[← journal Home > Vol 22, No 2 (2019) > Rodan M/C JOURNAL Animals Australia and the Challenges of Vegan Stereotyping **Debbie Rodan, Jane Mummery CURRENT ISSUE** Introduction **UPCOMING ISSUES ARCHIVES CONTRIBUTORS ABOUT M/C JOURNAL** vegan agenda and even of undermining the "Australian way of life".

Negative stereotyping of alternative diets such as veganism and other plant-based diets has been common in Australia, conventionally a meat-eating culture (OECD qtd. in Ting). Indeed, meat consumption in Australia is sanctioned by the ubiquity of advertising linking meat-eating to health, vitality and nation-building, and public challenges to such plant-based diets as veganism. In addition, state, commercial enterprises, and various community groups overtly resist challenges to Australian meat-eating norms and to the intensive animal husbandry practices that underpin it. Hence activists, who may contest not simply this norm but many of the customary industry practices that comprise Australia's meat production, have been accused of promoting a

If veganism means

a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals. (Vegan Society)

then our interest in this article lies in how a stereotyped label of veganism (and other associated attributes) is being used across Australian public spheres to challenge the work of animal activists as they call out factory farming for entrenched animal cruelty. This is carried out in three main parts. First, following an outline of our research approach, we examine the processes of stereotyping and the key dimensions of vegan stereotyping. Second, in the main part of the article, we reveal how opponents to such animal activist organisations as Animals Australia attempt to undermine activist calls for change by framing them as promoting an un-Australian vegan agenda. Finally, we consider how, despite such framing, that organisation is generating productive public debate around animal welfare, and, further, facilitating the creation of new activist identifications and identities.

Research Approach

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Data collection involved searching for articles where Animals Australia and animal activism were yoked with veg*n (vegan and vegetarian), across the period May 2011 to 2016 (discussion peaked between May and June 2013). This period was of interest because it exposed a flare point with public discord being expressed between communities—namely between rural and urban consumers, farmers and animal activists, Coles Supermarkets (identified by The Australian Government the Treasury as one of two major supermarkets holding over 65% share of Australian food retail market) and their producers—and a consequent voicing of disquiet around Australian identity. We used purposive sampling (Waller, Farquharson, and Dempsey 67) to identify relevant materials as we knew in advance the case was "information-rich" (Patton 181) and would provide insightful information about a "troublesome" phenomenon (Emmel

Materials were collected from online news articles (30) and readers' comments (167), online magazines (2) and websites (2) and readers' comments (3), news items (Factiva 13), Australian Broadcasting Commission television (1) and radio (1), public blogs (2), and Facebook pages from involved organisations, specifically Australia's National Farmers' Federation (NFF, 155 posts) and Coles Supermarkets (29 posts). Many of these materials were explicitly responsive to a) Animals Australia's Make It Possible campaign against Australian factory farming (launched and highly debated during this period), and b) Coles Supermarket's short-lived partnership with Animals Australia in 2013. We utilised content analysis so as to make visible the most prominent and consistent stereotypes utilised in these various materials during the identified period. The approach allowed us to code and categorise

materials so as to determine trends and patterns of words used, their relationships, and key structures and ways of speaking (Weerakkody). In addition, discourse analysis (Gee) was used in order to identify and track "language-in-use" so as to make visible the stereotyping deployed during the public reception of both the campaign and Animals Australia's associated partnership with Coles. These methods enabled a "nuanced approach" (Coleman and Moss 12) with which to spot putdowns, innuendos, and stereotypical attitudes. Vegan Stereotyping Stereotypes creep into everyday language and are circulated and amplified through mainstream media, speeches by public figures, and social media. Stereotypes maintain their force through being reused and repurposed, making them difficult to eradicate due to their "cumulative effects" and influence (Harris and Sanborn 38; Inzlicht, Tullett, Legault, and Kang; Pickering). Over time stereotypes can become the lens through which we view "the world and

mission is to:

social reality" (Harris and Sanborn 38; Inzlicht et al.). In summation, stereotyping: • reduces identity categories to particular sets of deeds, attributes and attitudes (Whitley and Kite); • informs individuals' "cognitive investments" (Blum 267) by associating certain characteristics with particular groups; • comprises symbolic and connotative codes that carry sets of traits, deeds, or beliefs (Cover; Rosello), and;

• becomes increasingly persuasive through regulating language and image use as well as identity categories (Cover; Pickering; Rosello).

Not only is the "iterative force" (Rosello 35) of such associative stereotyping compounded due to its dissemination across digital media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, websites, and online news, but attempts to denounce it tend to increase its "persuasive power" (29). Indeed, stereotypes seem to

refuse "to die" (23), remaining rooted in social and cultural memory (Whitley and Kite 10). As such, despite the fact that there is increasing interest in Australia and elsewhere in new food norms and plant-based diets (see, e.g., KPMG), as well as in vegan lifestyle options (Wright), studies still show that vegans remain a negatively stereotyped group. Previous studies have suggested that vegans mark

lifestyle difficult and impossible to maintain; 4) "faddist"; 5) "oversensitive"; and 6) "hostile extremists" (Cole and Morgan 140-47).

For many Australians, veganism also appears anathema to their preferred culture and lifestyle of meat-eating. For instance, the NFF, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), and other farming bodies continue to frame veganism as marking an extreme form of lifestyle, as anti-farming and un-Australian. Such perspectives are also circulated through online rural news and readers' comments, as will be discussed later in the article. Such representations are further exemplified by the MLA's (Lamb, Australia Day, Celebrate Australia) Australia Day lamb advertising campaigns (Bembridge; Canning). For multiple consecutive years, the campaign presented vegans (and vegetarians) as being self-evidently ridiculous and faddish, representing them as mentally

a "symbolic threat" to Western, conventionally meat-eating cultures (MacInnis and Hodson 722; Stephens Griffin; Cole and Morgan). One key UK study of national newspapers, for instance, showed vegans continuing to be discredited in multiple ways as: 1) "self-evidently ridiculous"; 2) "ascetics"; 3) having a

individuals living such lifestyles or holding such values—but operates as "political baits" (Rosello 18) to shore-up or challenge certain social or political Although such advertisements are arguably satirical, their repeated screening towards and on Australia Day highlights deeply held views about the normalcy of animal agriculture and meat-eating, "homogenizing" (Blum 276; Pickering) both meat-eaters and non-meat-eaters alike. Cultural stereotyping of this kind amplifies "social" as well as political schisms (Blum 276), and arguably discourages consumers—whether meat-eaters or non-meat-eaters—from advocating together around shared goals such as animal welfare and food safety. Additionally, given the rise of new food practices in Australia—including flexitarian, reducetarian, pescatarian, kangatarian (a niche form of ethical eating), vegivores, semi-vegetarian, vegetarian, veganism-alongside broader

unhinged and fringe dwellers. Such stereotyping not only invokes "affective reactions" (Whitley and Kite 8)—including feelings of disgust towards

commitments to ethical consumption, such stereotyping suggests that consumers' actual values and preferences are being disregarded in order to shore-up the normalcy of meat-eating. Animals Australia and the (So-Called) Vegan Agenda of Animal Activism Given these points, it is no surprise that there is a tacit belief in Australia that anyone labelled an animal activist must also be vegan. Within this context, we have chosen to primarily focus on the attitudes towards the campaigning work of Animals Australia—a not-for-profit organisation representing some 30 member groups and over 2 million individual supporters (Animals Australia, "Who Is")—as this organisation has been charged as promoting a vegan agenda. Along with the RSPCA and Voiceless, Animals Australia represents one of the largest animal protection organisations within Australia (Chen). Its

Investigate, expose and raise community awareness of animal

(Animals Australia, "Who Is")

 Provide animals with the strongest representation possible to Government and other decision-makers; • Educate, inspire, empower and enlist the support of the community to prevent and prohibit animal cruelty; Strengthen the animal protection movement.

In delivery of this mission, the organisation curates public rallies and protests, makes government and industry submissions, and utilises corporate

With regards to Animals Australia's campaigns regarding factory farming—including the Make It Possible campaign (see fig. 1), launched in 2013 and key to the period we are investigating—the main message is that: the animals kept in these barren and constrictive conditions are "no different to our pets at home"; they are "highly intelligent creatures who feel pain, and who will respond to kindness and affection - if given the chance"; they are "someone, not

something" (see the Make It Possible transcript). Campaigns deliberately strive to engender feelings of empathy and produce affect in viewers (see, e.g., van Gurp). Specifically they strive to produce mainstream recognition of the cruelties entrenched in factory farming practices and build community outrage against these practices so as to initiate industry change. Campaigns thus expressly challenge Australians to no longer support factory farmed animal products, and to identify with what we have elsewhere called everyday activist positions (Rodan and Mummery, "Animal Welfare"; "Make It Possible"). They do not, however, explicitly endorse a vegan position. Imagine a world without factory farming..

Make it Possible Australia Figure 1: Make It Possible (Animals Australia, campaign poster) Nonetheless, as has been noted, a common counter-tactic used within Australia by the industries targeted by such campaigns, has been to use well-known negative stereotypes to discredit not only the charges of systemic animal cruelty but the associated organisations. In our analysis, we found four prominent interconnected stereotypes utilised in both digital and print media to discredit the animal welfare objectives of Animals Australia. Together these cast the organisation as: 1) anti-meat-eating; 2) anti-farming; 3) promoting a vegan agenda; and 4) hostile extremists. These stereotypes are examined below. **Anti-Meat-Eating**

outreach. Campaigning engages the Web, multiple forms of print and broadcast media, and social media.

veganism, is clearly problematic for industries that facilitate meat-eating and within a culture that normalises meat-eating, as the following example expresses:

They're [Animals Australia] all about stopping things. They want to stop factory farming - whatever factory farming is - or they want to stop live exports. And in fact they're not necessarily about: how do I improve animal welfare in the pig industry? Or how do I improve animal welfare in the live export industry? Because ultimately they

The most common stereotype attributed to Animals Australia from its campaigning is of being anti-meat-eating. This charge, with its associations with

doing. (Andrew Spencer, Australian Pork Ltd., qtd. in Clark) Respondents engaging this stereotype also express their "outrage at Coles" (McCarthy) and Animals Australia for "pedalling [sic]" a pro-vegan agenda (Nash), their sense that Animals Australia is operating with ulterior motives (Flint) and criminal intent (Brown). They see cultural refocus as unnecessary

and "an exercise in futility" (Harris). **Anti-Farming** To be anti-farming in Australia is generally considered to be un-Australian, with Glasgow suggesting that any criticism of "farming practices" in Australian society can be "interpreted as an attack on the moral integrity of farmers, amounting to cultural blasphemy" (200). Given its objectives, it is unsurprising that Animals Australia has been stereotyped as being "anti-farming", a phrase additionally often used in conjunction with the charge of veganism. Although this comprises a misreading of veganism—given its focus on challenging animal exploitation in farming rather than entailing opposition to all farming—the NFF accused Animals Australia of being "blatantly anti-farming and proveganism" (Linegar qtd. in Nason) and as wanting "to see animal agriculture phased

are about a meat-free future world and we're about a meat producing industry, so there's not a lot of overlap, really between what we're

out" (National Farmers' Federation). As expressed in more detail: One of the main factors for VFF and other farmers being offended is because of AA's opinion and stand on ALL farming. AA wants all

Such stereotyping reveals how strongly normalised animal agriculture is in Australia, as well as a tendency on the part of respondents to reframe the challenge of animal cruelty in some farming practices into a position supposedly challenging all farming practices. Promoting a Vegan Agenda

farming banned and us all become vegans. Is it any wonder a lot of people were upset? Add to that the proceeds going to AA which may have been used for their next criminal activity washed against the grain. If people want to stand against factory farming they have the opportunity not to purchase them. Surely not buying a product will have a far greater impact on factory farmed produce. Maybe the

money could have been given to farmers? (Hunter)

resolve. (V.c. Deb Ford)

menu. (Cattle Advocate)

Nobody likes to see any animals hurt, but pushing a vegan agenda and pushing bad attitudes by group members is not helping any animals and just serves to slow any progress both sides are trying to

As is already clear, Animals Australia is often reproached for promoting a vegan agenda, which, it is further suggested, it keeps hidden from the Australian public. This viewpoint was evident in two key examples: a) the Australian public and organisations such as the NFF are presented as being "defenceless" against the "myopic vitriol of the vegan abolitionists" (Jonas); and b) Animals Australia is accused of accepting "loans from liberation groups" and being

Along with undermining farmers' "legitimate business" (Jooste), veganism was also considered to undermine Australia's rural communities (Park qtd. in Malone). **Hostile Extremists**

The final stereotype linking veganism with Animals Australia was of hostile extremism (cf. Cole and Morgan). This means, for users, being inimical to Australian national values but, also, being akin to terrorists who engage in criminal activities antagonistic to Australia's democratic society and economic livelihood (see, e.g., Greer; ABC News). It is the broad symbolic threat that "extremism" invokes that makes this stereotype particularly "infectious"

(Rosello 19). The latest tag team attacks on our pork industry saw AL giving crash courses in how to become a career criminal for the severely impressionable, after attacks on the RSPCA against the teachings of Peter Singer and trying to bully the RSPCA into vegan functions

protection at the expense of perceived human interests tend to be seen as wrong-headed (Sorenson; Munro).

between those non-human animals used for companionship and those used for food in the second (see fig. 2).

animal cruelty, violence and extremism is attributed to those making the charge.

contributing to the demise of farming and rural communities in Australia.

"supported by an army of animal rights lawyers" to promote a "hard core" veganism message (Bourke).

The "extremists" want that extended to dairy products, as well. The fact that this will cause the total annihilation of practically all animals, wild and domestic, doesn't bother them in the least. (Brown)

Stereotypes and Symbolic Boundary Shifting What is evident throughout these instances is how stereotyping as a "cognitive mechanism" is being used to build boundaries (Cherry 460): in the first instance, between "us" (the meat-eating majority) and "them" (the vegan minority aka animal activists); and secondly between human interest and

livestock. This point is that animals may hold instrumental value and receive some protection through such, but any more stringent arguments for their

These boundaries are deeply entrenched in Western culture (Wimmer). They are also deeply problematic in the context of animal activism because they fragment publics, promote restrictive identities, and close down public debate (Lamont and Molnár). Boundary entrenching is clearly evident in the stereotyping work carried out by industry stakeholders where meat-eating and practices of industrialised animal agriculture are valorised and normalised. Challenging Australia's meat production practices—irrespective of the reason given—is framed and belittled as entailing a vegan agenda, and further as

More broadly, industry stakeholders are explicitly targeting the activist work by such organisations as Animals Australia as undermining the 'Australian way of life'. In their reading, there is an irreconcilable boundary between human and animal interests and between an activist minority which is vegan,

What is interesting about these last two dimensions of stereotyping is their displacement of violence. That is, rather than responding to the charge of

unreasonable, extremist and hostile to farming and the meat-eating majority which is representative of the Australian community and sustains the Australian economy. As discussed so far, such stereotyping and boundary making—even in their inaccuracies—can be pernicious in the way they entrench identities and divisions, and close the possibility for public debate. Rather than directly contesting the presuppositions and inaccuracies of such stereotyping, however, Animals Australia can be read as cultivating a process of symbolic boundary shifting. That is, rather than responding by simply underlining its own moderate position of challenging only intensive animal

agriculture for systemic animal cruelty, Animals Australia uses its campaigns to develop "boundary blurring and crossing" tactics (Cherry 451, 459), specifically to dismantle and shift the symbolic boundaries conventionally in place between humans and non-human animals in the first instance, and

MAKE CAGE EGGS HISTORY Figure 2: That Ain't No Way to Treat a Lady (Animals Australia, campaign image on back of taxi) Indeed, the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals left unquestioned in the preceding stereotyping are being profoundly shaken by Animals Australia with campaigns such as Make_It_Possible making morally relevant likenesses between humans and animals highly visible to mainstream Australians. Namely, the organisation works to interpellate viewers to exercise their own capacities for emotional identification and moral imagination, to identify with animals' experiences and lives, and to act upon that identification to demand change. So, rather than reactively striving to refute the aforementioned stereotypes, organisations such as Animals Australia are modelling and facilitating symbolic boundary shifting by building broad, emotionally motivated, pathways through which Australians are being encouraged to refocus their own assumptions, practices and identities regarding animal experience, welfare and animal-human relations. Indeed the organisation has explicitly framed itself as speaking on behalf of not only animals but all caring Australians, suggesting thereby the possibility of a reframing of Australian national identity. Although such a tactic does not directly contest this negative stereotyping—direct contestation being, as noted, ineffective given the perniciousness of stereotyping—such work nonetheless dismantles the oppositional charge of such stereotyping in calling for all Australians to proudly be a little bit anti-meat-eating (when that

meat is from factory farmed animals), a little bit anti-factory farming, a little bit pro-veg*n, and a little bit proud to consider themselves as caring about animal welfare.

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(2016): 4-16.

For Animals Australia, in other words, appealing to Australians to care about animal welfare and to act in support of that care, not only defuses the stereotypes targeting them but encourages the work of symbolic boundary shifting that is really at the heart of this dispute. Further research into the reception of the debate would give a sense of the extent to which such an approach is making a difference. References

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Keywords stereotypes, vegan, digital media, animal activism, Animals Australia

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