine-like objects, to simple-minded

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animals, to human-like creatures attributed mind, and moral status. The ability of open-ended interviews to capture the richness and complexities of such individual perceptions is an added strength of the present study. There was a wide range of moral status given to different chickens by participants. However, to this researcher’s knowledge, human-animal bonds research has not yet examined variations in moral status given to specific companion animals. A promising avenue for future research is measuring moral concern for companion animals that may vary depending on factors such as pet status, species, meat behaviours, and belief in animal mind.

The present study identified uses of chickens as *moral utilities* to support ideological beliefs. This suggests that conventional views of utility and profit animals in human-animal bonds research neglect how animals are 'used' for non-material and non-financial means. Therefore, future research of animal attitudes may examine how companion animals might be used to satisfy cognitive and ideological needs. Utilitarian aspects of human-animal relationships might be better understood by testing companion animal owners on measures of altruism and egoism in relation to moral concern and caring behaviour for different animals. This is supported by research which found that egoism and altruism can each motivate caring behaviour in different contexts (Maner & Gailliot, 2007), and that moral behaviours can provide egoistic rewards of *feeling* moral (Gino et al., 2016). Furthermore, future research may operationalise different categories and perceptions of chickens identified in this study. Multivariate analyses may examine whether different attitudes correlate with different levels of empathy for, and different treatment, of various individual animals and animal species. Comparison of such measures across demographics has the potential to make valuable contributions to research on food and animal attitudes, and human-animal bonds.

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A growing body of literature is examining the extent to which factors in human-animal bonds and attitudes towards animals can be generalised to inter-human relationships. This includes how dehumanisation of people relates to personification of animals (Epley et al., 2013), and how empathy for animals correlates with empathy for humans (Kavanagh, Signal, & Taylor, 2013; Paul, 2000). The present participants sometimes recategorised chickens, such as by moving them from utility roles to companion animal roles, which participants connected to greater mind attribution to, and more empathy, for household chickens. Such changes in views may be explored through the intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), and support the argument that people may morally disengage from animals because they see animals as ‘out-groups’, and attribute moral concern when animals become ‘in-groups’ (Plous, 1993). Further research of animals as out-groups would contribute to the literature examining the generalisability of human-animal relationships to inter-human relationships.

4.10: Conclusions

This study is the first to qualitatively explore the perspectives of individuals who keep chickens and eat chicken meat, effectively forming relationships with companion meat animals. The study meets its aims of expanding exploration into human-chicken relationships, and has implications for researching broader human-animal relationships that diverge from those conventionally examined by human-animal bonds research. Attitudes and behaviours of people who own chickens and eat chicken meat were examined using both Meat Paradox and human-animal bonds theoretical frameworks, representing a unique intersection between the two fields. Categorisations of chickens identified by this study align with previous literature on perceptions of companion animals and meat animals, and extend that research by demonstrating that such categorisations are not static or mutually exclusive.

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Furthermore, this study also demonstrates that the rationalisations people employ to reduce Meat Paradox-related cognitive dissonance are not necessarily subconscious and automatic processes, but can be consciously accessed and actively directed. This particular finding has implications for people’s active influence over cognitive processes of empathy and moral disengagement in human-animal bonds, and possibly in inter-human relationships. Further research is required to explore how much influence individuals may exert over empathetic processes, as is inquiry into how individuals subjectively categorise and perceive meat and companion animals.

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Appendix A

Undergraduate Research Conference application acceptance

10/1/2018

Gmail - Undergraduate Research Conference Notification - Response required by 9am Monday 9 July



Undergraduate Research Conference Notification - Response required by 9am Monday 9 July

4 messages

Helen N [redacted]
To: [redacted] >

Tue, Jul 3, 2018 at 4:44 PM

Sent on behalf of Professor Philippa Levy, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Learning)

Dear [redacted]

Thank you so much for your interest in presenting a poster at the [2018 Undergraduate Research Conference](#) and for your abstract: *A Qualitative Study of Urban Chicken Owners' Perceptions of Chickens and Chicken Meat*

On behalf of the panel, I am delighted to invite you to present a poster during the lunch period, in the Ingkarni Wardli Atrium on Friday 27 July. Congratulations!

Our panel would however like to request some changes to your submitted abstract. Please view the comments below and resubmit your amended abstract to daseevents@adelaide.edu.au by no later than **9am Monday 9 July**.

Your poster is due no later than **9am Monday 23 July** (no extensions possible due to printing and delivery). Please email your poster in PDF format to daseevents@adelaide.edu.au with the subject line: *URC Poster*. You must use one of the templates below. Our office will have them printed A1 size at no expense to you. You will also be able to keep your poster at the conclusion of the conference.

- [Portrait red](#)
- [Portrait Gold](#)
- [Portrait Black](#)
- [Portrait Blue](#)
- [Portrait Generic](#)

- [Landscape red](#)
- [Landscape Gold](#)
- [Landscape Black](#)
- [Landscape Blue](#)
- [Landscape Generic](#)

Appendix B

Undergraduate Research Conference, poster presentation



FRIEND OR FOOD?
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
CHICKEN OWNERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF CHICKENS AND CHICKEN MEAT

adelaide.edu.au

Anna Chur-Hansen, &
Carolyn Semmler
Contact:

Rationale

Although there has been a **recent rise in Australia urban backyard chicken ownership**, most human-animal bond research focuses on conventional mammalian pets like **cats and dogs**. This leaves the nature of human-chicken bonds unclear, but **chickens are unique** in their potential to be **both pets or food**.

Research on mammalian meat animals (e.g. cows, pigs) shows **people morally disengage from meat animals to eat them**, but tend to form attachments with household animals. We aimed to begin exploring how chickens relate to this research through the **unique case of human-chicken bonds**.

Prior research

The Meat Paradox and Moral Disengagement frameworks give some idea how people perceive animals used for meat, but how pet chickens fit into this has not been studied.



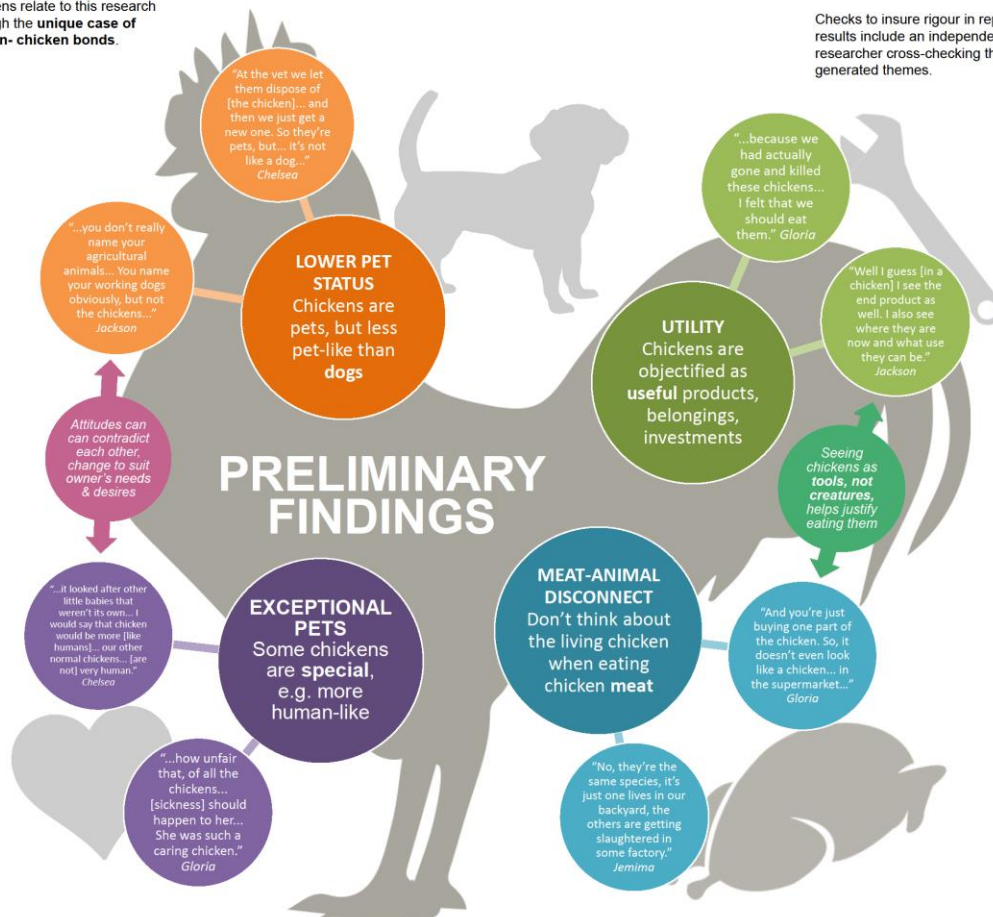
Participants

Participants are recruited through peer networks and posting flyers. They need to (1) keep or have kept backyard chickens, but NOT for commercial meat or egg farming, (2) eat chicken meat, (3) be at least 18 years old, and (4) speak fluent English.

Method

Five open-ended in-depth interviews have been completed so far. Data collection is ongoing until no new themes present. Interviews are transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis.

Checks to insure rigour in reporting results include an independent researcher cross-checking the generated themes.



Discussion

- Pet, Animal, Meat roles **not mutually exclusive**
- Perceptions of chickens change to **suit owners' needs**
- Different **pet status** = different levels of **empathy/care**
- Only some participants showed discomfort relating to **Cognitive Dissonance**

Implications

- Human-animal relationship studies can also apply to relationships between humans
- Contribute to research on psychological processes of empathy – who and what we decide to care for, and when
- Applications in human and animal welfare

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Are chickens friends or food? A qualitative study of attitudes towards chickens as companion animals and chickens as meat

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2018-18/41

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Anna Chur-Hansen and Carolyn Semmler

STUDENT RESEARCHER: [REDACTED]

STUDENT’S DEGREE: Bachelor of Psychological Science, Honours

Dear participant,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am studying relationships between animals and people as part of my Bachelor of Psychological Science, Honours, degree at the University of Adelaide. You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This research project is studying what people with chickens in their backyards think about eating meat and what they think about their own chickens. People may keep chickens in their backyards for many different reasons – such as for fresh eggs, a hobby, for ambiance, or to educate children. So far, research suggests that keeping chickens often leads to people growing relationships with their chickens, like getting to know their chickens’ personalities and giving them names.

Many people who keep chickens in their backyard also eat chicken meat. I aim to study different attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about ‘pet’ chickens and ‘food’ chickens, or chicken meat. Research shows that liking animals while eating meat produces a feeling of internal conflict caused by conflicting attitudes or behaviours. People tend to reduce this feeling with different strategies such as changing those attitudes or behaviours. In this study, I would like to research whether people who keep chickens in their backyard feel like this when they eat chicken meat, and if they do, what they do to feel better about it.

What are you being invited to do?

You are being invited to attend a one-on-one semi-structured interview that will run for approximately one hour, where we will talk about your relationship with your chickens and how you feel about eating chicken meat and the chickens that it comes from. This interview will be recorded, with your consent, so that I can transcribe it and accurately use your contribution in my research.

These interviews will either take place in person, or over phone call or online voice call - whichever you elect. If you agree to meet in person, the interview will take place in private rooms at the University of Adelaide, public libraries or community centres. If an in-person

FRIENDS, FOOD, OR “FREE EGG MACHINES”?

interview is too inconvenient or not possible, the interviews will take place over the phone or a voice-call using a computer program.

How much time will your involvement in the project take?

The interview will run for approximately one hour, including reading and signing consent forms. If you agree to meet in person, there will be additional travel time to and from the place of the interview.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

The only foreseeable risk of participation is the feeling of mental conflict and discomfort that might result from being asked about eating animals, as I will be asking questions that are likely to make you more aware of conflicting attitudes and behaviours. If you feel any discomfort or distress, you will be able to take all the time you need to continue the interview. You are also free to end the interview at any point you want without any consequence.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?

You will not receive any direct reimbursement or benefits for your participation. However, you may find the interview enjoyable or interesting, and in the future people and animals may benefit from the findings.

Can you withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time. This includes before, during, and after the interview - if you want your data retracted from the study, you will be able to contact me and request this without any consequence. You will only be able to elect to have your data retracted until my thesis is submitted, during the first week of October, 2018. Additionally, if you are studying at the University of Adelaide, withdrawing will have no impact on your studies.

What will happen to your information?

I will personally transcribe the interview recordings and give pseudonyms to anonymise your data. You are free to elect a pseudonym if you wish. I will personally remove any explicit personal identifiers from the interview transcripts and they will not be used in my thesis or any other potential use. All raw data, like interview recordings, interview notes, and transcripts, will only be accessible to me. My supervisors, Anna Chur-Hansen and Carolyn Semmler, will have access to the de-identified transcripts, but not the audio recordings. They will provide feedback and advice so that I can most accurately use your contribution to the research.

All data will be securely stored on a personal computer at the University of Adelaide, North Terrace campus. All research data is required to be kept for a minimum of five years after the date of publication or submission of the research report before being destroyed. A copy of the final transcripts will be provided to the primary supervisor on a USB device and stored securely

FRIENDS, FOOD, OR “FREE EGG MACHINES”?

in the University of Adelaide, School of Psychology, for a period of seven years, after which time they will be deleted and destroyed.

Only quotes from the de-identified transcript of your interview will be used in my thesis and any other potential publications like journal articles or presentations. Your personal information will not be reported or published in any form. Relevant excerpts from interviews to support my findings will be used only with the pseudonyms mentioned above. There is a possibility that my thesis will be adapted for publication by a scientific journal. If this is the case, you will still only be referred to by a pseudonym.

Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do you contact if you have questions about the project?

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the project. My e-mail address or phone number, both provided below, can reach me. You are also free to contact my supervisor, Anna Chur-Hansen, who is the primary applicant and Project Manager of the research, with any questions.

Student researcher:
E-mail address:



Primary contact: Professor Anna Chur-Hansen, Head of School, School of Psychology
Phone: 8313 5738
E-mail address: anna.churhansen@adelaide.edu.au

What if you have a complaint or any concerns?

The Human Research Ethics Subcommittee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2018-18/41) has approved the study. This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Subcommittee Convener, Professor Paul Delfabbro, on:

Phone: 8313 4936
E-mail: paul.delfabbro@adelaide.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

FRIENDS, FOOD, OR “FREE EGG MACHINES”?

What if you are upset or distressed due to the interview?

Free counselling services are available in case the interview causes discomfort, distress, anxiety, or depression. Please see contact details below.

Service name: The MindSpot Clinic, free counselling for anxiety, depression, low mood
Phone: 1800 61 44 34 AEST, 8am-8pm (Mon-Fri), 8am-6pm (Sat).
URL: <http://mindspot.org.au/>

Service name: Lifeline, free 24-hour crisis counselling
Phone: 13 11 14
URL: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

If you want to participate, what now?

If you would like to participate after reading this information sheet, please contact me using the contact details above to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview.

Yours sincerely,



Appendix D
Interview Guide

Interview guide/prompt questions
Participant #

Date:

How do people who keep chickens and eat chicken meat view chickens?

REASON for keeping chickens

■

■

HISTORY of keeping chickens

■

■

Friends with chickens, COMMUNITY

■

■

FAVOURITE chickens, NAMES

■

■

Physical AFFECTION and SICK CARE

■

■

Chicken INTELLIGENCE

■

■

Chicken EMOTION

■

■

Chicken PERSONALITY

■

■

SIMILARITY to humans

■

■

WHY do you eat (chicken) meat

■

■

FEELINGS when eating chicken meat

■

■

Ever EATEN OWN chickens, how would you FEEL

■

■

Do you CARE about chickens?

■

■

Closing thoughts, WHY did you participate?

■

■

Additional notes

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