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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The “V” Word: An Inquiry into Vegan Student Experience in Calgarian Schools

by

Meneka Rosanna Thirukkumaran

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
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## **Abstract**

In this study, I conducted focus group research to examine the school experience of vegan youths. This research was situated in the context of Albertan traditions and values, which emphasize rugged cowboy imagery and have been especially hostile towards vegans and vegetarians. Additionally, little is known about the school experience of vegan children and young adults. The majority of studies dealing with youth veganism primarily attend to whether or not nutritional needs are being adequately met. Furthermore, the field of education has been largely anthropocentric, with no dominant curricular theorists discussing the significance of nonhuman animals in relation to human learning. The field of Critical Animal Studies has recently begun to theorize nonhumans back into pedagogical frameworks, but the experience of vegan students has not (until this study) been examined. I chose to study how this group of students experience school because I believe that their viewpoints can help to better inform curricular policies and practices. I conducted focus group research with ten vegan students who attended Calgary public schools. I used an interview guide with semi-structured questions to help lead discussions. Throughout this process, I focused on elevating the position of students to theorists, with valid concerns and recommendations for the field of education. After analyzing the transcriptions of the focus group sessions, I discovered that these students discussed their veganism through three interconnected domains: society, identity, and school. Curricular findings specifically fell into explicit, implicit, and null curricular themes. I was also surprised to find significant differences between lower and higher grades. Ultimately, this study revealed a need for curricular reform and for practitioners to be cognizant of alternative, non-dominant viewpoints. In particular, students emphasized a need for strong relationships with family, peers, and teachers in order to feel better supported in their veganism. Further research into the area of vegan student experience is recommended.

## **Keywords**

Critical Animal Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, humane education, veganism.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
Personal acknowledgements .....	iii
Institutional Acknowledgements .....	iii
<b>Chapter 1- Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background and Situating Myself.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A Note on Word Choice.....	4
<b>Statement of Problem and Research Question.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Methodology and Study Design .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Delimitations .....</b>	<b>9</b>
The Myth of Humane Exploitation and the Locavore Movement.....	10
Operational Definitions .....	14
<b>Summary and Structure .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>A Brief Overview of Veganism and Human-Animal Relations in Canada.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Contextualizing Veganism in Alberta .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Zoophil Psychosis and the Dismissal of Counter-Hegemonic Viewpoints .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Nonhuman Animals in Philosophy.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Nonhumans in Educational Theory .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Humane Education .....</b>	<b>47</b>
A Brief History of Humane Education .....	47
Contemporary Understandings of Humane Education.....	49
Critically Examining Contemporary Humane Education Models.....	51
<b>A Dialogue Around Curricula .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Philosophical Position- An Introduction to Critical Animal Theory .....</b>	<b>60</b>
A Brief History.....	60
Embodied Praxis.....	63
<b>Contextualizing Critical Animal Theory .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Intersectionality.....	65
Total liberation.....	67
Rejection of Single-Issue Activism .....	69
Influences .....	70
<b>Critiques of Critical Animal Theory .....</b>	<b>77</b>
The Fallacy of Objectivity.....	77
Classism, Sexism, Racism, and Ableism in the Animal Liberation Community .....	78
<b>Expanding Critical Animal Theory and Educational Frameworks .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Research Methods.....</b>	<b>86</b>
Ethical Considerations .....	88
Participants.....	91
Context analysis .....	95
Focus Group Method.....	97

Date Coding and Analysis .....	104
Raw data and analysis process. ....	105
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter 4- Findings:</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>How Findings were Restricted</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>116</b>
Veganism and Society .....	116
Identity Construction .....	122
Schools .....	127
<b>Surprising Findings</b> .....	<b>168</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>169</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusions and discussion</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b>Summary of Key Findings</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b>Student Curricular Recommendations</b> .....	<b>176</b>
Accountability .....	176
Intersectionality.....	180
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>184</b>
<b>Significance</b> .....	<b>187</b>
<b>Recommendations for Further Research</b> .....	<b>189</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>195</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	<b>196</b>
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	<b>208</b>
<b>Appendix C</b> .....	<b>211</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>213</b>

# Chapter 1- Introduction

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“For I speak [...] of the disinherited of life, for whom there is no respite and no deliverance, to whom the world is a prison, a dungeon of torture, a tomb!”  
–Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 1906 (p. 360).

## **Background and Situating Myself**

One my primary intentions for this thesis was to examine how oppressed groups, particularly nonhuman animals, are conceptualized and positioned in Calgarian public schools. I undertook this endeavor through the memories, understandings, and encounters of ten vegan students who generously and enthusiastically contributed their experiences on the topic of veganism in schools. Though Sinclair’s (1906) character in the epigraph above was referring to the brutal conditions endured by working-class men in factories, the expansion of the capitalist enterprises he critiques has generated a more widely encompassing definition of “the disinherited.” Through the lens of Critical Animal Studies, I understand the concept of disinheritance as holistically applicable to those who experience “speciesism, sexism, racism, ableism, statism, classism, militarism and other hierarchical ideologies” (Nocella II, Sorenson, Socha, & Matsuoka, 2014, p. xxvii). For nonhuman animals who have the misfortune of being considered “food” by those in the human community, the world is literally a prison, where an entire lifetime of experiences is confined to a single cage, and natural instincts, behaviours, and body parts are quashed in favour of human convenience. For the students involved in this study, the prison was less pervasive, operating metaphorically to

segregate, monitor, and diminish vegan discourse in school. However, confronting institutional and mainstream understandings of nonhuman animals through this work also produced valuable insights about potential reformations of pedagogical theory and practice.

I am located in this study at the intersection of personal and professional identities. As a teacher and vegan I have long been fascinated by the ways in which schools, as powerful institutions, take up human and animal relations. I was raised to eat nonhuman animals and never had any friends who were vegan or vegetarian, so I never questioned the notion of meat eating. When I was eight years old, I read *Charlotte's Web* and began to develop a deep empathy for nonhuman animals. Around the same time, I stumbled across *Old MacDonald's Factory Farm* in the adult section of the public library. While I did not actually read the entire text at the time, the horrific images of the conditions that nonhuman animals are subjected to, along with the captions that explained each process, were enough to disrupt the idyllic narrative of "happy meat" that I had unquestionably accepted. I became a vegetarian almost immediately after learning these truths. This intertwined process of learning as connected to individual actions and identity led me to the desire to more thoroughly investigate the current position of vegan students. As a high school teacher, I noticed that many more students today seemed to be vegan or vegetarian compared to my earlier years in teaching, and I wondered how the experiences of these students compared to my own. I was also curious about how nonhuman animals are typically discussed and understood in conventional Californian classrooms, knowing that most teachers are not vegan. In this work, I



explore these issues with the intention of enhancing my own teaching practice and developing recommendations for other practitioners. Therefore, this project is emblematic of engaged activism and praxis (Nocella II, Sorenson, Socha, & Matsuoka, 2014), unifying theory and practice for the purpose of igniting meaningful change.

To situate myself in this work, I also draw upon Feminist Standpoint Theory to develop an understanding of how my social location influences my experience as a researcher. Feminist Standpoint Theory emerged alongside feminist activism in the early 1980s to counter the notion of “neutrality” in the academy (Harding, 1992, p. 437). In brief, Feminist Standpoint Theory holds that knowledge must be socially situated, and demands that the researcher acknowledge their physical and social position as integral components of knowledge production. Emerging from the Marxist realization that the oppressed have access to distinct forms of knowledge that remain hidden from privileged groups, Feminist Standpoint Theory maintains that the marginalized, especially women and women of colour, are positioned to be more aware of specific oppressions (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2004; Harding, 1992; Hartsock, 1997, 2003; hooks, 1984). Therefore, research, especially work that attempts to recognize and address power relations should begin with the marginalized (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2004).

I begin this research in the strange social location of both the colonizer and the colonized. I recognize my colonial position geographically, because I occupy the settled lands of Treaty 7, which encompasses the First Nations: Bearspaw, Chiniki, Blood Tribe, Piikani, Siksika, Tsuu T’ina, and Wesley. I have also learned and

internalized English, a colonial language. Simultaneously, I am a war refugee from a colonized country (Sri Lanka). As a brown woman, I am acutely aware of my unstable position in the mainstream animal rights movement: in vegan advertising (online, brochures, cookbooks) as well as in local protests, I do not see myself represented. Veganism is often “sold” through bodies that are positioned as superior because they retain the privileges of whiteness and thinness (Harper, 2010). I also experienced the majority of my years in public school as a vegetarian (and later vegan), and became conscious of how alternate positions about food justice can lead to marginalization. In my research, I am concerned with the power dynamics of both veganism as a movement that takes up that tactics of colonialism, but also how the dominant discourse (carnism) subjugates students and magnifies their other oppressions. In this way, my work examines an unjust social order (Harding, 1991) in order to come to a better understanding of how collective justice can come about.

### **A Note on Word Choice**

Throughout this thesis I have chosen to consistently use the problematic term “nonhuman animals” to refer to those outside of the human community. While the colloquially accepted term “animal” more smoothly facilitates reading, I believe it is necessary to move away from speciesist language that positions humans as so privileged that we have surpassed classification under the taxonomic rank of “animal.” Derrida problematizes this distinct separation philosophy established between humans and nonhumans. He proposes that the use of the general term “animal” operates metaphorically to cage nonhuman animals, and thus establishes a

binary between them and the human community (p. 393-394). Derrida argues that the term “animal” is too homogeneous to properly attend to the diversity within the category of “animal” (i.e. a monkey and an ant are both considered animals); he believes that this totalizing language is a violent gesture that subjugates nonhuman animals and justifies our industrial treatment of them. De Waal (2016) concurs: “humans...are a singular bright light in the dark intellectual firmament that is the rest of nature. Other species are conveniently swept together as ‘animals’...as if there were no point of differentiating among them” (p. 121). Abram’s (1996) phrase “the more-than-human-world” acknowledges that humans are embedded and entangled in a series of environments, along with a diverse range of plant and animal species. However, in its inclusiveness, the more-than-human is often not specific enough to name the precise groups of animals who suffer as a result of human actions. I also considered “other animals,” which seems to be regularly used in Critical Animal Studies and related fields, but for me, utilizing “other” contributes to a binary that resembles colonialism (Mountz, 2009; Said, 1978) and literally “others” certain animals. The term “nonhuman animal” is also subject to critique. De Waal (2016) observes, “for completeness sake [those who use the term] should add that the animals they are talking about are also nonpenguin, nonhyena, and a whole lot more...” (p. 28). While I acknowledge this assessment, “nonhuman” most clearly articulates the ways in which specific earthlings are framed and positioned through mainstream and curricular discourse. I use the term with an understanding that no word perfectly conveys animals who are not human, and that the terminology continues to be debated.

## **Statement of Problem and Research Question**

Across curriculum subjects and grades in the Alberta curriculum, one would be hard-pressed to find learning outcomes that thoughtfully address such critical issues as food security and scarcity, food production, and food ethics, both in relation to animal welfare and environmental sustainability (Alberta Learning, 2017). Even the most acclaimed, influential, and celebrated curriculum theorists of the 20th century such as Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, John Dewey, Dwayne Huebner, and William Pinar rarely, if at all, mention non-human animal and environmental ethics in connection with curriculum. Along with this gap in pedagogical theory, there is little research about vegan students. Most studies focus on whether vegan children and youths receive adequate nutrition (Craig, 2009; Larsson and Johansson, 2002; Mangles & Havala, 1994; Messina & Reed, 2001; Sabate and Wien, 2010; Sanders, 1988), or the effects of nonhuman animal presence in schools (Daly & Suggs, 2010). There has also been research about the specific impact of dissection (Oakley, 2009; 2012) and zoos (Fogelberg, 2004; Pedersen, 2010) on general populations of students. As well, there have been studies investigating the links between human empathy and nonhuman animals (Daly & Morton, 2003; 2015). Despite the growing body of work in the fields of Critical Animal Pedagogy, Critical, and Ecopedagogy (Bell & Russell, 2000; Corman, 2012; Drew & Socha, 2015; Jones, 2009; Kahn, 2010; Lupinacci, 2013; Nocella II, 2011; Weil, 2004), my literature search did not uncover any work on how vegan students experience school. For this reason, my study aimed to discover how perceptions of

vegan youths might provide educational practitioners and theorists with new understandings of how curriculum can be approached. My research questions were:

- 1) What might vegan experiences reveal about schooling and curriculum in Calgary?
- 2) What are the ways in which curricular discourse organizes, regulates, and distributes particular narratives about food, nonhuman animals, and veganism?

I examined these questions by applying Critical Animal Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis to focus group research.

### **Methodology and Study Design**

This study was philosophically rooted within the tradition of Critical Animal Theory (CAT). Like other critical lenses, CAT originated from street activism and grassroots animal liberation movements. As a theory, CAT functions to bridge the academy with the street, eschewing elitism by encouraging collaboration and the sharing of knowledge between activists and scholars. As a fully inclusive and intersectional position, CAT recognizes that human oppressions are entangled with the struggles of nonhuman animals, and that the collective emancipation of all groups must remain a fundamental goal. In this study, I consider the anecdotes of my participants from a CAT perspective, problematizing the ways in which nonhuman animals are taken up in curricular and other educational discourses.

I aimed to better understand an understudied and difficult to access minority population, vegan youths. To examine this group, I utilized a focus group method design, generating data from primarily verbal texts. Six vegan participants were

recruited using purposive sampling, a technique that acknowledges the distinctive knowledge gained from people who have very specific experiences (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Shepard, 2006). The purposive sample was complemented by a convenience sample of four students, resulting in a total of ten participants. Focus group research was an ideal fit for this study for two main reasons. First, I was interested in blurring the power demarcations of researcher and participant by positioning students as theorists with the expertise to understand and examine experiences beyond their own. I wanted to observe how students who shared a common experience would interpret and respond to the anecdotes of their peers. Focus groups offered the opportunity for students to interact with one another as well as with me, generate new questions, and help other participants remember forgotten details (Acocella, 2012). In addition, I chose focus groups to bring together a group of people who would not typically have a large network of peer support at their own schools. While the narratives of these students were directly relevant to my own study, I felt it would also benefit these youths to realize that others might share similar struggles, concerns, and encounters.

My focus group sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed. I analyzed the dialogues from these sessions using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA complements Critical Animal Theory as it is concerned with the ways in which unequal social relationships are enacted; in this study vegan students represented a social minority holding a non-dominant social and political stance. By listening to and supporting this group, I sought to privilege voices that are rarely heard in educational spheres. As De Waal (2016) notes, “we sometimes forget how much

courage it takes to defend one's ideas in the face of staunch opposition" (p. 95). The narratives, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of these students revealed discursive patterns in Calgarian public school settings. By using CDA, the perceptions of these students can begin to reveal expressions of institutional authority, implicit and explicit manifestations of power, and articulations of academic and emotional repression towards vegans. CDA also provided opportunities to destabilize and reconsider these dominant curricular narratives through recommendations for curricular restructuring.

### **Delimitations**

My research applies to human communities in North America where the effects of industrialization are manifested through various facets of everyday life. This study does not include food deserts or other geographically isolated communities<sup>1</sup> that do not have access, for instance, to grocery stores, or communities that do not approach schooling in the same way as most industrialized societies. The ethical and environmental concerns that my research addresses apply to nonhuman animal husbandry that is linked to an economic cycle, where the monetary transactions that occur lead to the commodification of animals. My research is inclusive of, and critical of the locavore movement, along with farms that carry such labels as "humane," "grass-fed," "cage-free," "organic," and "sustainable," however, it excludes remote communities where hunting for survival is the only feasible option. A brief discussion of why the locavore and related movements are problematic is included later in this chapter. I am also not interested in further

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<sup>1</sup> According to Statistics Canada (2005), "rural and remote communities are often geographically isolated or have far distances to travel to services and neighbours."

isolating historically marginalized Indigenous communities, where hunting is significant as a form of resistance against colonialism. Relatedly, some scholars (Robinson, 2010, 2013; Womack, 2013; Kemmerer, 2011) have demonstrated that there is no monolithic narrative of what indigenaeity should be. The ideologies of veganism do not have to be separate from or competitive with traditional Indigenous teachings; veganism can be very much compatible with these cultural values. In Robinson's (2010) view, for instance, "those who value only the preservation of an unchanging tradition join with the colonial powers in seeing no place for contemporary indigenaeity" (p. 5).

### **The Myth of Humane Exploitation and the Locavore Movement**

Though most would agree that the conditions of industrial meat production are less than ideal, a recent resurgence of alternative farming practices that carry such labels as "humane," "organic," "grass-fed," "cage-free," and "local" have been touted as more ethical and sustainable solutions (Friend, 2006, 2009; Pollan, 2006). These smaller-scaled operations allow consumers to justify their meat consumption by promoting a fallacy in which eating nonhuman animals or their by-products is compatible with loving them. Interestingly, Adams' (1990) absent referent theory and Joy's (2010) model of carnism (relying on invisibility) seem less applicable here than in industrial systems. Both authors theorize that the eating of animal flesh is only made possible by the physical, linguistic, and psychological distancing and separation of a living being from the "food" on one's plate. In the locavore and related movements, consumers are invited to "meet" their "meat" by visiting local



farms and even participating in animal husbandry practices, making the reference of the nonhuman animal present, rather than absent.

My position is that alternative forms of nonhuman animal agriculture are oxymoronic. They continue to engage in the commodification of nonhuman animals, and remain sites of exploitation that are fundamentally violent. Small scale farms maintain traditions such as tail docking, debeaking, disbudding/dehorning, castration, and teat removal (dairy cows), which are all performed without anesthesia even though higher cortisol (stress hormone) levels in the nonhuman animals suggest high levels of pain (Berreville, 2014; Davis, 2014; Jenkins & Stanescu, 2014). The reason that anesthesia is not used is because it is an expense and inconvenience to the farmer: “as for-profit [businesses] premised on breeding and killing animals for human consumption, even core values of animal welfare are, at times, sacrificed when it is perceived as necessary for profitability” (Stanescu, 2014, p. 228). Female cows and chickens, as well, are not permitted autonomy over their own bodies and reproduction. Whether on a small-scale or an industrial farm, female cows are artificially impregnated and must give birth in order to produce milk. While the physical trauma<sup>2</sup> of this repeated process is stressful enough, the emotional anxiety of a lost calf is likely worse. Mother cows frequently bellow for days in the hope of being reunited with their lost calves, and have even escaped from farms in search of their calves (Berreville, 2014, p. 196). In one case, a cow gave birth to twins, and hid one calf, while allowing the other to be taken away. The

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<sup>2</sup> Udders can become infected and develop calluses, cows can be electrocuted from the robotic milking stalls, and cows are at risk to be abused by frustrated workers who punch and stab them in the udders, face, legs, and stomach (Berreville, 2014, p. 187-194).

mother cow returned to her hidden calf to feed him, but her low milk production alerted the farmer, and eventually this calf was also taken away from her (Cross, 2012).

The pastoral imagery associated with small-scale nonhuman animal farming also problematically creates an illusion that allows consumers to assume that all meat is produced by way of a “happy” romantic narrative. The “humane” farm functions as a deceptive lens, that works in tandem with factory farming systems (Jenkins & Stanescu, 2014). Consumers are invited “in” to small scale farms, where practices may seem tolerable or even ethical; it is easy to make the assumption that all meat is produced in this way, especially when even factory farmed nonhuman animal products contain images of “happy” nonhuman animals in idealistic pastoral settings. The “happy” farm operates as a shield that further distances the consumer from the atrocities of factory farming, and assists in circulating the misleading narrative that all nonhumans are happy before they are slaughtered. In reality, meat from small farms contributes only minutely to overall meat consumption. 95% of the meat on Canadian plates originates from the brutal conditions of a factory farm (Brown, 2013; Toronto Vegetarian Association, 2014).

“Humane” farming is also unrealistic and unsustainable. Even the staunchest supporters of “compassionate” carnism such as Catherine Friend and Michael Pollan, who are leaders in the alternative farming movement admit to supporting factory farms as well. “While we still ate our own lamb,” writes Friend (2009), “I started buying chicken from the grocery store again. When we ran out of Dennis’s pork, I never seemed to find the time to call him and order more, so I started buying

pork from the grocery store again” (p.10). If even small-scale farmers themselves permit the funding of factory farms out of convenience, it is improbable that consumers will purchase “humane” meat exclusively.

Small-scale farms are also not as environmentally sustainable as their proponents may believe. Given the limited geographical land area of the earth, it would be impossible to maintain the current demand for meat products on only small-scale farms (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 81, p. 243). Smaller farms also use *more* water than factory farms because the nonhuman animals are generally kept alive longer, leading to greater cumulative water use for drinking and cleaning, in addition to water used in the slaughter process (washing equipment and surfaces) (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 73). Local farms are also praised because they require less transportation, but only 4 percent of all fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions are accounted for in the entire process of transport from producer to retailer (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 182). The raising and eating of nonhuman animals, in comparison, is responsible for 18-51% of greenhouse gas emissions (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 183). Framed in another way, a local diet would save the equivalent of driving 1000 miles in a year, while a vegan diet would save 8,100 miles (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 183). Meat consumption is projected to double by 2050 (Steinfeld et al., 2006, p.xx), which means that “it is a physical impossibility to raise an additional 55 billion [land] animals on open and expansive pasture land” (Stanescu, 2014, p. 221).

## **Operational Definitions**

As the emerging field of Critical Animal Studies heavily informs my work in the study of curriculum, I use terminology throughout this text that may be unfamiliar or unclear to those without a background in this area. Meanings themselves can be unstable and interpretive, so I felt that it would be prudent to provide understandings of these terms as I intend to use them in this study. Critical Animal Studies is discussed in detail in chapter 3, however a concise understanding can be gleaned from the 10 principles of Critical Animal Studies, which are reproduced in Appendix C.

**Speciesism.** In a text entitled *Animals, Men, and Morals*, Ryder (1971) argues, “ ‘race’ and ‘species’ are vague terms used in the classification of living creatures...discrimination on the grounds of race, although most universally condoned two centuries ago, is now widely condemned. Similarly, it may come to pass that enlightened minds may one day abhor ‘speciesism’ as much as they now detest ‘racism.’” (p. 81). Put simply, speciesism can generally refer to either discriminatory practices towards non-human animals by humans, or to the intentional mistreatment of certain species (such as male chicks in the egg industry) while other species are valued (such as dogs).

**Animals/ Nonhuman Animals.** As discussed earlier, the term “animal” is colloquially understood to apply only to those outside the human species. However, this use of the term “animal” is speciesist, in that it erroneously assumes that humans are not also animals. Thomas (1983) writes:

Men attributed to the animals natural impulses what they most feared in themselves- ferocity, gluttony, sexuality...even though it was men, not beasts who made war on their own species, ate more than was good for them, and were sexually active all year round. (p. 40-41).

Though it can initially make reading more awkward, I have chosen to use the term “animal” to apply to all animals, including humans, and the term “nonhuman animals” for those who are not human. However, in the interest of retaining the integrity of the authors that I have quoted, I have not placed “[sic]” after their use of the term “animal.” In the quotes from students in my focus groups, I retained the terms that each student chose to use.

**Vegans/ Vegetarians.** A simple definition for these terms can be found in Ruby Roth’s children’s book, *That’s Why We Don’t Eat Animals*: “vegetarians are people who don’t eat animals. Vegans are people who don’t eat animals or anything that comes from an animal (like eggs, milk, or butter)” (2009, p. 1). Most vegans also do their best to avoid harming nonhuman animals whenever possible; they do not support nonhuman animal testing, or wear fur or leather.

**Carnism.** Joy (2010) defines carnism as a sub-ideology of speciesism, where the classification of non-human animals into “edible” and “non-edible” categories reflects a deeper belief system (p. 28-29). Joy (2010) explains that the terms “meat eater” (a dietary orientation) or even “omnivore” (a biological orientation) are inaccurate because they assume that “the practice of consuming meat [is] divorced from a person’s beliefs and values. [These terms imply] that the person who eats meat is acting outside of a belief system.” (p. 29). Although vegans and vegetarians

are typically thought to be the only people who bring their beliefs to the table, all people who participate in an industrial society are behaving according to beliefs. Importantly, carnism is a violent ideology because “it is literally organized around physical violence...if we were to remove the violence from the system- to stop killing animals- the system would cease to exist” (Joy, 2010, p. 33). Entrenched, violent systems, such as carnism, avoid scrutiny through invisibility: they remain unnamed and their violent practices are sequestered and hidden from the public (p. 30-35). As a Critical Animal Studies scholar, I am interested in critically interrogating how carnistic systems and practices may infiltrate the institution of schooling.

**Animal rights / animal liberation.** Though these terms are often used interchangeably, even within the animal advocacy movement, the positions are actually distinct. They are further complicated by the additional concept of “welfarism.” To better understand these terms, I draw upon Francione and Garner’s (2010) text, *The Animal Rights Debate*, because it is useful for understanding the two positions. However, I reject Francione’s use of abelist language (“moral schizophrenia”) in later work, which I discuss in greater detail on page 85. Generally, animal rights activists believe that nonhuman animals have moral rights that extend beyond legal rights. Those in favour of animal welfare believe in progressive change. For them, regulating policies about nonhuman animals, such as advocating larger cages, is a positive step. Animal liberationists, argue that it is never acceptable to take away a nonhuman animal’s liberty and self-determination to serve human ends. In essence, liberationists believe in empty cages, rather than “comfortable” ones. My work takes the more radical position of animal liberation.

**Total Liberation.** Work that is situated in the field of Critical Animal Studies advocates a politics of total liberation, “which grasps the need for, and the inseparability of, human, nonhuman animal, and Earth liberation and freedom for all in one comprehensive, though diverse, struggle” (Nocella II, Sorenson, Socha, Matuoka, 2014, p. xxvii). This position works to dismantle all structures of oppression and exploitation through a radical anti-capitalist and anti-hierarchical agenda.

### **Summary and Structure**

In this chapter, I have briefly explained the background of my study and my personal interest in this topic. I identified the research problem and the research questions that were investigated through this research and summarized my methodology and study design. I articulated the delimitations of this study, and described why the “locavore” and related movements must be included in my critique of nonhuman animal agriculture. I also clarified my interpretations of several key terms. In the next chapter, I provide a condensed review of relevant literature, encompassing the most significant research around my topic. Chapter three elaborates upon my methodology by offering a more detailed discussion of Critical Animal Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, and focus group research. In chapter four, I reveal the results and meaningful insights of my study, focusing on the voices of my youth participants. Finally, in chapter five, I share the recommendations suggested by my participants, examine how these may function alongside existing literature and procedures, and discuss the implications of these results. I end with a consideration of areas for future research.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

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## Introduction

This chapter delves into a critical summary and analysis of the published scholarship that informs my research. My work is situated at the crux of two broad fields: education and nonhuman animal liberation. To develop a familiarity with both these areas, as well as the tensions that exist between them, I begin by tracing the origins of veganism and nonhuman activism in Canada. The complicated relationship that Canada has with nonhuman animals is then further considered through the provincial identity of Alberta specifically. The general resistance to veganism in Alberta leads into a discussion of how nonhuman animal activists have historically been silenced through powerful institutions. This disdain towards nonhumans is replicated through philosophy and educational theory, though a few exceptions exist. As an alternative model to current understandings of education, I investigate humane education as a meaningful, though not entirely immune from critique, philosophy to cultivate thoughtful relationships between the human and nonhuman. I focus on humane education rather than more radical and theoretical approaches to education such as ecopedagogy (Kahn, 2010) and Critical Animal Pedagogy because I am concerned with how vegan students understand identity within current systems of education. Finally I begin a dialogue about the multiple articulations of “curriculum” as a means to better position the findings of this study. Generally, there was an absence of literature discussing the specific school experience of vegans, which demonstrates the need for this study.



## **A Brief Overview of Veganism and Human-Animal Relations in Canada**

Veganism, a political stance rejecting the exploitation of nonhuman animals, is rooted in the global history of vegetarianism. Like other social movements, vegetarianism in Canada did not occur in a vacuum; the narrative of nonhuman ethics originates in the religious and spiritual belief systems of Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures. As understandings about the connections between humans and nonhumans developed in Britain and the United States, the complex relationships between colonists, indigenous groups, and immigrants produced distinctly Canadian meanings around nonhuman animals. Despite widespread attitudes of concern and care expressed towards nonhumans, the contemporary social position of nonhuman animals in Canada remains fragile and unstable.

For humans, food almost universally represents meanings and identities that transcend the basic function of sustenance as fulfilling a biological need. Across cultures, the avoidance of nonhuman animal flesh represents one of the most deeply consequential social taboos; restrictions around meat are more common and more severely reprimanded than other foods (Joy, 2010; Puskar-Pasewiez, 2010). Early rejection of nonhumans as food can be attributed to the spiritual prohibitions of Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which developed in India in 599-483 BC (Puskar-Pasewiez, 2010, p. xvii). However, regardless of the perception that these restrictions around consumption imply greater moral concern for nonhumans, Socha (2014) argues that the rationale for nonhuman avoidance remains centered around benefits for the human and thus continues to realize a hierarchical framework. In 570-490 BC, the Greek mathematician Pythagoras also

promoted a diet free from nonhuman flesh, emphasizing that meat would taint the soul. As a precursor to the term “vegetarian,” followers of Pythagoras’ teachings and dietary rituals were known as “pythagoreans” (Puskar-Pasewiez, 2010, p. xvii). Western religions, such as Judaism and Christianity also place restrictions on meat, although complete abstinence is not required or expected. Sorenson (2010) and Socha (2014) point out that despite these minor lapses, Western religions are particularly hostile towards nonhumans, with practitioners often interpreting passages of sacred texts as permissive of human domination and superiority.

The competing discourses of human centrality and human stewardship were illuminated during colonization, when European settlers realized that Indigenous knowledge was vital for survival and for trade. While First Nations groups quickly learned that overhunting threatened their own ways of life and adopted epistemologies in connection to the land and its inhabitants, colonists were more concerned with resource and wealth accumulation (Sorenson, 2010). The industries developed by colonists depended upon the fur, skin, and flesh of nonhumans in the conquest for prosperity and material wealth to support imperialism. While the initial collaboration between Europeans and indigenous peoples led to new cultural groups, such as the Metis, it also had dangerous implications for nonhuman animals and indigenous cultural identity. The bison were nearly eradicated, and as fashion trends in Europe changed, the demand for fur declined, forcing indigenous groups into poverty. Sorenson (2010) remarks, “in Canadian history, exploitation of animals is directly involved with the erosion of indigenous cultures” (p. 24). This erosion is evident in the contemporary fur

industry in Canada, which continues to profit enormously from exploited humans and nonhumans under the guise of environmental, animal, and indigenous welfare (Sorenson, 2010, p. 30). As Sorenson (2010) observes, the Fur Council of Canada claims to be a defender of indigenous society, yet remains silent on issues of environmental racism that disproportionately target already marginalized First Nations groups. For instance, the carcinogenic chemicals used in the process of “treating” furs through bleaching and tanning are not only harmful to the humans who labor in the process, but are also pollutants to the soil, water, and air (Sorenson, 2010, p. 24-30). This entangled relationship between colonists, indigenous peoples, and nonhumans created a foundation of oppressive practices in Canada that were challenged by veganism and other social movements.

The vegetarian and animal liberation movements in Canada were influenced not only by the tensions stemming from colonialism, but also British and American trends in moral reform. In the 1800s, economic and industrial development in Britain and the US evoked values of efficiency, productivity, and profitability. Nonhuman animal agriculture began to expand and mirror other methods of production, but in 1822 the UK passed the “Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act,” the first parliamentary acknowledgement that nonhumans warrant some universal degree of protection. The term “vegetarian” was coined shortly afterward, in 1847 by the English “vegetarian society” (Puskar-Pasewiez, 2010, p. xviii). Interest in vegetarianism emerged in the US primarily in the Northeastern states through the establishment of an American “vegetarian society,” which was influenced by its British predecessor (Lacobbo & Lacobbo, 2004; Puskar-Pasewiez, 2010). Formal

articulations of nonhuman worth and the formation of organized groups in favour of nonhuman issues occurred in contrast to the American civil war (1861-1865). The military did not accommodate vegetarian diets, so pacifists such as Henry Stephen Clubb would sometimes go hungry or be forced to consume flesh (Lacobbo & Lacobbo, 2004, p. 103). Additionally, advancements in medical technology resulted in an excessive fervor to treat soldiers with drugs, an approach that was acutely contested by Russell Trall. During the civil war, Trall argued that changes in diet would promote long-term health, rather than masking or temporarily alleviating injuries (Lacobbo & Lacobbo, 2004, p. 103). Trall advocated a vegetarian diet and trained groups of physicians to become “hygienic doctors;” his students published numerous studies on the health benefits of vegetarianism, contributing to its expansion across the states (Lacobbo & Lacobbo, 2004, p. 103). While many early vegetarians embraced the claims of improved health, Henry Salt’s pivotal text *Animal’s Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (1894) provided the first ethical argument positioning animal rights as complementary to humanitarian efforts. Salt discusses not only the “use” of nonhumans as food, but also hunting and vivisection as incompatible with the principle of equal freedom (p. 1-2). Salt’s reconceptualization of nonhumans facilitated new understandings about the role of vegetarianism amid other interconnected social movements.

The 1900s was emblematic of significant growth for the animal liberation and other justice movements. In the early 1900s vegetarian athletes began to win major competitions and gained credibility from a Harvard study concluding that vegetarians have more physical stamina (Puskar-Pasewicz, 2010, p. xviii). During

the two world wars (1914-1945), meat again was perceived as a necessity for male soldiers, so the rationing of meat on the home front was positioned as a vital effort on the part of women and children (Puskar-Pasewicz, 2010, p. xvii). As the narrative of nonhuman animal flesh as unhealthy and unnecessary expanded, Donald Watson further challenged articulations of animal rights to include all forms of exploitation as inherently cruel. In 1944, he coined the term “vegan” and created the Vegan Society in England (Puskar-Pasewicz, 2010, p. xvii). A year later, a small group of British immigrants formed the Toronto Vegetarian Association (TVA), facilitating the growth of the vegetarian movement in Canada (Alexander, 2009; Toronto Vegetarian Association, 2016). The TVA facilitated lectures, letter writing, and campaigned to send soy grits and vegetable oil to Europe during the war (Alexander, 2009; TVA, 2016). The animal liberation movement in Canada was highly concerned with social reform on a larger scale, “[Canadian] animal rights advocates supported women’s emancipation and feminism, anti-slavery, anti-racism and civil rights, and anti-war activism” (Sorenson, 2010, p. 17). The social reforms and activism of the 1950s were paralleled by an increasingly industrialized approach to nonhuman animal agriculture. In 1956, the percentage of Canadian farms began to steadily decrease, while the size of farms increased by 141% (Blay-Palmer et al., 2012, p. 3). The concentrated assembly line approach to nonhuman animal agriculture led to the confinement of nonhumans in small indoor spaces, contributing to disease and an increase in antibiotics, hormones, and pathogens (Palmer et al., 2012, p. 16). In the 1960s, concerns over food safety were widespread; communities were alarmed about possible nuclear fallout in milk, the

Canadian government banned the sugar substitute cyclamate after reports of cancer and tumors, and trust in the medical community waned after thalidomide was linked to birth deformities (Carstairs, 2012, p. 305-306). Anxiety over food production, food additives, pollution and pesticide use, and the safety of medical testing prompted a desire for a more holistic approach to health in the 60s and 70s. Vegetarianism and veganism grew in popularity along with health food stores, nutritional textbooks, and health-centered cookbooks (Carstairs, 2012). The resurgence of vegetarianism for health reasons was again balanced by more ethical theories about animal rights: Singer (1975) proposed a utilitarian orientation, arguing for the greatest amount of good for the greatest number, Regan (1984) suggested that all beings who are capable of recognizing themselves as “subjects-of-a-life” must be ascribed inherent value, and Francione (1996) rejected welfarist approaches, viewing reform as a condition that perpetuates oppression. It should be noted that while these three authors made significant contributes to the animal liberation movement, I do not necessarily position myself in support of them. All three authors have made ableist comments, and are not intersectional in their approaches to justice. The late 1980s was illustrative of the growing popularity of vegetarianism and veganism in mainstream discourse, rather than as a fringe movement. The animal rights organization PETA was founded by Ingrid Newkirk in 1980 (PETA, 2016) and quickly became recognized for its outlandish performative stunts that drew attention to issues of nonhuman animal exploitation. The increasing significance of food choice as linked to nonhuman ethics as well as environmental protection was evident as media and popular culture began to

represent vegetarianism more consistently. In 1995, Lisa Simpson, a character in the popular American cartoon *The Simpsons* became a vegetarian after empathizing with a cute lamb at a petting zoo; she remained a vegetarian in subsequent episodes, challenging assumptions about vegetarianism as a phase or trend rather than a legitimate social justice position. This expansion in mainstream exposure to vegetarianism was contrasted by hostile criticism from those who felt that traditional values and culture were being undermined. In 1996, Howard Lyman, a former dairy farmer and cattle rancher appeared as a guest on the Oprah Winfrey show and exposed the dangers of beef consumption by discussing his participation in standard meat production procedures: adding slaughterhouse “by-products” to nonhuman animal feed, feeding cows excessive amounts of antibiotics, and maximizing profits by adding growth hormones to nonhuman animal diets (Lyman, 1998, p. 81). Three days after the show aired, beef sales, which were already declining due to drought and oversupply, further plummeted and in what became known as “the Oprah crash” (Lyman, 1998, p.8). In response, a group of Texas cattle ranchers unsuccessfully attempted to sue both Oprah Winfrey and Howard Lyman, eventually being dismissed with prejudice by a federal court (Lyman, 1998). The repercussions against Winfrey and Lyman are almost identical to the public response to singer k. d. lang’s disapproving statements about meat consumption in Alberta, which is discussed in greater detail on page 30.

The contemporary relationship between Canadians and nonhumans continues to express inconsistent values that parallel and elaborate upon the American and British models. Despite Canada’s reputation as a peaceful nation,

militaristic ties to the British monarchy and the profitability of fur challenged romanticized narratives of Canada as an expansive frontier where individuals harmoniously interact with the land and resources. Canada continues to supply black bear fur to Britain for use on the hats of the queen's guards and the RCMP persist in wearing fur hats during the winter months (Sorenson, 2010, p. 31-32). Although synthetic alternatives have been proposed, both institutions rejected them under superficial claims that faux fur lacks the luster and protection of nonhuman animal fur (Sorenson, 2010, p. 31-32). In Canada, there are no laws protecting nonhuman animals used in fur production, and industries "police themselves through voluntary adherence to recommended codes of practice they design" (Sorenson, 2010, p. 39). Similarly, nonhuman animals raised for food on factory farms in Canada are subjected to the same deplorable conditions as those in the US (Berreville, 2014; Eisnitz, 1997; Sorenson, 2010). In addition to the standard nonhuman animals exploited in systems of food production, Canada is a major global supplier of foie gras (fatty goose or duck liver), which is marketed as a "luxury" product. To produce foie gras, moultard ducks are force-fed through tubes with the goal of generating hepatic steatosis, a disease characterized by an accumulation of fat in the liver (Sorenson, 2010, p. 47). Tubes used in force-feeding the ducks can rupture or more frequently, tear internal organs, leading to slow and painful deaths (Sorenson, 2010, p. 47). Despite international critique and absolute bans of foie gras in several countries, Canada continues to be a leader in the production and export of foie gras and other "exotic" nonhuman animals, such as bison. Mirroring the fur industry, there are no Canadian laws protecting



nonhumans used in food production or vivisection and Sorenson (2010) argues that welfarist organizations such as Friendly Manitoba, and The Beyond Farming coalition accept nonhuman animal exploitation as long as it occurs under particular conditions (p. 57). The oppression of nonhuman animals in Canada is also evident in industries of entertainment. Hunting for sport contradictorily claims to conserve wild nonhuman animals through killing them and artificially manipulating nonhuman populations, and rodeo tradition has been expanded through lucrative marketing portraying cowboy imagery as a deeply rooted aspect of Western Canadian culture (Blue, 2007; Sorenson, 2010). Canada's continued participation in exploitative industries reflects an uncertain tension between respecting and oppressing nonhumans. In a 2008 all major political parties except the conservatives stated that they would support legislation in favour of nonhuman animal welfare (Sorenson, 2010), suggesting that Canadians ultimately perceive nonhumans as worthy of human care and consideration. Nevertheless, Canadians have largely maintained an indifferent position to the widespread institutionalized violence and exploitation of nonhuman animals.

### **Contextualizing Veganism in Alberta**

This research project is situated at the juncture of two dichotomous and contradictory ideologies: veganism and carnism. In Alberta, the prominence of the "beef" industry, both as an economically significant commodity, and as a symbolic nod to traditional and deeply rooted values, assists in developing an understanding of how individual lives are entangled with provincial identity. For instance, Albertan singer k. d. lang's polarizing "coming out" as a vegetarian operates as a

synecdoche for a more general disdain towards non-dominant perspectives. This tension between the prominence of certain social narratives and the quiet growth of a counter discourse is a thread that guides my work.

The pervasive myth of Alberta as an expansive terrain that is geographically suited for rugged cowboys and intergenerational small-scale farming was exploited and circulated in the late 80s. Initially, the “best” Albertan cows were consumed not by Albertans but by global consumers who were willing to pay more for an exotic “product.” Ironically, the popularity of Albertan “beef” for locals increased only after the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis. In Britain, the outbreak of BSE in the early 90s led to a ban of British “beef” imports to other European countries and ultimately fueled existing health concerns about “beef” consumption (Hinde et al., 2001). Although “beef” consumption was linked to British identity, anxieties about health and safety seemed to surpass patriotism and tradition. The opposite effect occurred in Alberta. The post-settler colonialism attitude in Alberta focused on extracting natural resources, positioning Alberta as the Canadian hub of oil, gas, and “beef” production. For Blue (2007), however, these associations are more complex than a casual linkage between a region and its commodities. She observes that maintaining an image of agrarian culture allows Alberta to remain distinct from the rest of Canada, a feature attractive to both the tourism and the beef industries (p. 75-78). In the 1980s, a marketing campaign titled “if it ain’t Albertan, it ain’t beef” eagerly embraced the preservation of cowboy and frontier iconography as a means to distinguish Alberta as a host of the 1988 winter Olympics (Blue, 2007). Selling Alberta as “wild,” “unsettled,” and “untouched” linked “beef” to the

strengthening of provincial identity and nostalgically reminded Albertans that preserving particular cultures was necessary (Blue, 2007, p. 75-78). Unsurprisingly, this preservation shifted attention away from indigenous cultures and towards a championing of Anglo-Canadian centered histories. As a residual consequence, the campaign instilled the mythology of the cowboy in an open, rugged pasture as an authentic component of Albertan ways of life, solidifying cowboy culture in the collective Albertan imaginary. The growing understandings of Alberta as synonymous with idyllic farming imagery dovetailed with the outbreaks of BSE that occurred in 1993 and later in 2003 (Forge & Frechette, 2005). In contrast to the British alarm over contaminated “beef,” government funds were swiftly allocated to the Albertan “beef” industry to compensate for global trade bans (Blue, 2007, p. 70). Combined with the tax breaks afforded to the “beef” industry, advertising campaigns further articulated the romanticized notion of “beef” as an inherently valuable element of Albertan identity. This government protection of “beef” production not only economically supported the industry, but also functioned to circulate the narrative that approval of nonhuman farming should be a prerequisite for inclusiveness in the definition of being Albertan. The distribution of bumper stickers emblazoned with “I love Alberta beef” logos along with television and radio advertising actually raised the popularity of beef domestically, despite the threat of BSE (Blue, 2007, p. 70). This cultural dialogue, built upon Western frontier imagery and staunch support of the “beef” industry despite hard times, resulted in an unwelcoming climate for oppositional viewpoints.

The expectation of loyalty towards Albertan industries is bound up in individual connections to economy as well as the preservation of rural values. Alberta's firm disapproval of alternate dialogues can be understood through singer k. d. lang's "coming out" as both gay and a vegetarian. The controversy that followed was emblematic of Alberta's complex and unstable relationships between food symbolism and sexuality, leading to a convergence of speciesism and homophobia. Lang was raised in Consort, Alberta, and the town's pride in her musical accomplishments was commemorated through two highway signs reading "Consort, home of k. d. lang" (Korinek, 2012, p. 330). The acknowledgement of lang's talent as a musician was tempered by a general marginalization of gender and sexual minorities, who were largely segregated to members-only bars and clubs (Korinek, 2012). As Korinek (2012) notes, these gathering places served as sites for gender and sexual minorities to develop their own inclusive communities through the sharing of food (p. 327). Thus, food fulfills multiple roles as a literal source of nourishment, a symbol of bodily awareness, and a marker of identity. According to Korinek (2012), any inklings about lang's sexuality were attributed to "quirkiness" and either ignored or dismissed as irrelevant (p. 330). In 1990, k. d. lang appeared in a PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) television commercial where she not only discussed her own vegetarianism, but also critiqued the meat industry as being damaging to human health and the environment (TheLangChannel, 2011). In the commercial, lang declares that meat "stinks" and discloses her own connection to the Albertan beef industry by adding, "if you knew how meat was grown, you'd lose your lunch. I'd know, I'm from cattle country and

that's why I became a vegetarian!" (TheLangChannel, 2011). Lang's "insider" position in the advertisement granted authority to her statements and implied knowledge about specific kinds of information that had remained hidden from the public; simultaneously lang revealed a counternarrative that was typically suppressed in discourses of Albertan identity. The commercial almost immediately engendered a shift in lang's status from a profound musician to a traitor of small-town values. Mainstream media, politicians, and the public in general heatedly expressed that opposition to the beef industry was decidedly un-Albertan, damaging to the economy, and a threat to rural values (Korinek, 2012, p. 331-334). Radio stations threatened to pull her music because they generated significant profits from agricultural advertising and depended upon rural listenership (Korinek, 2012, p. 331). The backlash against k. d. lang also epitomized the complex relationships between speciesism and homophobia. The abrupt social consequences for lang's denigration of Alberta "beef" extended beyond the ostracizing of her music and into an arena where critique and commentary of her sexuality were suddenly permitted. For one country music station owner, lang's decision to publicly oppose the "beef" industry was categorically "unladylike" (Korinek, 2012, p. 331), signifying the power of allied industries to enact specific and rigid definitions of gender. Lang's counterhegemonic views were also opposed more violently by residents who spray-painted "eat beef dyke" across the Consort highway signs and harassed lang's mother with threatening phone calls (Korinek, 2012, p. 332-333). The graffiti over the signs carries multiple implicit layers of meaning in addition to the obvious use of a slur to publically shame the musician. The decision to deface the sign operates to

dismiss lang's singing career by visually obscuring the underlying text. As well, the message can literally be read as a prescription to consume nonhuman animal flesh or more subtly allude to the association of meat with male genitals, suggesting that lang's rejection of heterosexuality must be reprimanded. The escalation of negative responses towards lang also illuminates the powerful and entrenched symbolism of "beef" as integral to provincial identity. The tensions between k. d. lang and the dominant discourse in Alberta are more significantly emblematic of deeper structural oppressions that entangle animal liberation with queer theory. In brief, the forcible breeding and sterilization of nonhumans are theft of sexual autonomy and the erasure of gender and sexual diversity in nonhuman communities contributes to the same suppression for humans (McJetters, 2016). For instance, discomfort with "they" as a singular pronoun when an individual's sex is unknown or non-binary occurs both in discussions of nonhumans and humans. Because my research is deeply concerned with identity construction in vegan students, k. d. lang's experience provides a contextual framework for understanding Albertan food-related values, and how non-dominant perspectives can be intentionally stigmatized and subjugated.

### **Zoophil Psychosis and the Dismissal of Counter-Hegemonic Viewpoints**

In academic work, the oppressive practices of humans towards nonhumans and less powerful humans can remain unchallenged. Vivisection, the experimentation or cutting of a live nonhuman animal has been employed by various disciplines since the 1870s (Glasser & Roy, 2014; Kelly, 2003). In conjunction with the emergence of vivisection as a standard academic practice, anti-

vivisections challenged the narrative of nonhuman bodies being commodified as tools for the purposes of human inquiry and advancement. By questioning the ethics and rationale of vivisection, these activists became threats to the institution and needed to be suppressed. By discussing how dissection forms a significant component of science curricula in Alberta, I am interested in the tensions that vegan students may face when their positions clash with “educational” activities.

In the early 1900s, primarily female activists in America drew upon their involvement in the suffragette movement to campaign for stricter regulation or discontinuation of vivisection (Kelly, 2003). Working alongside animal rights societies that were steadily expanding in Britain and the United States, these activists articulated a need for greater consideration of ethics in scientific paradigms. In 1909, Charles Loomis Dana, a prominent supporter of vivisection combined neurological theory with the panic and disdain for nonhuman animal empathies held by the scientific community. Inspired by the popular diagnosis for female hysteria (hysterical neurosis), Dana identified the “condition” zoophil psychosis to describe individuals who expressed concern for nonhuman animals (Buettinger, 1993; Chicago Tribune, 1909; Dana, 1909; Kelly, 2003; Regan, 2001). Dana’s diagnosis appeared both in medical journals and standard newspapers, ensuring that both the scientific community and the public were aware of the condition. Due largely to Dana’s titles and credentials as an academic, zoophil psychosis was unquestioningly accepted and circulated in medical and mainstream discourse (Kelly, 2003, p.99). Dana’s original description of the diagnosis positions “sufferers” in a broader category of obsessive psychoses, noting that neurotic

ailments may also fall into the two other groups: neuroasthenia and hysteria (Chicago Tribune, 1909). For Dana, the “abnormality” of those with zoophil psychosis is rooted in “the extent to which individuals with the disease [will] go to to protest the abuse of animals” (Kelly, 2003, p. 99). As evidence, Dana refers to two case studies representing clients in his charge: a man in his thirties who could not bear the mistreatment of horses and a married woman who was exceptionally sensitive to the plights of stray cats (Buettinger, 1993; Chicago Tribune, 1909). Notably, Dana was able to “cure” the man, but dismissed the woman as hopeless (Buettinger, 1993, p. 279). General treatments for those diagnosed with zoophil psychosis, again, were modeled upon therapies for other neurological conditions of the time such as isolation and electric currents (Buettinger, 1993, p. 279).

While zoophil psychosis functioned literally as an efficient method of reinforcing Dana’s claims to authority within the medical community, the diagnosis was, more significantly, a tool to delegitimize the claims of those who interfered with the establishment. Dominated by males, the academy privileged the hard sciences and became symbolic of reason and rationality. As Buettinger (1993) remarks, women were generally perceived as inferior, and “when challenged by the lay and predominantly female antivivisection movement, scientists brimmed with condescension and misogyny” (p. 277). The inherent biological inferiority of women was emphasized by the hysterical neurosis diagnosis (Tasca, Rapetti, Carta, & Fadda, 2012), and solidified by Dana’s confident assertion that the primarily female sufferers of zoophil psychosis were intellectually similar to “mentally defective children” (Dana, 1909, p. 383). Dana further stigmatized nonhuman



animal activists by emphasizing their supposed disregard for humans in the interest of protecting nonhuman animals, suggesting that women with zoophil psychosis would sooner care for nonhumans than their own children (Buettinger, 1993, p. 284). This claim supported the more pressing agenda of further distancing activists from the mainstream population by labeling them not only irrational, but also indifferent to human suffering. To bolster the absurdity of nonhuman animal empathy, Dana extrapolated that zoophil psychosis patients could demonstrate a psychotic concern for plants (Buettinger, 1993, p. 284). From a Foucauldian standpoint, the zoophil psychosis diagnosis is emblematic of the structural power enacted by institutions to discredit and suppress counter-hegemonic dialogues. It physically and symbolically demarcates socially ordered categories that must be reinforced rather than challenged: male versus female; academic versus incompetent; rational versus emotional; normal versus abnormal; civilized versus crazed; human versus nonhuman. These binaries permit the medicalization of particular groups of people, limiting their opportunities to challenge oppressive regimes. By classifying activists as neurologically damaged, and therefore inferior, Dana and colleagues were able to maintain control and regulation of the academy and ensure that positions that threatened academic power would not be listened to.

Zoophil psychosis was widely used and accepted into the 1920s, and one vivisection supporter attempted to revive the term as late as 1966 (Buettinger, 1993, p. 287). Hysterical neurosis was not deleted from the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for mental disorders) until 1980 (Tasca, Rapetti, Carta, & Fadda, 2012). The persistence of these terms reflects how deeply held social constructions

of normalcy function to discipline and subordinate viewpoints that might threaten powerful institutions. As Nocella (2015) reminds us, stigmatization is the first step in oppressive systems that later seek to marginalize, segregate, and finally eliminate divergent viewpoints, bodies, or groups. In my research, I am investigating how counter-hegemonic opinions of vegan students might be perceived and addressed in Calgarian schools. The zoophil psychosis diagnosis as a response to resistance against vivisection connects to research on how dissection is oriented in school contexts. Oakley (2009) observes that opposition to dissection can be derived from ethical concerns about the unnecessary and painful killing of nonhumans, as well as environmental issues with the sourcing of nonhumans (p. 62). She also points out that capture, housing, and transport of nonhuman animals can subject them to pain, distress, and death (p. 63). Moreover, Oakley (2009) questions whether dissection can be considered an accurate representation of contemporary biology; the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine recently reported that "all medical schools in the US and Canada are completely free of animal laboratories in teaching" (Barnard, 2016, para. 1). Additionally, Slusher (2016), a former vivisectionist, argues that experiments involving nonhumans are not only unreliable, but also notoriously poor long-term predictors of the outcomes for humans. Nevertheless, dissection and vivisection continue to be used in teaching programs for junior high, high school, and surgical training after medical school courses (Barnard, 2016; Oakley, 2009; Oakley, 2012; Slusher, 2016; Thomas, 2013). In a later study of Ontario students and teachers, Oakley (2012) found that despite the ethical implications of dissection, teachers did not always offer choice or alternatives.

While most students supported choice, less than half of teachers were open to providing alternatives, privileging traditional dissection over computer or synthetic models (Oakley, 2012, p. 16). In Oakley's (2012) study, perspectives on student choice in dissection lessons were generally expressed through four themes: choice was offered freely with alternatives, choice was offered conditionally, choice was connected to grades, or choice was not provided. Even when choice was offered freely, nearly a quarter of students who objected did not voice their concerns, preferring instead to "go along" with the dissection (p. 19). These findings are consistent with the Asch conformity experiments, which found that participants feel compelled to conform to a majority group even when they believe the group is mistaken (Asch, 1951; 1952; 1955; 1956). The generally passive position taken by those with alternate beliefs reveals how dominant societal messages can be powerful enough to prevent contestation by a competing discourse. Dominant institutions can also enact structural violence (or implicit violence, Galtung, 1969) by normalizing and making invisible the suffering of others. For instance, Thomas (2013) recalls that his training as a physician required vivisection. In his program, Thomas (2013) observes that while medical students were encouraged to show empathy towards their first human cadaver or "patient," nonhuman lives were devalued as disposable commodities. In one course, medical students were instructed to continue cutting and probing live frogs despite clear evidence of pain such as gasping and attempting to escape (p. 48). When the ethics of such an assignment were questioned, Thomas (2013) was met with laughter from the professor (p. 49). Contemporary critique of nonhuman animal advocacy bizarrely

parallels Dana's conception of zoophil psychosis; in a memoir about his surgical residency, Miller (2004) refers to the hypocrisy of "mostly female vegetarian types" who champion animal rights but remain indifferent to the feelings and rights of lettuce (p. 99). Here, Miller takes up the same rhetoric of hysteria and absurdity to relegate alternate positions into the realm of the mentally unstable, utilizing institutional power to deflect attention away from a critique of nonhuman "use." The general perception of nonhuman animals in the academy, as well, has changed little from the Cartesian view of nonhumans as merely unfeeling automata. Both dissection in schools and vivisection in surgical programs implicitly emphasize that nonhuman animals must be conceived of as machines or tools (Dorian & Arluke, 1997; Pedersen, 2010; Slusher, 2016) that do not experience pain and must be experimented upon to serve the important and central goals of humans. Fundamentally, this landscape of nonhuman disregard in academic settings provides an interesting space for the competing discourses of vegan students. In my study, I am interested in better understanding how the experience of vegan students in Calgary might connect to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

### **Nonhuman Animals in Philosophy**

In reference to nonhuman animals, Malebranche (1958) writes "they eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing" (p. 394). Malebranche's sentiments are not unique; Western philosophers and scholars have typically positioned nonhumans as inferior, and this viewpoint laid the foundations for contemporary speciesism. Philosophy has historically been aligned with other branches of academia, and has

therefore remained largely silent or indifferent towards the relationships between humans and nonhumans. Several texts centered around nonhuman animal liberation focus especially on Descartes' "monstrous" notion that nonhumans are mechanistic beings who are unable to feel pain (Boisseu & Donaghey, 2015; Regan & Singer, 1976; Smith, 1952; Socha & Mitchell, 2014). According to Lieber (2011), however, this narrative originated from Descartes' adversary, Nicholas Fontaine, who asserted that Descartes and his followers participated in especially cruel experiments on nonhumans, such as nailing dogs to walls by their paws. However, Cottingham (1978) interprets Descartes' position as more neutral, pointing out that for Descartes, the "bête machine" (animal machine) is "a machine in exactly the same sense as the [human] body" (p. 552). Further, Cottingham (1978) observes that Descartes acknowledges nonhuman animal sounds as their natural ways of communicating feelings (p. 556). Harrison (1992), as well, suggests that the nailing of dogs is unlikely considering Descartes had a pet dog "upon whom he lavished much attention" (p. 220). Although there is a consensus on Descartes' involvement in vivisection, Greenwood (2007) asserts that Descartes was no crueller than other vivisectionists of the time period (p. 86). Nevertheless, Harrison (1992) builds upon Cottingham's (1978) work to conclude that Descartes does indeed deny nonhumans the capacity to feel and views them as automata. Regardless of whether Descartes actually nailed nonhuman animals to walls, he seems to create a clear delineation signifying the supremacy of humans. Fundamentally, Descartes positions humans as separate from and hierarchically superior to nature and maintains that nonhumans are soulless and unthinking (Cottingham 1978, p. 552-558).

In contrast to Descartes and other philosophers, Derrida problematizes the function of such labels as “animal.” In a ten-hour address given in 1997, Derrida interrogates the question of “the animal” (2002, p. 378) in philosophy. Working through the work of Descartes, Levinas, Lacan, and Heidegger, Derrida problematizes the distinct separation that philosophy establishes between humans and nonhumans. Derrida proposes that the use of the general term “animal” operates metaphorically to cage nonhuman animals, and thus establishes a binary between them and the human community (p. 393-394). Derrida argues that the term “animal” is too homogeneous to properly attend to the diversity within the category of “animal” (i.e. a monkey and an ant are both considered animals); he maintains that this totalizing language is a violent gesture that subjugates nonhuman animals and justifies our industrial treatment of them. Elevating the position of nonhumans by troubling the conception of “the animal,” however, is not widely accepted in philosophy or in the broad landscape of educational theory.

### **Nonhumans in Educational Theory**

My literature search in the field of educational theory was almost entirely anthropocentric, suggesting an assumption that human education is separate from the nonhuman and that humans have nothing to learn from nonhumans. In the field of Critical Animal Studies, education has been taken up rigorously, with activist-scholars arguing that curricula must embrace alternative possibilities and perspectives in order to challenge human privilege and heal relationships with nonhumans and the earth (Kahn, 2010; Lupinacci, 2013; Nocella, 2004; Pedersen, 2010; Socha & Mitchell, 2014; Weil, 2004). Humane education, which I examine in

greater detail later in this chapter, is also a specific field that attends to the ways in which humans can challenge oppressive structures. Ultimately, however, the most acclaimed, celebrated, and influential theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dewey, 1902, 1929, 1938; Eisner, 1983; Freire, 1968; Greene, 1971; Huebner, 1959, 1962, 1963; Montessori, 1912; Pinar, 1978), do not mention nonhuman animals or their welfare in connection with curriculum.

The work of Nel Noddings (1984) is an exception to general absence of nonhumans in curriculum theory. Noddings (1984) positions the role of education as central in promoting a caring, ethical idea (p. 172). Noddings devotes one chapter in her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* to animals, titling the selection “Caring for Animals, Plants, Things, and Ideas.” She begins by acknowledging that “an ethic grounded in the natural caring of ordinary life must consider our relation to animals” (p. 148). Noddings contemplates whether humans are obligated to promote the welfare of animals, and grounds her argument in her earlier contention that “the caring attitude is limited to the possibility of reciprocity” (p. 149). Noddings states that it is “obvious” that animals cannot be the ones doing the caring in a relationship, but permits nonhuman animals into caring relationships by virtue of their capacity to be cared for, and therefore provide benefits to humans. Noddings rejects ethicist Peter Singer’s utilitarian view (the greatest good for the greatest number) in favour of an individualist argument, where it is acceptable for personal notions of sentimentality to guide relationships with or without nonhuman animals. Using her cat as an example, Noddings claims that ethical obligations towards nonhuman animals are

dependent upon the initiation of a relationship (where it is the human who decides whether a relationship has been established or not). Noddings concludes that ethical responsibility toward nonhuman animals is for the individual to decide.

Though Noddings claims that her ideas are not speciesist (p. 152), I would argue that this work does, perhaps unintentionally, promote dangerously speciesist ideas that contradict her entire foundation of a caring and ethical approach to education. Noddings' chapter title alludes to the human arrogance that permeates the entire section. Beyond the problematic nature of disassociating humans from the category of "animal," Noddings' Cartesian classification of animals along with "things" and "ideas" indicates her view of nonhumans as hierarchically lower than humans. As well, Noddings makes no distinction between a sentient nonhuman animal, with the capacity to think and feel, and an inanimate object or thought. This conception of nonhumans as separated from and positioned below humans steadily leads into Noddings' further arguments, which operate under the assumption that the interests of the human are superior.

In Noddings' view, reciprocity within a relationship of caring is of paramount importance, and because nonhumans are incapable of caring, the onus for maintaining a caring relationship remains with the human. Though I might be at risk of being accused of anthropomorphizing nonhumans, I would uphold that nonhuman animals are undoubtedly capable of caring. Rats, who according to Noddings do not warrant ethical responsibility ("I would shoot [a rat] cleanly if the opportunity arose," p. 157) are motivated by empathetic pro-social behavior, exactly like humans. Bartal, Decety, and Mason (2011) determined that rats will forfeit



chocolate to rescue a restrained or drowning cagemate, but will not respond to an empty or object-containing restrainer (p. 27). After learning to intentionally and quickly open the restraining device, the two free rats would typically share the chocolate (p. 27), but even when no social contact was permitted, the rats behaved ethically by saving their peer (p. 27). To recap, rats, a non-primate species of mammal, consistently choose the life of another over food. Even if, as Noddings implies, the life of an unknown nonhuman animal is not worth much, “if it’s the Grade Scheme we are going by, just what is a plate of bacon or veal worth?” (Scully, 2002, p. 45). Furthermore, if we teach children that violently killing any being is an appropriate response for our own fear or lack of sentimentality, we risk inadvertently teaching them to look upon even other humans as pests or threats (Patterson, 2002, p. 27-50).

In her discussion of nonhuman animals and the ethic of caring, Noddings is troublingly dismissive of vegetarianism and environmentalism. She purports that if the world became vegetarian:

Sharing the earth with large animals would be impossible. We would either have to destroy them to relieve our mutual pain and hunger, or we would have to regulate their reproduction so stringently that they would become rarities in special preserves and zoos. (p. 154).

It is unclear why Noddings believes that sharing the earth with large animals would be impossible, since we are currently sharing the earth with such nonhuman animals as elephants, blue whales, and rhinoceroses. From an environmental standpoint, it would be to the advantage of humans and every other species on the

earth to eliminate animal agriculture completely. Animal agriculture is the leading cause of species extinction and habitat destruction (Oppenlander, 2013, p.33-37; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2006). Animal agriculture is responsible for 91% of Amazon destruction (Margulis, 2003, p.9; Oppenlander, 2013, p. 33-37), and 1-2 acres of rainforest, about the size of a football field, are cleared every second as a result of the animal agriculture industry (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015; Myers, 1992). The leading cause of rainforest destruction is to create grazing area and feed crops for livestock (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2006). As a result, using conservative calculations, at least 14 plant, animal, and insect species are lost every day due to rainforest destruction<sup>3</sup> (Kolbert, 2014, p. 186; Oppenlander, 2013, p. 33-37). This means there are species that have not even been discovered yet that are going extinct as a direct result of the meat, dairy, and egg industries. As for regulating the reproduction of “food animals,” again, Noddings’ paternalistic assumption is that humans, who are unable to control their own populations, are qualified to tinker with the populations of other species.

I would reject Noddings’ implication that “food” animals becoming rarities for conservation centers is in some way negative. Beyond the reality that consumer demand for meat products is threatening overall species diversity, animals bred for food are genetic monstrosities. They are bred to grow abnormally large and as fast as possible (Eisnitz, 2007; Scully, 2002). Dairy cows in Canada (Holsteins) have been continuously genetically selected in favour of significantly higher milk

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<sup>3</sup> To arrive at this estimate, scientists calculate the species diversity and the rates of speciation, or formation of new species, within a given area and then extrapolate those numbers.

production than they would naturally produce, which takes a toll on their bodies and sends them to slaughter at approximately five years old, a fraction of their natural lifespan (Berreville, 2014, p. 186-187). Broiler (egg-laying) hens also suffer, as they are bred for forced labor or what the industry calls “productivity” (Davis, 2014, p. 173). As Davis (2014) writes, laying an egg cannot be paralleled to a tree producing an apple; it is a labour intensive process that draws calcium from the hen’s bones and eventually leads to osteoporosis, broken bones, and paralysis. There is “something grotesque,” writes Watts, about a creature that is a “steroidally [and genetically] enhanced growth machine, producing in unprecedentedly short periods of time enormous quantities of flesh around a distorted skeleton” (Watts, 2002, p. 15-16). The breeding of nonhuman animals into flesh machines expectedly leads to a countless health conditions: “cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal disorders, crippled joints...unnatural gaits...oxygen deficiency, and heart failure,” (Davis, 2014, p. 173), as well as “sores, tumors, ulcers, pus pockets, lesions, cysts, bruises, torn ears, swollen legs everywhere” (Scully, 2002, p. 267). It is an abuse for these nonhuman animals to be produced in the first place, and in contrast to Noddings, I would be in favour of their extinction.

Noddings (1984) also seems to have a strong optimism bias regarding environmental issues. She claims that “we cannot be certain about consequences. What is likely today may not be likely years hence; what is [nuclear] waste today may be a resource tomorrow” (p. 152). However, there are many consequences that climate specialists, for instance, are certain about. Most climate researchers agree that by the year 2050, the earth will only be able to accommodate 565 gigatons (Gt)

of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CDE) (Oppenlander, 2013, p. 28). According to Oppenlander's (2013) research, the planet "would reach this no-turning-back climate change figure by the year 2030, even if we were to eliminate all use of fossil fuels by the 'energy/industry' sector, starting today" (p.28). In Noddings' *laissez-faire* view, the potential negative long term effects of environmental damage are not enough to dictate what those in the present should do: "we would do better...to argue against the accumulation of nuclear wastes on grounds of present and imminent danger to organisms now living" (p. 152). What Noddings does not seem to recognize is that many environmental ills may not pose an immediate threat, but can, in a domino sort of effect, backfire later on. As Shiva (1993) points out, monocropping in India seemed destined to succeed because it was assumed that the efficiency of the industrial line could be applied to forest ecosystems (p. 19). Years later, species diversity was destroyed, high nutrient crops were converted to cash crops (further marginalizing the poor), Indian farmers were committing suicide because of high debts and loans, soil and water systems were disrupted, and pesticide resistance developed (Shiva, 1993, p. 26-29). I would further challenge Nodding's assertion that because we cannot be completely certain about future circumstances, we should uncritically continue our actions. Given the earth's current state of environmental crisis, we should not wait for generations of children to grow up before we start teaching them to critically examine and reflect upon their actions.

## **Humane Education**

### **A Brief History of Humane Education**

The notion of education that is “humane,” in that it identifies a need for children to understand kindness and compassion to both nonhuman animals and other humans, is not a recent conception. Locke (1889) realized that children have natural impulses to express power, and that adults have a responsibility to correct acts of cruelty. Locke (1889) was disturbed by the tendency of children to treat nonhuman animals roughly and “with a seeming kind of pleasure” (p. 101). He partially attributed these cruel impulses in children to the way that adults treated beings that were believed to be inferior. Locke (1889) writes, “tormenting and killing other animals will, by degrees, harden [children’s] minds even toward men; they...will not be apt to be very compassionate or benign to those of their own kind” (p.101). Although treating nonhuman animals respectfully was understood as a basic virtue in the nineteenth century, the movement from teaching individual children to groups of children in a more formal implementation of humane education occurred later. Specifically, humane education targeted young boys as a method of protecting against the “tyrannical tendencies that might undermine civic life were they to go unchecked” (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p. 27). Essentially, a social fear of extreme aggression leading to an obsession with power in young men propelled the use of nonhuman animals in formal instruction to develop empathy and compassion in boys.

In the United States, George T. Angell, the leader of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), became an important figure in

providing schools with both resources for humane education and curricular developments through a humane lens (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p.28). Angell advocated juvenile literature that featured anthropomorphized animal characters that appealed to both children and the values of society. A salient text in his promotion of humane education was "Black Beauty" by Anna Sewell (Unti and Derosa, 2003, p. 29), a story that was unique (in 1878) because it was narrated from the perspective of a horse rather than a human. Prior to World War I, humane educators were relatively successful in touting the merciful treatment of nonhuman animals as a "powerful solution to the world's ills" (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p.31). The public was receptive to the idea of "civilizing" children through education about and exposure to animals. However, there were three primary factors, occurring slightly before, during, and after World War I, that likely contributed to the decline of humane education in the mid-twentieth century.

First, in 1907, Columbia university acquired a donation of \$100, 000 that was specifically allocated for the promotion of humane education (for instance informing pre-service teachers about the philosophy of humane education and providing them with resources). Unfortunately, the funds were poorly managed and "no progress toward the goal of the donor was realized" (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p. 31). This suggests that even in the field of education, there may have been hostility or apathy towards humane education. To compound matters, the stirrings of World War I led to a belief amongst the public that humane education would "soften" American youth, and the work of humane educators shifted to war nonhuman animal relief rather than the promotion of empathy in children (Unti and DeRosa,

2003, p. 31). Additionally, technological changes such as the spread of motor cars “eliminated from American’s daily experience the abuse of horses and other working animals” (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p. 32). Because the most obvious visual reminders of human interactions with animals were removed from the social stage, “institutionalized uses of animals such as animal experimentation and the mass production of animals for food and fur [were] well beyond the experience and influence of most individuals” (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p.32). This detachment from animals, likely exacerbated by the desperation of the World Wars and the depression is equally persistent today.

By the 1930s, the “softness” and ambiguity of humane education was abandoned for solid comfort of the harder sciences. According to Pauly (2000), the “abstract rationalism” of science instruction, especially in high school and university de-emphasized the building of empathy in favour of seeking certainty. Unti and DeRosa (2003) maintain that schools “have yet to accept and integrate the teaching of most humane concepts into their curricula...[humane education] is typically relegated to side issue status, addressed perfunctorily by most animal care and control organizations and imply ignored by others” (p.33). When humane education does occur in schools, it is generally initiated by organizations that conduct classroom visits, tours of their own facilities, volunteer programs, and after-school programs (Unti and DeRosa, 2003, p. 34).

### **Contemporary Understandings of Humane Education**

Unti and DeRosa (2003) define humane education as “the attempt to inculcate [sic] the kindness-to-animals ethic through formal or informal instruction of

children...a response to the challenge of reducing the abuse and neglect of animals” (p.27). Although this is one understanding of humane education, it is extremely literal and continues to reflect the ideals of the past: kindness to nonhuman animals will transfer to kindness to humans, and society as a whole will be less violent and more civilized. This over-simplified definition can be useful, especially in studies that seek to directly determine the effects of nonhuman animal and human interactions, however, there are new ways to view and implement humane education. Weil (2004; 2014) proposes that humane education seeks to empower youth to address the pressing challenges of their time. Students are provided with opportunities to make informed choices “that do the most good and least harm for [themselves], other people, animals, and the earth” (Institute for Humane Education, 2014). Humane education encompasses not only a philosophy about education, but also the knowledge and resources to consider how “human rights, animal protection, environmental stewardship, and cultural issues are interconnected and integral dimensions of a just, healthy society” (Institute for Humane Education, 2017). This more intersectional idea of humane education emphasizes that students are already active and necessary participants in their communities, and that they have the capacity to promote meaningful change. These ideas are compatible with Dewey’s (1902) explanation that when students are saturated “with the spirit of service, and [provided with] the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious” (p.29).



## **Critically Examining Contemporary Humane Education Models**

Based on the literature that I reviewed, the majority of studies that deal with the implementation of humane education programs are generally focused on the older definition of humane education, which emphasized kindness and empathy to nonhuman animals and the possible transference of these attitudes to humans. Though some (Daly and Suggs, 2010) acknowledge the diversity of humane education programs, most research in the area of humane education has not been considered through the lens of Critical Animal Studies. Studies in humane education are ultimately concerned with how humane education programs influence humans. While nonhumans are invited into the process of learning, their value is limited only to their capacity to benefit or serve humans. For instance, Daly and Suggs (2010) researched the benefits of keeping a classroom pet. The study concluded that a pet helped students develop empathy by teaching them about respecting nonhuman animals (p. 108), and positively impacting academic, socio-emotional, and linguistic development (p. 107). Similarly, Daly and Morton's (2009) findings suggested that empathy in adults was linked to dog ownership in childhood. Ascione's (1991) study found a "significant and positive" correlation between humane education and both the humane treatment of nonhumans as well as human directed empathy (p. 197). Though a primary goal of most humane education programs is to foster an ethic of kindness towards nonhuman animals, these programs can be problematic. First, the studies tended to limit the circle of compassion to pet animals only. By excluding other domestic nonhuman animals such as pigs or chickens, these programs remain incomplete and uphold existing speciesist values. Humane

education programs can also be anthropocentric. Most studies focused on the ways that nonhuman animals can potentially benefit humans, while ignoring the possibility that the nonhumans may be impacted negatively. “Using” nonhuman animals as “tools” in classrooms objectifies nonhumans and operates to further marginalize them as inherently inferior to humans. None of the studies I reviewed in this area demonstrated consideration for the nonhumans involved in classrooms; a relationship where one party benefits while the other party is negatively impacted is parasitic and oppressive. Finally, humane education programs tend to have a paternalistic rhetoric, where the superior humans care for the inadequate nonhumans. This positioning erases the autonomy of nonhumans and extinguishes the possibility that nonhumans can also care for humans. As well, the assumption of the human as an essential element deflects from opportunities to learn from nonhumans through their natural interactions with their own families and communities.

Weil’s (2004; 2014) conception of humane education does seem to surpass the anthropocentrism of earlier work, but retains much of the oppressive capitalist rhetoric that it seeks to dismantle. While Weil’s website (Institute for Humane Education 2017) and books are generally accessible to a wide audience, the actual implementation of humane education on a school-wide level has been limited to private schools that implicitly reinforce the financial segregation of students. Additionally, many of Weil’s (2004) lesson plans and activities emphasize individualistic lifestyle choices by “[inviting] students to...take individual action” (p. 4). These lesson plans (p. 63-135) often task students with choosing between two

or more products, such as a conventional toothpaste or a vegan brand. Such activities, while superficially useful for demonstrating that some products are less harmful than others, can also be problematic. First, students from diverse economic backgrounds may not have equal access to vegan products, which are not widely available in all communities. In this case, choice is not necessarily as explicit or simple as the lesson plan implies, and students who cannot afford or access vegan toothpaste are further distanced from a lifestyle of “good” choices and may even be “demonized...as moral failures” because of their inability to conform to specific consumer practices. (Seiter, 2015, p. 2). Additionally, educational activities that focus on shifting individual consumption habits towards vegan alternatives can still reinforce speciesism. As Seiter (2015) points out, the capitalist mindset of relentless profit accumulation will destroy the earth and all its inhabitants regardless of whether or not the meat industry, specifically, becomes obsolete (p.3). Buying or boycotting particular goods perpetuates “vote with your dollar” rhetoric that upholds the capitalist myth that consumers have meaningful power. Finally, the emphasis on individual lifestyle politics obscures the need for revolutionary activism by permitting consumers to feel complacent in their habits. While both Seiter (2015) and I believe that individuals should certainly choose vegan products when it is logistically possible, these purchases should not be where activism ends. Seiter (2015) explains that individual choices are not enough, and that disenfranchised groups must unite against the common oppressor towards a revolutionary political strategy that will bring about collective liberation (p. 2-5).

## **A Dialogue Around Curricula<sup>4</sup>**

As a focus of this thesis is to better understand Albertan curricula through an analysis of student experiences, I believe it would be prudent to briefly examine some generally accepted classifications within understandings of “curriculum.” Curricular structures in schools are intricate and nuanced. Various forms of curricula, while distinct, operate not only independently, but also in relation to one another in the context of school and society (Dewey, 1902). Because of these entangled points of intersection, there are myriad ways in which curricular structures generate and circulate knowledge, ideas, and attitudes. Through discussions with my student participants, I am aiming to comprehensively investigate the connections between multiple layers and perceptions of curriculum.

The various forms of curriculum exist synergistically and can be thought of as occupying individual points on a complex, three-dimensional shape. The two most basic ways that matters of curriculum operate are overtly and covertly (Glatthorn, 1987; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). The overt or explicit curriculum refers to the conspicuously planned aspects of formal schooling, whereas the covert or implicit curriculum refers to the unintentional and often unexpected realities of the classroom (Eisner, 1985). The overt curriculum encompasses curricular documents, teaching and learning materials, lesson plans, and other resources that authoritative bodies deem important for learning. Overt goals are influenced by the tradition of scientific inquiry (Bobbitt, 2013) and tend to be pragmatic in nature. They seek to create

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<sup>4</sup> This section of the chapter is a revised and modified excerpt from a publication in the *Green Theory and Praxis Journal* (Thirukkumaran, 2016). It is used in this dissertation with permission from the journal editor.

uniformity and standardization between schools so all schools have access to the same content, and assessment practices such as standardized testing can be administered more efficiently. Despite the goals of the overt curriculum, students are also shaped by the covert outcomes of their schooling. The covert or hidden curriculum attends to the conclusions that students draw from the organizational structures of the school combined with the attitudes of authority figures, such as teachers and administrators (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 46). For instance, students may covertly learn that following a schedule, raising one's hand, remaining quiet during instruction, and waiting in line are behaviours that elicit praise. They may also make assumptions about rigid, clearly established teacher and learner roles. The other categories of curricula complicate the overt/ covert binary because they may take up either an overt or a covert space, depending on the circumstances.

There are two further categories of curriculum that are related to overt and covert structures: the prescribed curriculum and the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). The prescribed curriculum refers to the written, formal, planned aspects of learning that typically originate from a professional organization or government. State (or in this case provincial) legal documents such as curricular guides and expectations from administrators are examples of prescribed curricula. In Alberta, the prescribed curriculum or "Program of Studies" for each subject area is the legal document that public school teachers are obligated to reference when developing their lesson plans. Although teachers have some degree of autonomy over the implementation and delivery of learning outcomes in these documents, they must ultimately cover each learning "objective" within the Program of Studies.

Currently, teachers are not permitted to introduce new material, unless this material is justified through a learning outcome, or unless a student brings up a new idea or topic in class discussions (teachable moments). A peculiar assumption of the Programs of Study for each subject area is that it is actually possible to teach each learning outcome to any classroom in Alberta, regardless of demographics such as ethnic compositions, socio-economic factors, and class sizes; McClements (2011) demonstrates that even standardized provincial exams in Alberta test less than 20% of learning objectives (p. 21-39). Although prescribed curriculum documents are most frequently accessed by teachers, they are publically available, meaning that parents, students, and other members of the public can access them. A counterpoint to the prescribed curriculum is the null curriculum, or the subject matter that is not explicitly taught or discussed. Eisner (1994) proposes that the null curriculum can prevent critical thinking skills in students by reinforcing a parochial perspective (p. 97) rather than “a wide range of modes of thought” (p. 98). The null curriculum intentionally excludes subject matter and prevents or restricts teaching opportunities for particular topics. When I analyzed the prescribed curriculum for environmental and outdoor education in Alberta, the null curriculum was well represented through the absence of three significant areas: discussions of nonhuman animals as linked to the environment, the role of meat consumption in environmental degradation, and environmental racism towards minoritized communities (Thirukkumaran, 2016). The omission of these areas tacitly sends the message that they are not important or relevant in schools (Eisner, 1994).

There are a multitude of other curricular positions that operate in tandem with the overt, covert, prescribed, and null curricula. The taught curriculum concerns how teachers interpret and deliver prescribed learning outcomes, while the learned or received curriculum is what students actually retain as a result of taught activities. As well, the societal curriculum acknowledges that not all learning takes place in a formal school setting. Cortes (1981), for instance, suggests that a variety of social forces such as family, community organizations, and media all influence how people learn (p. 24). Similarly, Giroux (1997) notes that sites designated for formal learning are not neutral; they represent conflicting societal values and represent cultural contexts. My discussions with vegan students (chapter 4) more closely examine how dominant messages about the position of nonhumans and vegan students are recognized and enacted through various curricular structures in formal schooling.

### **Summary**

This review of literature relevant to the fields of education and nonhuman animal liberation revealed an absence of research specifically addressing the school experience of vegan students. By examining veganism and human-animal relations in Canada and Alberta, it is evident that those of us in the human community have a complicated and often contradictory relationship with nonhuman animals. Historically, nonhuman animal activists have been positioned outside the framework of normalcy in an effort to discredit their efforts; this prominence of human supremacy is also evident in philosophy, with the exception of Derrida, and educational theory. Humane education, while somewhat problematic in some ways,

offers educators an opportunity to dissolve the boundaries between species while working towards a framework of total liberation. Finally, understanding the tensions around multiple understandings of “curriculum” assists in interpreting how students and others discuss this term. In the next chapter, I discuss my methodological approach in greater detail.



# Chapter 3: Methodology

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## Introduction

A research methodology, or design framework is supported by two primary concerns: a philosophical or theoretical position and a research method (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.6). My inquiry is methodologically situated within the traditions of Critical Theory: the philosophical position that guides this study is the emergent framework Critical Animal Theory (CAT), and my research method employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In the first section of this chapter, I review the structure of Critical Animal Theory by delving into its history as street activism that later emerged as a scholarly area of study. I build on these roots as well as the influences of other theories to examine Critical Animal Theory as I use it in my research project. I also address some of the critiques of CAT, and discuss how CAT can work to resolve some of the issues that have not been fully considered by the animal advocacy community. In the second part of this chapter, I explain the research method for my study. I begin by providing an overview of Critical Discourse Analysis as a specific mode for understanding how power relationships are enacted through schools, as social institutions. I then outline the ethical considerations of the study and introduce the participants. Finally I explain my process of data coding and analysis.

## **Philosophical Position- An Introduction to Critical Animal Theory**

### **A Brief History**

**The influence of street activism.** Critical Animal Theory (CAT) is a scholarly perspective for addressing dominance and inequality; it extends the ideas of critical theory to apply to both human and non-human animals. Critical Animal Theory works to dismantle all oppressions, but is especially concerned with the protection and emancipation of nonhumans, as this area has been largely overlooked in academic discourse. The academy has a history of developing fields of study that parallel social justice movements: the women's liberation struggle led to the establishment of women's studies, the civil rights movement was pivotal in African and black studies, various environmental movements created environmental studies, and queer studies grew out of queer activism. Comparably, CAT emerged through movements of animal advocacy and liberation (Nocella II, Sorenson, Socha, & Matsuoka, 2014, p. xxii). The primary goal of CAT is to ask individuals to better "understand society from the perspective of those who are oppressed and victimized...our ideas of social justice should be applied to other animals, not just to members of our own species" (Sorenson, 2014, p. xx).

**Theoretical influences.** As a branch of the wider field of critical theory, Critical Animal Studies (CAS) originates from the social theorists of the Frankfurt school. Critical theory is a response to oppressive social realities and ultimately seeks to "create a world which satisfies the needs and powers" of everyone (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246). Ultimately, critical theory is concerned with the emancipation and liberation of groups that remain subjugated by an oppressive or

ruling class. Therefore, critical theory aims to move beyond the realm of the theoretical and into a process to actively end oppression. As Bohman (2005) notes, the purpose of critical theory is to “explain what is wrong with the current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation” (p. 1). Elaborating upon this transformative resistance to oppressive powers, critical pedagogy, as well, is foundational to the development of CAS. In particular, Freire (1968) critiques traditional systems of education (the “banking” model), pointing out that public education is a means of control and injustice by the oppressing class (p. 71-79). The acquisition of freedom, Freire (1968) argues, must be initiated by the oppressed with the goal of social transformation rather than the tendency to merely emulate the oppressors or gain entrance into the dominating group (p. 125-130). Critical Animal Studies arose through the intergenerational teachings of the Frankfurt school and critical pedagogy. Foundational CAS scholars Richard Kahn and Steven Best were students of Doug Kellner, who was a student of Herbert Marcuse, a Frankfurt school theorist (Nocella, personal communication, 2017). Kahn was also a student of Peter McLaren, who was a student of Friere (Nocella, personal communication, 2017). Nocella, Kahn, and Best worked with Henry Giroux and other students of Friere to develop the concept of Critical Animal Studies, extending the necessity for emancipation beyond humans (Nocella, personal communication, 2017).

**Extending Existing Animal Studies Scholarship.** Critical Animal Theory acknowledges the positioning of universities as centers of knowledge production, but also problematizes the role of the academy as a crucial mechanism within the animal industrial complex<sup>5</sup>. There are two primary ways that post-secondary institutions participate in reinforcing a hierarchy between humans and non-humans: directly and indirectly. First, the academy literally positions most non-humans beneath humans by allowing them entry into the institution only through the vivisection lab or the cafeteria. In these places, not only does the exploitation of non-human animals go unchallenged, it is accepted as a given. Second, recognized fields of study such as Animal Studies (AS), Human Animal Studies (HAS)<sup>6</sup>, and zoology less explicitly assume that nonhumans have significance “only insofar as what they and their interactions say about the human animal” (Nocella II, Sorenson, Socha, & Matsuoka, 2014, p. xxiv). In contrast, Critical Animal Theory challenges these fields “with the purpose of breaking down ideologies that promote [non-

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of an Animal Industrial Complex (AIC) was originally put forth by Noske (1989) who proposed that the commodification of non-human animals in food systems is directly linked to capitalist systems that prioritize “monopolistically inclined financial interests” over the well being of humans, non-humans, and the environment (p. 22). Twine (2010) expands on Noske’s work, explaining that “corporate influences have had a direct interest through marketing, advertising, and flavour manipulation in constructing the consumption of animal products as a sensual material pleasure” (p. 15). Essentially, the AIC refers to the triple helix of influential, powerful systems that control knowledge systems about meat production: government, the corporate sphere, and the academy (Twine, 2010, p. 17). Both Noske and Twine refer to the complex intersectionally, acknowledging its negative impact on human minorities and the environment.

<sup>6</sup> Animal Studies (AS) generally focuses on the use of non-human animals through experimentation in the hard sciences; the non-human is perceived as a number or a tool rather than an individual being. Human Animal Studies (HAS) attempts to surpass this by considering the welfare of non-humans as they are being studied in captive settings, but omits to examine the oppression and liberation of these other animals (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 94).

human] oppression” (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 94). Essentially, CAT is interested in re-positioning other(ed) animals within the space of the academy to dismantle notions of human exceptionality and superiority. CAT assumes that members of the human community have an ethical obligation to our non-human stakeholders, and that our relationship with them is not severed when the research has ended (Glasser & Roy, 2014).

### **Embodied Praxis**

Critical Animal Theory is also the result of activist scholars who are working to blur the distinction between the academy and the street. In what Glasser and Roy (2014) refer to as the “Ivory Trap,” post-secondary institutions operate to keep knowledge production limited, a view that is echoed by bell hooks, who writes: “[inaccessibility] has led to the formation of a false dichotomy between theory (the development of ideas) and practice (the actions of the movement)” (2000, p. 113-114). The unification of theory and practice to create *praxis* is prevented by the access-barrier of the academy. As illustrated through the Ivory Trap (Glasser and Roy, 2014), institutions withhold particular kinds of knowledge by preventing access to “those without the desire, need, or socioeconomic status to gain admittance to or attend postsecondary educational institutions” (p. 95). Accessibility is further barred by the use of academic jargon, which sends “clear signals to identify disciplinary insiders” (Glasser and Roy, 2014, p. 96). These barriers present challenges to non-academic activists who are essential in conversations about animal liberation, and who generate knowledge outside the academy. Critical Animal Theory aims to be more welcoming by recognizing that

“activists and academics can learn from each other” (Glasser and Roy, p. 95). One way of diminishing the barriers of the academy to mesh theory and practice is for academics to publish work in dual or multiple formats, such as a traditional academic text that is reproduced as a video or blog that can be accessed by many in the Animal Liberation (AL) community. Similarly, journals such as the Journal for Critical Animal Studies (JCAS) publish peer-reviewed work that encompasses both the academic and activist realms of animal liberation.

The development of CAT was also a result of activist scholars recognizing that daily actions must not conflict with academic pursuits. Critical Animal Theorists engage in an embodied ethic of scholarship that realizes that theory and action inform one another. In the same way that it would be contradictory for a scholar of Critical Race Theory to uphold racist ideologies outside the academy, proponents of Critical Animal Theory live their practice by eschewing the exploitation of non-humans whenever possible. Because Critical Animal Theory is by definition opposed to speciesism, vegan praxis<sup>7</sup> acts as a defining feature that merges the personal with the theoretical. According to Weitzenfeld and Joy (2014), “vegan praxis- a counternarrative and practice in which nonhuman beings [and their secretions] are not viewed or treated as appropriate for human consumption- is perhaps the most effective and direct way to subvert the speciesist complex” (p. 21). The praxis of veganism is less concerned with personal purity and perfection, aspiring instead towards the greater goal of destabilizing oppressive structures.

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<sup>7</sup> Jenkins and Stanescu (2014) use the term “engaged veganism,” (p. 76) which essentially has the same meaning: going beyond the simple rejection of animal products to work towards disrupting speciesist structures.

Critical Animal Theory, then, along with the larger movement of animal liberation can be defined as:

Avant-garde (n., adj., maybe even a verb): any individual or collective who questions cultural assumptions and opposes social, intellectual, and political standards to the extent that he, she, or they challenge those standards through direct aesthetic, symbolic and/ or political means in an effort to integrate change into daily life practice and, in effect, to ultimately become self-negated and irrelevant. (Socha, 2012, p.19)

### **Contextualizing Critical Animal Theory**

#### **Intersectionality**

Crenshaw's (1989) work examining how race and gender are not "mutually exclusive categories of experience" (p. 57) was essential to me in illuminating the compounding effect of multiple forms of oppression. By examining the legal cases of black females as well as building upon the statements of enslaved black females, Crenshaw uses the term "intersectionality" to name the connected forms of discrimination that are not adequately addressed by categories such as "race," "class," and "gender" alone. The field of Critical Animal Studies further expands upon the concept of intersectionality to maintain that oppression is not limited to humans, and that speciesism is equally linked with sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, discrimination against those in LGBTQIA community, and various other oppressions. As Sorenson (2014) notes:

Domestication of animals served as a model for the enslavement of humans.

Breeding animals helped to develop concepts of race and pure blood, and

classification of animals helped with the stratification of humans by “race” and by form of society. Racist discourse is replete with animal imagery, and colonial history mirrors the hierarchy of humans over animals (p. xv).

Further, Cusack (2013) points out that although mainstream feminism clearly opposes rape, human privilege and the social legitimization of dairy consumption prevents the majority of those who consider themselves feminists from acknowledging the interconnected oppressions of female cows. Cusack (2013) asserts that the sexual exploitation of female cows is a feminist issue, and that the consumption of dairy is inconsistent with the most basic tenets of the feminist movement (p. 25). Beyond issues of commodification, where female non-humans are valued primarily if not only for their potential to increase profits of their owners (Adams, 1990; Jenkins & Stanescu, 2014; Harrison, 1964), female cows are “repeatedly and forcibly raped...by humans using inanimate objects,” (Cusack, 2013, p. 27) in order to impregnate them, and later their calves are stolen and their lactations sold to humans<sup>8</sup>. “The quasi-property status of the cow dictates that the cow’s suffering is secondary to the farmer’s control of her reproductive organs” (p. 28); by participating in the exploitation of nonhuman animal bodies by paying for sexual byproducts, feminists are participating in the most violent and dominant aspects of patriarchy. Though I feel that Cusack’s (2013) points are valid and necessary in a discussion about protecting all female bodies from the oppression of

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<sup>8</sup> For a thorough analysis of how the dairy industry perpetuates the normalization of sexual violence towards non-human animals, including a discussion of the use of the word “rape,” see Cusack, 2013, and Tyler, 2008. The intersection between non-human animals and female humans is also discussed by Gruen (1993) and Adams (1990, p. 54).



patriarchy, the comparison of females to nonhuman animals has historically been utilized as a tool to further demean and subjugate women. As Kemmerer (2012) notes, passing exploitation down the ladder does not ultimately work. Therefore, I believe the greater goal of the animal liberation movement should be to use language that is both accurate but also cognizant to the sensitivities of human populations, to invite rather than isolate. Others have articulated that consuming animals is also incompatible with queer theory (Jenkins and Stanescu, 2014; Kelch, 2007), and environmentalism (Lyman, 2001; Oppenlander, 2013).

### **Total liberation**

Though Critical Animal Theory is an elaboration of the Animal Liberation movement, it is rooted in the understanding that all forms of oppression must be completely abolished. The concept of “total liberation” is a salient principle in Critical Animal Studies, and draws from previous work in colonial studies. Fanon (1968) initially used the term “total liberation” in reference to the mental emancipation of the colonized from the colonizer. Fanon argues that a truly liberated and transformed society can only occur if “every facet of the personality” is engaged to fully utilize all resources in resisting and overthrowing colonial powers. He encourages the colonized to use both brains and muscles in the quest for independence, asserting that “the colonized subject fights in order to put an end to domination. But he must also ensure that all the untruths planted within him by the oppressor are eliminated” (Fanon, 1968, p. 233). Until 2001, the term “total liberation” continued to circulate as a measurement of freedom on a single political issue, rather than a collective intersectional movement. In 2001, the One Struggle

conference, the first conference held by the Institute for Critical Animal Studies, brought together a range of activists: former Black Panther members, the American Indian movement, Irish supporters of the IRA (Irish Republican Party), earth liberationists, queer activists, disability activists, animal liberationists, anarchists, and feminists (Nocella, personal communication, 2017). This conference inspired the inception of “total liberation” by Best & Nocella as an inclusive, intersectional concept (Nocella, personal communication, 2017). Best (2011) further articulates that “total liberation” is useless if it is only used in human contexts; even if all human oppressions were eliminated, the privilege of freedom would only benefit one portion of the earth’s inhabitants. Instead, Best (2011) suggests that total liberation encompasses not only disadvantaged humans, but also nonhuman animals and ecological systems: “from the animal and ecological standpoints, therefore, “progress” is regress, ... and since injury and damage to nonhuman animals and ecosystems inevitably undermines human existence itself, such “gains” are short-term at best” (para. 27). Total liberation, as conceptualized by Best & Nocella also draws from classical and contemporary anarchism to propose that true liberation is nonhierarchical and against authoritarianism, ownership, control, and punishment (Ackelsberg, 2005; Amster, DeLeon, Fernandez, Nocella, & Shannon, 2009; Bookchin, 1977; Chomsky, 2005; Ehrlich, 1979). An anarchist approach to justice contrasts the organizational structure of some current social movements, which remain problematic as they seek justice through the replication of social hierarchy, concentrating power in specific roles, such as managers and overseers. For me, total or collective liberation is the only meaningful way to address any

oppression. If oppressed groups waste time and resources arguing about whose cause warrants the most attention, we deflect attention away from the larger power structures (i.e. capitalism) that make all oppressions possible.

### **Rejection of Single-Issue Activism**

The 6<sup>th</sup> principle of Critical Animal Studies reads: “[CAS] rejects reformist, single-issue, nation-based, legislative, strictly animal interest politics in favor of alliance politics and solidarity with other struggles against oppression and hierarchy” (Best, Nocella II, Kahn, Gigliotti, Kemmerer, 2007, p.4-5). Single-issue activism focuses on forwarding the agenda of one issue, without acknowledging or recognizing the links between multiple forms of discrimination. The avoidance of single-issue activism is derived from a reflection upon and learning from the struggles of other historical movements, particularly the American civil rights movement. Many Black Panther members and other black revolutionaries such as Malcolm X built alliances with other marginalized groups to unite races, classes, and genders with the common goal of resisting racism, poor living and working conditions, unemployment, and other concerns (Colling, Parson, & Arrigoni, 2014, p. 60-61). The official combining of these various groups with the interest of advancing all social justice movements generated the Rainbow Coalition, which provided food programs to all struggling individuals in any racial, class, or gender group (p. 60). The intersection of harm to specific groups of people and unnecessary harm to nonhuman animals under capitalist systems was recognized by many in the civil rights movement, such as Angela Davis (Harper, 2012; Britten, 2016), John Africa (Colling, Parson, & Arrigoni, 2014), Dexter Scott King, and Coretta

Scott King<sup>9</sup> (Messina, 2010). Therefore, I embrace the notion of groundless solidarity (Colling, Parson, & Arrigoni, 2014), where the combined struggles of all who are oppressed is stronger than the efforts of any of these groups in isolation.

## **Influences**

Like other critical fields of study, Critical Animal Theory examines how a particular group can be liberated from oppressive circumstances. CAT broadens this idea to include both human and non-human animals as worthy of emancipation. In my consideration of a theoretical framework to guide this study, the inclusiveness of nonhumans and the earth in the emancipatory component of CAT is what drew me to this philosophical position. Although CAT is informed by a wide variety of fields that are all driven by the desire to neutralize inequality, the primary influences are derived from concepts in Critical Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, Environmental Justice, and Green Criminology.

The two types of feminism that are especially salient in addressing the links between human and nonhuman oppressions are intersectional/ multiracial feminism and ecofeminism. In addition to the idea of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), intersectional or multiracial feminism forwarded the concept of examining marked and unmarked categories. To simplify McClintock's (1995) definition, marked or "articulated" categories are the cultural barometers by which we create or judge other categories. Understandings of race, gender, and sexuality, for instance, are based on the dominant members of those groups. This leads to dichotomous thinking, where individuals of the dominant group are considered

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.'s son and wife.

socially “normal”: “white appears to be raceless and man appears to be genderless” (Glenn, 2000, p. 10). In *Critical Animal Studies*, species and humanness are added as unmarked categories (Fitzgerald and Pellow, 2014, p. 32-33). The “normality” of humanness is illustrated by early memory studies conducted on chimpanzees: to determine facial recognition, the chimpanzees were shown images of humans that they were later tasked with identifying. The chimps scored lower than human subjects of comparable maturity, and it was assumed that their memories were therefore inferior. It was not until later studies that researchers tested the chimps with images of their own species, and found that their recognition surpassed humans (De Waal, 2016; Westoll, 2012). Fitzgerald and Pellow (2014) contend that intersectional feminism and other related fields have not adequately addressed species privilege as an unmarked category (p. 33). Examining and critically interrogating how those in the human community benefit from the oppression of nonhumans has generally been overshadowed by our collective speciesism.

According to Gaard and Gruen (1993), ecofeminism emerged from the observation that the oppression of women strongly paralleled environmental destruction; previous environmental theories did not consider feminist insights. Major environmental ills such as deforestation, pollution, decreasing fresh water supplies, and food scarcity, Gaard and Gruen argue, are closely intertwined with human oppressions and should be discussed holistically rather than independently (p. 234-235). Shiva’s (1993) work highlights how these connections are global, rather than strictly Western. Shiva (1993) explains how local knowledge systems about seeds, plants, and forestry in India were refined over generations of primarily

women (p. 55), and that this nuanced and spiritual connection between both women and the earth as nurturer has been threatened by economic development (p. 60). Gaard and Gruen (1993) propose that the linguistic and ideological feminization of nature by way of such metaphors as “‘mother nature’ and ‘virgin forests’....authorize the subordination of nature” (p. 238). Similarly, and of particular interest to Critical Animal Studies, are the “animalizing” terms used to describe women, such as “cow,” “heifer,” and “bitch.” Gaard and Gruen (1993) rightly state that these colloquialisms “reinforce women’s inferior status by appealing to women’s animal (and thus non-human) nature” (p.238). Women, as well, have historically been enmeshed in the same inferior category as the natural world, while maleness and humanness have been associated with reason, and rationality (Adams, 1994, p. 11). However, Gaard and Gruen’s analysis allows nonhuman animals to remain hierarchically below female humans, and unworthy of consideration as exploited beings *alongside* women. In an examination of several performative art pieces where female artists juxtapose their own bodies with pieces of nonhuman animal flesh to highlight their own oppression, Socha (2012) remarks:

Performance pieces that use animals in this way are beyond concentrated analysis because most of them are saying the same thing- *I am allied with animals in this culture, and that is a bad thing because being an animal is a bad thing.* They perpetuate the fairy tale that animals are misbegotten humans. (p. 118).

Adams (2014) concurs: “When someone says, ‘I was treated like an animal,’ he or she is standing on the human ladder and looking down at those who have never been on the top rung” (p. 23).

The feminizing and sexualizing of nonhumans through advertising campaigns that depict pigs, cows, and chickens in lipstick, bikinis, and daisy dukes (Adams, 1990; Suicide Food, 2011) is also problematic for both women and nonhumans. The invitation to literally consume a nonhuman animal because she wishes to die, and is excited to pleasure and satisfy a human, is reminiscent of the same socially approved violence that commodifies and hyper-sexualizes women. Critical Animal Theory scrutinizes the alienation of nonhuman animals from human circles of compassion.

Perspectives in Critical Race Theory contributed to my understanding of Critical Animal Theory by demonstrating the interconnectedness between racism and speciesism, as well as providing a framework for building alliances with all marginalized groups. Critical Race Theory (CRT), while drawing upon the incremental progress model of the civil rights movement, is more focused on examining and dismantling social foundations of inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Bell (1992) explains that racism, especially in America, is so deeply entrenched that it surpasses the myth of “progress” provided by policy adjustments (p. 3). Both systemic and structuralized racism operate to maintain existing concentrations of power among the socially privileged, resulting in political, social, and economic disadvantages for those in non-dominant groups. The intersection of race and meat production in Canada is highlighted in analyses of marketing

campaigns put forth by meat industry lobbying groups. Though farm animal treatment and animal liberation more generally are carefully excluded from their discussion, Cairns, McPhail, Chevrier, and Bucklaschuk (2013) found that advertising campaigns by the Manitoba Pork Council utilized idyllic family farm imagery to position Canadian land as a white, heteronormative space. The television commercials that were analyzed were situated within the context of heavy critique because of environmental concerns resulting from the animal agriculture industry. Rather than explicitly responding to these environmental issues, the commercials focused on portraying the pork industry as a series of small, family-oriented operations. As Cairns and colleagues point out, this depiction negates the continual expansion of pork production into Intensive Livestock Operations (ILOs, p. 4). The association of meat production with the imagery and values of exclusively white families emphasizes a historical frontier narrative, in which dominant Canadian spaces are occupied by European settlers (p. 5-6). Additionally, Cairns and peers observed that the commercials employed nostalgic imagery of children happily participating in family activities, which symbolizes a future claim to the land by white Canadians (p. 7-8). Ironically, no First Nations or Metis populations are present in any of the commercials, either literally or symbolically. The expansion of animal agriculture industries, therefore, displaces Indigenous populations from their original lands both geographically and through dominant facets of media (Cairns et al., 2013, p. 8). Unfortunately, this displacement of Indigenous peoples to either create grazing land for livestock or grow food for livestock is being (or has already been) replicated in other developed and



developing nations around the globe (Nibert, 2002; Oppenlander, 2013). The media representations of picturesque white families that welcome the consumer into their dining rooms also ignores the non-white populations that comprise the majority of workers in meat processing plants (Cairns et al., 2013; Eisnitz, 1997; Pachirat, 2011). Cairns et al. further argue that the exclusion of migrant workers who “accept work with poor conditions and low pay, and cannot access citizenship” (p. 8) both facilitates the whitewashing of the meat industry and also distances the industry from less admirable aspects of production. Essentially, Cairns et al.’s analysis found that the advertising campaigns functioned to “erase the presence of people of colour within the [Canadian] landscape” (p. 17).

Critical Animal Theory is also heavily informed by Environmental Justice (EJ) studies. There are several areas of overlap between these two fields: “both movements broadly view threats to ecological sustainability as harmful to all life forms...[and]...view human society as the source or point of origin for the harm visited upon vulnerable bodies” (Fitzgerald & Pellow, 2014, p. 39). Additionally, both fields draw from interdisciplinary sources of scholarship to challenge hierarchy and inequality. Though the protection of nonhuman animals is essential to EJ studies, the emphasis is more broadly on investigating the impact that humans have on the destruction of environments and communities (Lynch, 1990). For instance, human populations that are already marginalized in multiple intersecting ways “also tend to confront disproportionately intense exposure to pollution and other risks associated with industrialization” (Fitzgerald & Pellow, 2014, p. 37). Critical Animal Theory is also interested in these vital concerns, but expands the

notion of animal protection to theorize that the emancipation of all animals is necessary.

Finally, the framework of Critical Animal Theory draws upon ideas in the area of green criminology. Again, building on major concepts in Environmental Justice as well as criminology, green criminology seeks to address injustices to human, nonhuman, and environmental spaces, regardless of whether those injustices are considered illegal by the state (South & Beirne, 2006, p. xxv). Green criminologists are interested in reevaluating “traditional notions of crimes, offences, and injurious behaviours and start to examine the role that societies (including corporations and governments) play in generating environmental degradation” (Carrabine, Lee, & Iganski, 2004, p. 316). Like CAT, green criminology is focused on praxis (meshing theory with praxis) and disrupting systems that are hegemonic. For CAT, the use of nonhuman animals in the food industry is of particular concern because it is an area that has not been fully interrogated by even the “crimes of animal rights” facet of green criminology. According to Carrabine, Lee, and Iganski (2004), the rights of nonhuman animals in the study of green criminology has generally concentrated on species extinction, overfishing, and the welfare of non-farm animals, such as dogs and animals used in the entertainment industry (p. 317). In addition, CAT recognizes that animal agriculture, especially when industrialized, is harmful to human populations and the environment.

## **Critiques of Critical Animal Theory**

### **The Fallacy of Objectivity**

By using Critical Animal Studies, I am able to maintain dual positions as both an activist and theorist: “emotions, from grief to compassion to rage, are necessary tools for the holistic activist. Compassion and fury are often prompts to action, as opposed to theorizing, writing, and rationalizing oneself into oblivion.” (Socha, 2012, p. 55). However, the privileging of objectivity in the academy maintains an ideology where it is unwise or even biased for researchers to study movements in which they are personally involved. This, write Glasser and Roy (2014) “allows the avoidance of social problems altogether, particularly ‘fringe’ issues like animal liberation” (p. 98). Even in fields that have grown distant from positivist and post-positivist ideals, the view that research is only accomplished when the scholar is adequately separated from their research process reinforces methodological hierarchies and operates to further marginalize studies that do not conform to the formulas of mainstream work (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 98-99). However, all research is entangled with the interests of the researcher. For instance, “hard sciences” such as those that embrace vivisection are generally considered objective “even though researchers almost always have personal financial gain tied into their research by way of funding from pharmaceutical companies or government agencies” (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 99). In contrast, Critical Animal Studies research seeks to explicitly state personal and political values, which can result in a lack of funding and result in scholars receiving “negative professional repercussions” (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 99). By embracing a Critical Animal Studies framework, I

have an obligation to be an activist both by building interdisciplinary and community ties and also through continual examination of lifestyle choices that may allow nonhumans to remain in an oppressed position.

### **Classism, Sexism, Racism, and Ableism in the Animal Liberation Community**

Because Critical Animal Studies is closely aligned with the larger community of animal liberation, the discriminatory actions of some individuals or organizations must be included in a critical examination of CAT. By recognizing the assumptions and flawed rhetoric of these campaigns and recommendations, the animal liberation movement can hopefully become a space that is more inviting, rather than isolating, to other oppressed groups.

Vegan advocacy groups have tended to oversimplify the issue of veganism by erroneously assuming that all populations are equally equipped to adopt a vegan lifestyle. This assumption ignores issues of poverty and food accessibility, even in developed nations. Smoyer-Tomic, Spence, and Amrhein (2006) define food deserts as “populated, typically urban, low-income areas with limited access to full-service supermarkets” (p.307). This means that food for these typically impoverished populations is obtained from fast food restaurants, gas stations or convenience stores, and is low in nutrients. Food deserts are also problematic because they intersect with race; in Canada, the reservation system has geographically isolated many Indigenous communities from fresh fruit and vegetables, leading to low nutrient diets and an increase in Western diseases (Johnson, Williams, & Weldon, 1997; Travers, 1995). Gallagher (2006; 2007) had similar findings about black

communities in America. Critical Animal Studies seeks to engage with these issues by recognizing that human oppressions are connected to nonhuman animal issues.

Advertising campaigns produced by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have also demonstrated a failure to recognize the intersectionality of oppression. PETA billboards, print advertisements, live demonstrations, and commercials frequently promote the recognition of nonhuman animal life as fundamentally important, while simultaneously devaluing and demeaning women. A Google search of the terms “PETA + sexism” brings up dozens of images in which women are animalized, hypersexualized, and portrayed in violent situations. In one particularly disturbing television commercial, entitled “boyfriend went vegan,” a woman is violently injured to the point where she needs to wear a neck brace because her boyfriend went vegan and was able to “bring it like a tantric porn star.” Perhaps more alarming than the romanticizing of domestic violence is that the woman actually leaves the apartment, while injured, to fetch vegetables for the boyfriend, highlighting the position of women as subservient to men. As discussed earlier, these portrayals undermine both human and nonhuman animals. I would suggest that the mass circulation of imagery showcasing commodified and brutalized women actually functions to make the sexual exploitation of female nonhumans even more acceptable, because nonhumans are generally viewed as hierarchically lower, and thus less important than humans. In other words, if it is acceptable for PETA (an organization that prides itself in reducing nonhuman animal suffering) to exploit female humans, surely the exploitation of nonhumans is

also acceptable. In a CAT framework, challenging all forms of discrimination is necessary.

PETA advertisements have also directly compared factory farming to the atrocities of the Holocaust and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Though I am of the opinion that the horrific violence of speciesism can stand on its own, without the need for comparisons, I would also argue that some methods of drawing attention to the similarities of these oppressions are more productive than others. In a series of billboard ads, PETA juxtaposed graphic images of industrialized farming with photographs of various human oppressions. Some of these ads were later displayed in an exhibition entitled “The Holocaust on your plate.” Though the analogies are not necessarily invalid<sup>10</sup>, I would maintain that individuals within those marginalized communities are more appropriately positioned to make the comparison. For instance, Patterson’s (2002) masterful volume “Eternal Treblinka: Our treatment of animals and the Holocaust” (p.1-280) eloquently parallels the oppression of nonhumans to the atrocities committed against many human groups throughout history, including enslaved Africans, the American Indians, and the Japanese during World War II. Patterson begins by arguing that all human oppressions are rooted in the “domestication” (a euphemism for exploitation) of nonhuman animals. He illustrates that the conceptual ideologies, along with the technologies used in dominating nonhumans were pivotal in modeling human slavery, genocide, and colonialism. The breeding of nonhumans led to the notion that certain traits (such as the inherent intelligence of Europeans) were genetic, and tools of power such as

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<sup>10</sup> Snaza (2004) provides a thoughtful analysis in the piece “(Im)possible witness: Viewing PETA’s ‘Holocaust on your plate’” (p. 1-20).

barbed wire, branding, and the use of chains were perfected through years of victimizing nonhuman animals. The linguistic vilification of human groups by referring to them as pigs, rats, beasts, insects, or monkeys also contributed to the ease with which it was perceived that these groups could be exploited. Patterson's analysis of Hitler's relationship with and idolization of Henry Ford (an open anti-Semite) documents how the carefully controlled, efficient disassembly of nonhuman bodies through slaughterhouse assembly lines served as a perfected blueprint for the mass killing of people. Patterson's thesis, that the elimination of nonhuman animal exploitation is necessary if human oppression is to end, is further strengthened by his interviews with holocaust survivors and their descendants. Many of these individuals express that their experience and understanding of oppression led them to eschew the exploitation and consumption of nonhuman animals. The nuance and depth of research provided by Patterson sensitively and intimately builds the reader up to the main points through a sort of history and narrative. In contrast, the PETA images, while pointing to the same message of linked oppressions, appear superficial, with the intention to shock rather than evoke compassion. PETA campaigners fail to recognize that because society has been conditioned to be speciesist, the immediate reaction of the public is to assume that the ads degrade an already marginalized group (again, being compared to an animal is bad because being an animal is bad). As Best (2007) observes, the intent of PETA was not to bring human groups "down" to the level of nonhuman animals, but rather to bring nonhuman animals "up" to the level of humans (p. 10), at least in terms of their capacity to suffer. However, in this case I think perception is more salient than

intent. Through their advertisements, PETA risks further isolating marginalized human populations from the AL movement, instead of creating a space for them.

There are other unfortunate examples of racism within the Animal Liberation movement. In 2010, singer Morrissey stated in an interview, “did you see the thing on the news about their treatment of animals and animal welfare? Absolutely horrific. You can’t help but feel that the Chinese are a subspecies.” (Armitage, 2010). In 2011, the Chinese Business Association of Toronto received a hateful letter from a group called “Animal Liberation Canada/USA,” which “was shamefully shot through with slurs, crude generalizations, and racially charged rhetoric directed towards Toronto’s Chinese community and Chinese communities worldwide” (Sheen, 2011, para 1). In response, the North American Animal Liberation Press Office (NAALPO) issued a statement acknowledging the blatant and disturbing racism of the letter, and went on to detail NAALPO’s position as totally intersectional<sup>11</sup>: “Racism and racial generalizations perpetuate speciesism, and vice versa, due to the fact that such stereotypes and classifications have been closely intertwined throughout history” (Sheen, 2011, para 10). Harper (2010) also observes that “mainstream vegan outreach models and top selling vegan-oriented books rarely, if ever, acknowledge other racial groups...there is an underlying assumption among mainstream vegan media that racialization and the production of vegan spaces are disconnected” (p. 6).

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout the statement, NAALPO consistently maintained their belief that the letter was falsely created by insiders who profit from animal industries. The detailed response, including rationale for this position is on the NAALPO website under the heading “In defense of total liberation: A response to animal liberation Canada/ USA’s racialized rhetoric.”



Conceptions about race in the Animal Liberation community are further complicated by the geopolitically racialized<sup>12</sup> consumption of vegan products by animal liberation consumers. “Ethical” consumerism may ignore issues of race; by focusing on being consumers of products that are “cruelty free,” North American vegans risk the privileging of nonhuman animal suffering above the oppressions of humans, who incidentally, are also animals. For instance, “an indentured black Haitian sugar cane worked in the Dominican Republic will have a different relationship and perception of sugar, than a “free” white USAmerican [sic] vegan that is consuming a vegan product with sugar harvested by the enslaved Dominican” (Harper, 2010, p. 13). White sugar, from the standpoint of non-white vegans, also carries significance through its associations with colonization and power. “The British who sipped their sugary teas considered themselves ‘civilized’ despite the torture and slavery it took to get that white sugar into their tea cups” (Harper, 2010, p. 15). “Ethical” consumerism in the mainstream vegan movement is further convoluted by the emphasis on individual purchasing “power” towards specific products. This “vote with your dollar” rhetoric praises individuals for buying, for instance, vegan Ben and Jerry’s ice cream, while ignoring the human and nonhuman suffering that must occur in order for the company to continue producing dairy products on a massive scale. Additionally, individuals who lack the emotional or financial availability to make such choices are ignored. Therefore, current usage of

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<sup>12</sup> Geopolitically racialized means that “human producers and consumers within [systems] of power, exist in “raced” bodies that are socially and geographically located in a globalized capitalist economic system” (Harper, 2010a, p. 12-13).

the term “veganism” often engages in the commodification and greenwashing of animal liberation, aligning the freedom of nonhumans with corporations and taking up capitalist tactics. By using a Critical Animal Theory framework, I seek to critically scrutinize and interrogate these complexities.

Linking Critical Animal Studies with disability studies, Nocella II (2015) proposes that the eco-ability movement (along with eco-ability studies) can provide new perspectives in understanding and further developing other fields. In his paper “Movement of oppressors: An eco-ability perspective on narcissism and the savior mentality in animal advocacy,” Nocella identifies several examples of how abelist discourse has perpetuated dangerous and hierarchical notions of “normalcy” in the Animal Liberation movement. Abelist imagery and terminology conflict with the emancipatory framework of Critical Animal Theory, as dis-ability liberation is a necessary component of animal liberation. As a single example, one of the most blatant uses of abelist language in the AR community is the concept of “moral schizophrenia,” which author Gary Francione first introduced in his text, “Introduction to animal rights: Your child or the dog?” (2000). Francione uses “moral schizophrenia” to refer to the contradictory way that societies and individuals behave towards nonhuman animals. Francione’s primary argument is that there is no moral distinction between consuming the flesh of a “food” animal and deep-frying the family dog. Both are equally sentient and value their own lives. The term “moral schizophrenia” is fundamentally problematic because it trivializes and stigmatizes those with clinical schizophrenia. As Nocella (2015) points out, the notion of “moral schizophrenia” is being used by Francione in a negative rather than

uplifting way (p. 32), which suggests that those diagnosed with schizophrenia are inadequate and inferior. Francione's website (Animal rights: The abolitionist approach, 2015) contains a note in which he addresses the critiques associated with his usage of the word "schizophrenia." However, Francione never actually apologizes for or revokes his error, instead he delves into a justification and explains that his intent was never to offend those with clinical schizophrenia. This, I think, works against the animal liberation community because it distances other marginalized groups.

### **Expanding Critical Animal Theory and Educational Frameworks**

In my research, I am interested in using Critical Animal Theory as a lens through which curriculum can be analyzed and understood. Though much of the research in CAT emphasizes the need for greater public awareness about speciesism and more thoughtful models of education that address issues of human, earth, and animal liberation (Bell & Russell, 2000; Corman, 2012; Drew & Socha, 2015; Kahn, 2010; Lee, 2014; Lupinacci, 2013; Pedersen, 2010; Socha & Mitchell 2014; Weil, 2004), I am not aware of any that have examined the experiences of vegan students and their interpretations of curriculum as intertwined within a CAT framework. Similarly, the most acclaimed, influential, and celebrated curriculum theorists of the 20th century such as Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, John Dewey, Dwayne Huebner, and William Pinar rarely, if at all, mention non-human animal and environmental ethics in connection with curriculum. The relative absence of nonhuman animal liberation, environmental ethics and sustainability, and food choice in school curricula is emblematic of how schools can be microcosms of broader social

ideologies. My work seeks to expand both the fields of Critical Animal Studies and curriculum studies by studying the tensions and points of convergence between these areas.

### **Research Methods**

The focus of my work is to investigate how dominant discourses about food choice, especially in relation to the consumption of meat, operate hegemonically (Gramsci, 1971) through various social contexts and institutions. My understanding of hegemony through Gramsci's (1971) work is the tendency for a powerful social group to perpetuate and frame specific ideas as natural and universally beneficial. The meat and related industries, for instance, use advertising as a form of knowledge dissemination to make meat and dairy consumption seem natural and healthy. In particular, I seek in this study to determine how an existing social discourse permeates educational discursive structures, such as curriculum. To address my research question, I engage in a textual analysis that is specifically informed by *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). CDA "studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). In other words, my analyses of social texts are driven by critical theory, which "stresses giving voice to those whose voices are rarely heard" (Hinchey, 2008, p. 68). My work is a reaction against a persistent, socially accepted Western dominant paradigm that positions humans as masters and controllers of the earth, rather than as stewards that act alongside other life forms in a diverse, complex, and interconnected web. I am interested in understanding and resisting the inequalities that exist as a result of

this dominant discourse. In this research I examine two groups that remain “othered” and marginalized through dominant ideologies, interests, and institutions: 1) The planet, which is inclusive of animals, plants, land, and oceans, and, 2) Vegans, people who do not consume animals or their by-products.

According to Van Dijk (2001) and Foucault (1972), discourses occur at both a micro and macro social level (p. 354, p.4). Micro structures refer to the direct communications that occur between individuals, such as language and other verbal or non-verbal interaction, while macro contexts take into account the power, dominance, and inequalities that occur in groups or institutions. Critical Discourse Analysis attempts to unify the micro and the macro. Thus, I consider the links between curricular texts and the embedded discursive patterns in verbal and non-verbal dialogues. Micro and macro structures, influenced by the social power of groups or individuals, gradually influence thoughts and actions, which eventually become established “laws, rules, norms, [and] habits” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 355). Power is established and maintained through control when recipients accept beliefs or knowledge through what they perceive to be “authoritative, trustworthy, credible, sources” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 357). Schools enact institutional authority through the various forms of curriculum, which circulate and uphold particular social narratives. In this study, I focus on amplifying the voices of vegan students to acknowledge their positions as theorists and activist-scholars who question and confront the rules and routines of public education as a specific dominant institution. Through their words, it is my hope that alternative ways of

understanding curriculum can be presented as a contrast to the expression and reproduction of a single story (Adichie, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Consent and participant rights.** In this study, I sought to be especially mindful about the vulnerable population that I was working with, children and youths. Because all my participants were minors at the time of the study, it was crucial that I receive informed consent from both the students and their parents or legal guardians. Drawing upon Ensign's (2003, p. 47) recommendation, I asked for both written and oral consent from the participants and their parents. Students were provided with a youth assent form, and parents were given a consent form; these forms described, in accessible and age appropriate language, the nature of the research along with the possible risks and benefits (see Appendix A). Both the participants and their parents had the right to revoke their consent or terminate their participation in the study at any time prior to the publishing stage of this work. Before proceeding with the first focus group of the study, I reviewed the information in the assent forms verbally, and asked if the students had any questions or concerns. All students said that they were clear with their role in the study and understood their rights.

**Privacy.** In addition to consent, privacy was an important consideration in this study. I informed both parents and students about how the data would be collected and used, and how personal information would be protected. I kept the names and contact information of the participants and their parents only for communicative and follow-up purposes; identifying details of the participants were

changed, and names were concealed through the use of pseudonyms (Richards and Shwartz, 2002, p. 31). However, I also informed participants and their parents that even with all precautions taken, it is impossible to maintain total confidentiality, as life experiences can be very specific to individuals. Additionally, I made students aware that in circumstances where I might obtain information indicating a risk of harm to either the participants or others, I would prioritize the safety of the individual over confidentiality. I asked students to choose their own pseudonym, but four did not specify a pseudonym. For these students, I chose a pseudonym that seemed to reflect the heritage and meaning of their actual name, without being too similar. I sent a follow-up email to these students with the name that I had chosen, and all students confirmed that they were fine with their pseudonyms. I also informed students that names and identifying details of specific people (such as friends or relatives) would be changed in the study to protect the privacy of those individuals. After transcribing the focus group meetings, I emailed the participants and asked them if they would like to review the transcripts. There were a few students who were interested in reviewing them, so I initially sent them the full transcripts, and then followed up with quotes from that particular student that I found to be interesting. I gave students the opportunity to expand upon, modify, or delete sections from their responses, but aside from a few spelling corrections, none of the students took me up on that offer. At the beginning of the study, as well as at the end, students were kept up-to-date about the process of the research. I informed them about what I would use the findings for (thesis and publication), and gave them the option of reading the results of the research.

**Community Supports.** Focus group research has the potential to uncover sensitive or emotionally intense subject matter (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), which must be handled with great care. Because the topics of our conversations focused broadly on veganism, identity construction, and school experience, there was potential for discussions to trigger extreme emotional responses or be upsetting. For instance, examining veganism invariably leads to the examination of inhumane treatment of nonhuman animals in various industries. Many vegans find imagery and thoughts related to the abuse of nonhumans to be triggering and distressing, even if they are not physically situated at the site of the mistreatment. Joy (2009) refers to this as secondary traumatic stress, where the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are mimicked as a result of indirect exposure to trauma. In activist communities, this is also known as compassion fatigue, empathic engagement that results in feelings of hopelessness and anxiety. As vegan students represent a vulnerable minority, there was also the possibility that experiences with bullying or harassment may have caused distress. The greatest concern for the students in my study was ensuring that recalling memories or other imagery (i.e. videos) related to nonhuman treatment would not be more upsetting than daily interactions at school. Although there is no universal formula for addressing these ethical concerns, I did let parents and participants know that the study would be abandoned if “participants’ words or gestures seem to set a boundary on a particular issue” (Allmark et al., 2015, p. 13). To minimize discomfort for my students, I offered them the possibility to stop the conversation, take a break from that topic, or take a physical break by leaving the room. Students were also



informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences. As an additional precaution to minimize distress, students were provided with the contact information for therapeutic supports to assist with emotional or mental health difficulties. Counseling support systems through both the University of Calgary as well as community resource centers where participants resided were established in advance of the focus group process. These were available to parents and students throughout the duration of the study, as well as upon completion of the research. Over the course of this project, none of the students expressed more than mild discomfort with topics discussed, and none of the students ultimately needed a break or counseling.

## **Participants**

**Rationale for participant sample.** My study focused on the discourse of self-identified vegan youths by interviewing them about their school experience. In my work as a teacher, I have found that students in upper elementary to high school represent a very specific period in the development of identity. The pre-teen and teenage years encompass a time when the tensions between independent decision-making and the influence of social pressures (i.e. parents, peers) are high (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011). According to Pasupathi & Weeks (2011), building relationships between the self and one's experiences are a way that adolescents create identity. Vegan students already encompass a viewpoint that closely aligns with the basic principles of Critical Animal Theory. Though they may not recognize themselves as theorists, these students recognize the oppressions of non-humans, and have made a lifestyle change that reflects their views. This suggests that these students are

uniquely positioned to speak about how food choice, non-human animal welfare, and sustainability are represented in schools. By interviewing 10 students in a series of focus group sessions, I engaged in a deep understanding of how these students reconcile their beliefs and activism with the more dominant discourses in schools. The narratives of my youth participants produced valuable insights about the dynamics of power and control in curriculum and the wider arena of school.

**Sampling.** According to Daniel (2012) a sample is a “subset of a target population” (p. 259). For this study, I am defining my target population as youths (age 12-18) who are vegan (abstain from eating animal products), follow the Alberta Learning curriculum at school (or through their homeschool program), and live in Calgary, Alberta. Because vegan youths are an understudied population, as well as a minority amongst the general population in Calgary, random sampling carries a greater risk of accessibility. This group of youths has a tendency to remain “hidden” by virtue of being difficult to locate and to gain cooperation (Daniel, 2012, p. 11). Therefore, I primarily relied on purposive sampling to obtain participants. In purposive sampling, the researcher sets out to find people with experience and knowledge in the topic, who are willing to share their expertise (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Shepard, 2006). Tongco (2007) maintains that purposive sampling is “most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (p. 147). In this case, students who are vegan can be considered experts on the ways that non-human animal issues are included or subverted through curricular and other school discourses. They were also chosen for their potential to provide valuable insights into possible alternative discourses that could

be introduced into schools. In a purposive sample, the researcher makes a “deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses...one or a few individuals are socialized to act as guides to a culture” (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). I specifically sought out vegan youths who are openly passionate about their views and activism, under the assumption that a few articulate participants would generate more knowledge than a larger group of randomly selected participants. For instance, I would not have been a good participant in this study as a youth because I simply felt guilty about eating animals, so I refused to continue eating them. I had little else to say about the topic. To complement the purposive sampling technique, I also utilized two types of convenience sampling. Like purposive sampling, convenience sampling obtains respondents based on availability, willingness to participate, and specialized knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 46). In opportunistic sampling, the first form of convenience sampling, there is no formal selection process or logical strategy; participants are derived from unplanned opportunities that arise (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 46). For example, the Calgary vegan and vegetarian society often has gatherings where families convene over food, activities, and discussions; this was a potential place to gauge whether teen activists would be interested and willing to participate in my study. Finally, Tongco (2007) suggests that requesting help from the community can be a useful strategy in purposive sampling (p. 151). This can be done through snowball sampling, a second type of convenience sampling. Snowball sampling, again, can be used when “appropriate candidates for a study are difficult to locate” (Dattalo, 2008, p. 6). As an insider in the culture of veganism and animal liberation

activism, I can draw upon personal networks to assist in the sampling process. This gradually led to an accumulation of participants as networks expanded and further connections developed.

**Participant demographics.** This study consisted of 10 participants, who ranged in age from 12-18. All participants self-identified as vegan and attended public or Catholic (publically funded) schools in either Calgary or the surrounding area at the time of the study. All students in the study attended school in either Calgary or the surrounding area. Two students identified as cisgender males, and the remaining eight participants identified as cisgender females. Two participants identified as mixed-race, six participants identified as either white or Caucasian, and two participants preferred not to answer the question of ethnicity. Eight students identified as middle class, and perceived their schools to be either middle or middle-upper class. Two students preferred not to respond to the question of class. I was not able to find reliable statistical information about the demographics of vegans in Calgary, however from my experience as an insider in vegan communities there seems to be a predominance of white, middle-class, female vegans, suggesting that the sample was generally proportionate to the vegan population in this city. As discussed in the first chapter, one of the limitations of this study is the lack of diversity with respect to race, gender, and class. I am hopeful that future studies will address these issues. It should also be noted that because I used convenience and snowball sampling, some students knew one another prior to the study.

## **Context analysis**

**Significance of space and place.** Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013) emphasize the importance of creating safe and comfortable spaces for interaction and self-disclosure in focus group research (p. 65). The focus group sessions for this study were conducted in a private meeting room at the public library. Prior to meeting with the participants for the first time I sent both an email and text message to the group to inquire about possible locations. Because text messaging seemed to be the fastest and most efficient way to communicate information with all participants, it became the primary method for discussing scheduling throughout the study. Before beginning the research, I offered a few possibilities for meeting places: the university library, a private room at the university, a coffee shop, or at a school. I also asked participants if they had any suggestions about where to meet, and one student suggested a public library. This idea was easily agreed upon by the group, and through this collaborative process of decision making, it was decided that the downtown library location would be convenient and accessible to everyone since it is centrally located and easy to reach by public transit. The library meeting space immediately seemed to be a comfortable community site to engage students in relevant and personal conversations; on the first day, one of the younger students was dropped off early because her mother had to work, so I found her listening to a pianist on the main floor. While waiting for the others, we walked over to a giant interactive Lego sculpture and discussed the logistics of how such an architectural feat may have been constructed. Although this interaction was not directly related to my study, it provided an opportunity for me to dissolve the barrier between the

participant and authority of the researcher (Freire, 1968; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Regular, consistent meetings at the library seemed to create a degree of safety and comfort amongst participants, who disclosed relevant and personal information through conversations that would not likely have happened in other settings, such as their schools. Schools seemed to be a source of anxiety for some students, and the anonymity, privacy, and distance provided by the library seemed welcome. For instance, most students were at least somewhat critical about particular aspects of their school, and it is unlikely that they would have engaged in such a critique while at school or in other social settings (such as online) because those spaces offer less privacy. Implicitly, the library may also have operated as a signifier of knowledge generation, communication, and narrative, allowing the surroundings to more generally evoke the desire to reveal personal experiences. The public library, therefore, functioned as an appropriate safe space for participants in this study.

**Communitas.** Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013) refer to *communitas* as the communal structure (p. 72) that occurs through the gradual building of relationships. In this study, I established an ethos of *communitas* by ensuring that students did not feel rushed or pressured during the meetings. I booked more time than we actually needed, and allowed the natural process of informal socializing to lead into conversations about my research topic. I also brought snacks to each meeting, which had three meaningful purposes. First, the bringing of food links to a wider anthropological pattern of “gift exchange,” which is crucial to developing trust (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 74). This became apparent at the first meeting,

when a few students expressed caution before taking a cookie, asking, “are they vegan?” before quickly realizing that everyone in the room was connected by the shared experience of being vegan. The habit of first asking whether something is vegan also points to ingrained thought processes that seem to surpass other types of knowing. The sharing of food is also reminiscent of a convivial family meal, or what Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013) call social “glue” (p. 74). While the discussion itself was not necessarily centered around food, the literal positioning of food in the middle of the table, along with passing and sharing items were tangible cues that signaled familial nurturance and feelings of community. Finally, the act of eating accompanied by a sense of togetherness functioned as a form of folk phenomenology (Rowe & Rocha, 2015), an understanding of food as inexplicably tied to narratives. “We need,” write Rowe and Rocha (2015), “rituals and stories to accompany the simple act of eating” (p. 493). Food acted as a natural conversational agent, encouraging students to recollect and describe memories. The sharing of food, combined with notions of trust building, family, and narrative contributed to establishing *communitas* in this study.

### **Focus Group Method**

A focus group is an assemblage of six to ten individuals who share a connection to a particular topic and are willing to comment on their experience (Acocella, 2012; Gibbs, 1997). Although focus groups have historically been used in market research, especially to inform media through radio and television advertising, they are also useful for gathering and interpreting scholarly research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Morgan 1988). As tools for research, focus group

studies are developed by specifically targeting people who have a direct relationship and familiarity with the topic being studied (Acocella, 2012). Although focus groups emerged from the tradition of group interviews, the two research methods are actually distinct. In group interviews, the researcher typically asks structured questions and emphasizes the responses of participants. In contrast, focus group research is concerned not only with how participants discuss researcher questions, but also the interactions between all individuals in the group (Gibbs, 1997). Therefore, “answers” in focus groups are often the result of the dynamic opinions expressed through group discussion (Acocella, 2012, p. 5).

**Rationale for focus groups.** “The self,” write Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013), “is seen as produced in and through historical, social, and material practices” (p. 5). Focus groups were an attractive research tool for this study because I was interested in understanding veganism as a collective phenomenon (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). I wanted to uncover how this particular group thinks by using the group, rather than individuals, as a unit of analysis. In this way, I could begin to understand how the attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of the self are manifested through social practices. Focus groups permit the observation of group dynamics; the interactions between participants, as well as between participants and the moderator assisted in generating new questions and ideas to discuss. During the focus group sessions, many of my participants corrected or modified statements made by others, generated new questions, offered insights into the experiences of other members, and helped others to remember specific details. Understanding these feelings and reactions would not likely have been feasible



through other methods, such as individual interviews or surveys. Additionally, the dynamics between all individuals in the group assisted in mitigating the power differences between researcher and participant (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Morgan & Kreuger, 1993. Because I did not rely solely on predetermined questions, participants had opportunities to “take over” and “own” the research space (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 7).

**Focus groups to reposition students.** Research about youths who occupy the dual identities of “student” and “vegan” has not been meaningfully interrogated in existing studies. The majority of research about vegan youths focuses on whether nutritional needs are being adequately met (Craig, 2009; Larsson and Johansson, 2002; Mangles & Havala, 1994; Messina & Reed, 2001; Sabate and Wien, 2010; Sanders, 1988). This work, while important, is incomplete, as it does not provide an understanding of the identities and experiences of these students beyond the one-dimensional perspective of whether they are physically healthy. My research investigates how vegan adolescents are situated in schools, where public and personal identities collide.

My research paradigm, Critical Animal Theory, emphasizes the need for knowledge to be non-hierarchical, accessible, and transferable between those involved in street activism and those within the academy (which is not to deny that many activist-scholars occupy both these spaces). Critical Animal Theory acknowledges that there are various possibilities of who can be a knower, and who can be a teacher; this acknowledgement extends beyond the species barrier. In this study, I was interested in how the role of a public school student can evolve to also

include youths as theorists. Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013) note “focus groups can mitigate or inhibit the authority of the researcher” (p. 7). The teen activist-scholars who were involved in this study were uniquely positioned at the intersection of contemporary learning, non-human and earth liberation, and a culture that is increasingly consumptive. The eagerness of these students to embrace nonhuman social justice issues is indicative of many characteristics that academic theorists embody: a willingness to modify thoughts and actions on the basis of new information, an interest in addressing a problem from an unconventional perspective, and an intuitive commitment to uplift and empower those in less privileged positions. The insights that these students provided worked to disrupt dominant thought patterns in education and provide a vision of what transformative education could be.

**Recruiting participants.** Participants came into this study primarily through my links as an “insider” in the vegan community as well as teaching and learning communities in Calgary. Three participants were recruited through their parents, who were either teachers or were involved in local vegan community activities that I also participated in. One participant was recruited through a course I was teaching at a local post-secondary institution, and another participant was invited through their friendship with this student. I invited two participants through my work as a teacher at a local high school, and these participants invited three of their friends.

**Focus group structure and benefits.** For this study, I conducted six official focus group meetings with my participants. These meetings were complemented by

ongoing conversations with individual participants over email and occasionally over text messages. I used the focus groups to get a sense of the feelings, perspectives, and narratives of the group as a whole, and I relied upon follow-up discussions with individuals to determine how specific experiences fit into these larger narratives. The students in this study spoke about their experiences in six publically funded schools in the Calgary area. The focus group sessions were scheduled with both pragmatic and theoretical reasons in mind. It was necessary to hold the meetings on weekends and evenings because both students and myself, as a teacher, were unavailable during school hours. We also considered the extracurricular activities of students and came to decide on times that were convenient for the majority of participants. I was also cognizant of the waning availability of students after the school year, as some participants were moving out of town in the summer. Before beginning this project, I was aware that multiple focus group sessions would likely be necessary, because new groups of people often take time to feel comfortable around one another. This was the case with my study: the first session was slightly awkward because many students did not know others in the group, but as the groups progressed and students realized their shared interest in the subject matter, the conversations grew more dynamic. This was especially evident to me during the transcribing phase of the research because I realized that students were not only answering my questions, but also asking questions of one another, disagreeing, joking, and sometimes interrupting. This natural flow of conversations was valuable in helping me understand the range of experiences around this topic.

I conducted my focus group sessions using an interview guide (Gibbs, 1997), which provided a flexible pathway for ideas to be discussed. A copy of this guide is available in Appendix B. I used semi-structured open-ended questions, meaning that opportunities for diversion and expansion were balanced with a careful consideration not to veer too far from the topic. One of the challenges throughout the sessions was to gently guide the students back to their relationship with veganism in *school*, rather than more generally with everyday social interactions. As an example of the flexibility of my interview guide, I began one conversation by asking students if they had ever done a dissection. Most of the older students had been in a classroom where dissections were part of the lesson. When I asked students how they felt about dissection in their science courses, each student had a unique experience to share. This meant that I need to ask follow-up questions that were specific to each participant; as well, the conversation branched out into a variety of new areas that I had not anticipated when making the interview guide. Some students felt that dissection was handled in a reasonable way, because they were given the option not to participate. Other students were academically penalized or not given the same academic opportunities because they refused to participate in the dissection. Some students chose to watch the dissection or stay in the same room, but were uncomfortable with the physical reminders (smell, reactions of classmates). In this way, I was able to access distinctive experiences that had some common overlapping themes. The focus groups provided value for me as a researcher because they illustrated the vegan student views of the world, in the language of the participants (Gibbs, 1997). The multiple understandings and

meanings that were revealed through this study allowed me to better understand how particular narratives are reinforced and circulated in Calgarian public schools. I feel that these focus groups also provide a sense of empowerment to the students involved, as they were able to challenge the institutional authority of schools and teachers without fear of academic or social repercussions. The focus group sessions also provided the students with a sense of community and comradery because it is not common for vegan students from various schools to meet regularly. Finally, the focus groups were instrumental in the application or praxis component of this research, because they helped both the students and me solve real world problems (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). I discuss these recommendations in the final chapter of this thesis.

**Limitations of focus groups.** Like all research methods, focus group research is not without limitations. From a pragmatic standpoint, I had difficulties assembling the focus group sessions to accommodate multiple students with a variety of other extra-curricular activities. This meant that while I initially hoped to conduct weekly sessions, I occasionally had to wait two weeks between meetings. As well, because focus groups rely on active participation, my study may have discouraged those who are less articulate and confident (Gibbs, 1997), but nonetheless have valuable experiences that merit sharing. The nature of focus groups also prevents full confidentiality or anonymity for participants; this was addressed in the consent and assent forms, as well as verbally explained to participants prior to starting the research. Finally, it can be difficult to identify individual viewpoints in focus group research because participants may feel a desire

to conform to the social expectations of their peers (Gibbs, 1997). I attempted to alleviate this issue by phrasing difficult questions hypothetically or in third person (Acocella, 2012).

### **Date Coding and Analysis**

**Inquiry strategy.** This study employed a critical approach that was oriented within an analysis of discourse. Discourse, here, consisted of verbal dialogue as a primary mode of social communication, along with gestures, tone of voice, and other nonverbal expressions as forms of texts. The larger goal of this project was to evaluate, examine, and re-negotiate social identities within and beyond constructions of power and authority that exist in schools. My analysis of the conversations that took place in the focus group meetings was guided by two primary components. First, I was looking for information that would be especially valuable in providing insight into my topic, school experiences of vegan youths. Because the students were remarkably candid throughout the focus groups, I had a plethora of material that I found interesting and novel to the discourse of veganism amongst youths. However, the focus of this thesis is to specifically trouble issues of veganism within the realm of education, so for that reason I provided less analysis to findings that spoke more strongly about other topics. My analysis was driven by my research question: What is the school experience of students who are vegan? Additionally, my theoretical position as a Critical Animal Studies (CAS) activist-scholar was a lens through which I viewed the data. The eighth principle of CAS encourages scholarly work that “[rejects] pseudo-objective academic analysis by explicitly clarifying its normative values and political commitments” (Drew &

Taylor, 2014, p. 158). In my work, I am interested in promoting an agenda of full intersectionality with the inclusion of nonhumans in the spectrum of oppression. I am also aiming to uncover anecdotes that describe how schools can be problematic for vegan students by giving space to these non-dominant viewpoints. My analysis applies the emancipatory paradigm of CAS to both vegan students and nonhuman animals as marginalized groups within schools; ultimately the goal is to challenge a systemic and institutional “interest in maintaining the anti-animal status quo” (Drew & Taylor, 2014, p. 169).

### **Raw data and analysis process.**

**Analysis.** According to Rabiee (2004), clearly establishing and documenting data analysis procedures helps to verify findings, minimize selective perception, and increase the rigor of a focus group study (p. 657). Jones (2014) observes that analysis of discourse is both a situated practice and a community practice, “tied to particular times, places, and material configurations of cultural tools...[and] tied to particular kinds of people” (p. 2-3). In my work, I am interested in identifying how place, both in terms of geographical location, but also community, can impact the types of narratives that are conveyed and circulated. I used the transcripts attained from focus groups with my youth participants as collections of texts. Through this collection procedure, the texts underwent a transformative process, becoming research “artifacts” in addition to their intended purposes (Jones, 2014, p. 3). According to Jones (2014), the cornerstone of analyzing discourse is entextualization (p.3); essentially, the researcher acts as a catalyst to transform actions into texts and texts into actions. This transformative element meshes well

with Critical Animal Theory, which emphasizes the need for scholars to be active against injustice, rather than focusing more passively on theory alone. Even outside the sphere of academic research, “practices of entextualization have historically defined elite communities in society, who, through the ‘authority’ of their entextualizations are able to exercise power over others” (Jones, 2014, p. 3). One of the underlying aims of my research is to understand how the interests of particular groups or individuals are expressed through both texts and actions. I would like to expand upon Jones’ (2014) entextualizing process to derive my own representation (illustrated below), which re-interprets entextualization as more cyclical and nuanced, rather than immediate and instantaneous:



I believe that this expanded entextualization process couples more strongly with Jones’ (2014) stages for analysis (p.6):

1. Framing- selecting a segment of discourse for collection and determining which units are relevant to understanding the phenomena.
2. Summarizing- Representing a selection in greater or less detail.
3. Re-semiotization- Translating a text through analysis.
4. Positioning- making claims about relationships.

My analysis of the data was also structured and influenced by a combination of Krueger’s (1994) framework of analysis with Neuman’s (2004) detailed



recommendations for coding. Krueger (1994) suggests breaking down the process of analysis into three components: raw data, descriptive statements, and interpretation. Neuman (2004) suggests coding through stages that increase in detail and structure: initial coding, open coding, axial coding, and selective/ focused coding.

**Raw data.** I conducted a total of six research meetings with the participants, and remained in contact with them after the study on an individual basis through email and social media. The focus group meetings were audio recorded, and yielded nearly 11 hours of recordings in total. The raw data for this study consisted of audio recordings of the focus group sessions and transcriptions of these conversations. I began by transcribing the audio recordings verbatim. Each recording represented one meeting, and took approximately five hours to completely transcribe. Individual recordings resulted in about 30-40 pages of text. As I was transcribing the recordings, I began to familiarize myself with the data, what Rabiee (2004) describes as a process of immersing oneself in the data as a whole prior to breaking it down into more detailed parts (p. 657). Although I found transcribing to be tedious, it was also invaluable in developing preliminary themes, as I was able to internalize responses, visualize participants, recall gestures and facial expressions, and sense the “flavour” of the conversation. As I started to arrive at possible themes, I wrote down my ideas in a notebook that was specifically designated for coding (a codebook). These early insights were “initial” codes (Neuman, 2004, p. 321) that were kept flexible and open to modification.

**Descriptive statements.** After transcribing the recordings, I read through each individual transcript twice to see if any new ideas would emerge. It was at this stage that I realized that I had numerous findings that mushroomed into areas beyond the scope of this thesis. I eventually decided to focus on responses that specifically illuminated issues related to education (framing).

After reading through the transcripts, I printed them out and placed them in a large three-ring binder. I read the printed transcripts individually and as a whole, moving between transcripts as I started to see patterns and emerging information. I went back and forth between my codebook and the transcripts, recording notes in the margins, circling words or sentences, and refining some of the codes. Proceeding in this way, combining my intuitive ideas with past research and participant views resulted in open codes or early findings (Neuman, 2004, p. 321). I then returned to the digital transcriptions and exported selected quotes into a chart to start confirming the codes (summarizing). I organized the information into a matrix, with the idea or code as a heading and the data listed underneath in a column. I also took Krueger & Casey's (2000) suggestion of printing new copies of the transcripts and physically cutting out responses with scissors. I took these cutouts and arranged them in various ways to determine whether themes could be combined or if new relationships or hierarchies existed between the codes. Examining responses in more detail through both digital and tangible charts is referred to by Neuman (2004) as axial coding (p. 321). Axial coding resulted in a few overarching findings, such as consistent connections to personal identity and relationships with adults and peers both in and out of school. These were refined in the next stage.

**Making connections.** In the final stage of analysis, I looked for further relationships between words, groups of words, and recurring phrases (re-semiotization). At this point I was fairly confident with what the findings were, and began to consult existing literature to come up with more precise theories and new ideas. Although I primarily drew upon Critical Animal Studies to theoretically guide my interpretations, other fields, such as ecopedagogy, critical pedagogy, and humane education were also intertwined in the interpretive process (positioning). Understanding my findings in relation to existing research was instrumental in developing an awareness of “meso-level and macro-level social, cultural, political, and economic structures and forces that exert powerful (usually negative) effects on participants lives” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 81).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the philosophical underpinnings of my research study by elaborating on the history, definition, and critiques of Critical Animal Theory. My study uses Critical Animal Theory as a lens to investigate the school experiences of vegan youths by examining how they perceive curricular structures. To further understand the unique perspectives of this population, I conducted a series of focus group meetings, which I audio recorded and transcribed. I then analyzed these transcribed texts within their geographical and social context. I also understood my analysis as an entextualization process, with the goal of transforming these texts into actions. The most immediate action, for me as a researcher, is centering the voices of these students within discussions of curriculum; this task is attended to in the next chapter.



# Chapter 4- Findings:

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## **Introduction**

In this investigation, I employed focus group research to examine the school experience of vegan youths. While existing literature has addressed veganism in general, little is known about how vegans in Alberta perceive their school environments. Similarly, the field of education in Alberta has been largely silent about the intersections between humans and nonhumans. The goal of this study was to elevate the voices of these students in an effort to consider new ways that curriculum may be understood. This chapter explains how I restricted the findings and introduces the broad themes that my findings fell into: society, identity construction, and schooling. I also discuss the insights that were most surprising to me.

## **How Findings were Restricted**

In this study I was interested in providing a space for the feelings and experiences of vegan students to be centered. As a result, I engaged in deep, meaningful conversations that were often long and time-consuming. The transcripts from my recorded focus group sessions yielded a substantial amount of data, with many interesting findings that would have relevance in curricular fields that are not the focus of this research. My intention in this thesis is to treat my themes carefully, and deal with the most central pieces of my topic in depth, rather than to provide an exhaustive list of every finding that emerged. I restricted the

findings in this chapter to what I felt were the most salient insights about the vegan youth experience in the context of Calgarian public schools. By presenting multiple ways of understanding the ideas brought up in the focus groups, my ambition was to develop more nuanced conclusions and areas for further research.

### **Introducing the Participants**

#### **Ana**

Ana was 12 years old and graduated from grade six towards the end of this study. Ana was very athletic, and enjoyed sports. She was very concerned about the way that her peers approached veganism; they viewed veganism as a “quick fix” for weight loss, but seemed disinterested in information about the treatment of nonhumans. Ana was very reserved throughout the focus groups; she was a careful listener and but added her own anecdotes when they linked to what others were saying. To give Ana more space in conversations that were dominated by more vocal students, I had follow up conversations with her and her mother.

#### **Maddie**

Maddie was another 12-year-old grade six student. Maddie was interested in participating in the study because she wanted to meet more vegans and hear from older students. Maddie was very forthcoming in the focus groups; she opened up very quickly about the marginalization and isolation she felt at school. Although Maddie tried to be friendly and kind to everyone at her school, she felt that other students did not reciprocate this attitude. Maddie was able to recall very specific instances of speciesism at her school, and felt largely misunderstood by her peers. In follow up conversations, I learned that Maddie was inspired by my study to pursue food production as the topic of her science fair project.

**Sam**

Sam was 13 and in grade eight. Sam and Maddie came from the same vegan family. Sam was initially reserved in focus group meetings, but was engaged and interested. As the meetings went on, he began to share his thoughts and opinions more frequently. Sam was initially worried about being vegan, because he was concerned that his friends would ridicule him. He started to shift towards veganism after hearing stories about his father's previous job in a meat "processing plant" and seeing slaughterhouse footage. Throughout the focus groups, Sam tried to maintain a balanced perspective, pointing out that although there were some uncomfortable moments in school, he also had a supportive teacher and friend group.

**Sylvia**

Sylvia was an 18-year-old grade 12 student, who finished school early. She did not come from a vegan family, but felt that her family was supportive of her choices. Sylvia was the student who was most involved in activism, beginning by attending and then organizing protests. She had also independently decided to go vegan at a very young age (9). Sylvia was very enthusiastic about being involved in this project, and was articulate and forthcoming in all the focus group sessions.

**Michelle**

Michelle was a 17-year-old grade 11 student, who attended the same school as Sylvia. Although they did know one another, they had not spoken much outside of this study. Michelle was busy, active, and loved to travel, but a very keen participant in the focus groups as well. Michelle was one of the quieter participants, but openly expressed her dissatisfaction with school activities that marginalized vegans.

Michelle was also frustrated by the lack of awareness in schools about nonhuman animal ethics. I found out after completing this study that Michelle was interested in pursuing a PhD as well.

### **Stephanie**

Stephanie was a 16-year-old grade 11 student, who attended the same high school as Sylvia and Michelle. Stephanie and Michelle were friends prior to the start of the study. Stephanie was raised in a family that was intimately tied to nonhuman animal agriculture. Her father lived outside of a rural Albertan town, and when she was young, Stephanie would witness her father and uncle breeding and branding cattle. She also helped brand cows, and at the time, did not view the process as problematic. Stephanie also saw her father whipping nonhuman animals at one point, but remained disconnected from the nonhuman animal's position. These experiences helped Stephanie realize that blaming children or adults was counterproductive, and that information to help them adjust their worldviews would be necessary. Stephanie participated enthusiastically throughout the study.

### **Erica**

Erica was a 16-year-old grade 11 student, and attended the same school as Sylvia, Michelle, and Stephanie. Erica was soft-spoken and thoughtful; she participated in conversations less frequently than some of the other students, but always had very insightful experiences to share. Erica was especially conflicted about zoos, and the Calgary zoo in particular. Although she understood the concerns around nonhuman animal captivity, she also had a family member who was involved in the zoo's successful breeding programs, and viewed this aspect of the zoo as positive. Erica



also struck me as very mature; she had a very free and calm way about her, which helped her resist comments from peers and others about veganism.

### **Alina**

Alina was a 16-year-old grade 11 student who had previously attended school with Stephanie. Alina attended a public school in a community surrounding Calgary. Because Alina perceived her community to be more predominantly meat-centric than Calgary, she believed she was the only vegan at her school. She generally felt isolated because of her veganism. Eventually, one of Alina's friends made the decision to go vegan after Alina took her to a vegan restaurant. Alina was engaged yet cautious during the focus group meetings. She listened carefully, and interjected with her own experiences, choosing her words wisely and confidently.

### **Jacob**

Jacob was a 17-year-old grade 12 student who attended a large public high school in Calgary. Jacob had an outgoing and charismatic personality, which made him a social leader in most conversations. Jacob also had a sarcastic sense of humour, pointing out the irony or hypocrisy of his own and other student's experiences. Although Jacob was instinctively conversational, he was also a considerate and strong mentor for the younger students.

### **Paige**

Paige was a 17-year-old grade 12 student who attended the same school as Jacob. Jacob and Paige were good friends prior to beginning the study. Paige was friendly and amicable, also offering words of encouragement and advice to the younger students. Paige was studious and passionate about both human and animal

liberation. She was very forthcoming and honest in the focus groups, but occasionally expressed concern that the stories she shared were specific enough that they could be traced back to her (these specific stories were not included in the final dissertation).

## **Findings**

Students generally discussed their veganism through three overarching areas: society, identity construction, and education. While these three areas do not exist in a vacuum, and likely function in interconnected ways through the school experiences of vegans, information appeared to become more concentrated and detailed as I worked through these codes sequentially. For instance, the theme “society” contained broad findings that seemed to contribute to “identity construction,” and ideas stemming from “identity construction” influenced the “education” category, which was the most detailed. Therefore, although what I think are the most relevant and intriguing findings of this research are contained in the last section, I will gradually excavate the school experience of vegans through a brief analysis of other meaningful areas of experience.

### **Veganism and Society**

The most general findings of this study were related to how veganism is connected to society. There were three interesting facets to how students observed the world around them: pronoun use, general social hypocrisy, and misconceptions about veganism.

**Pronoun use.** An unexpected finding that resulted from having both younger and older students included in this study was that younger students seemed more

willing to use less speciesist language when discussing nonhuman animals, even though all students were vegan. The two 12-year-olds generally used “he” or “she” pronouns, which are more consistent with the discourse of anti-speciesist work. Although “it” is a socially acceptable pronoun to describe nonhumans, the term ultimately functions hegemonically to maintain their objectified status and position humans as superior. Despite hearing younger students use “he,” “she,” or “they” as singular pronouns in the same conversation, older students seemed ingrained in their habits:

*Maddie (12)...like if you go to see a lion [at the zoo], he doesn't look happy. He doesn't like sitting on the cement concrete...*

*Sylvia (18): ...If humans kind of get them in a mess where they, like an animal gets hit by a car or something but it's still alive, then humans are also there to kind of fix that and put it back in the wild...*

The more frequent use of “it” as a pronoun for nonhumans with older students suggests that as students are gradually exposed to language conventions, they assimilate to what is commonly accepted. It is also possible that younger students feel less distanced from nonhumans because it is more socially appropriate for children, rather than teens or adults to be interested in caring for nonhuman animals (Plous, 1993). As well, from an intersectional standpoint, it is conceivable that social refusal to accept “they” as a singular pronoun for both gender minorities and nonhumans is indicative of a collective anxiety over elevating the status of “others” into the privileged realm of human and “normal.”

**Social hypocrisy.** Students seemed amused, frustrated, and disappointed by instances of hypocrisy that they encountered in their everyday lives. After going

vegan, students seemed hyper-aware of how marketing and advertising can be used to shield the public from the brutality of the meat industry:

*Sam: One of the worst ones I've seen was at Planet organic...all the meat section, where there's all the bloody meat, and on the sign it said, "where nature lives"...I was like....[laughs with a confused look]*

The behaviour of carnists seemed to perplex students online as well:

*Jacob: We've also talked about the, um, like, dog festival a lot...*

*Paige: Yeah...*

*Jacob: Like, you'd see people, they post on Instagram or Facebook being like, "stop this terrible thing, this terrible festival where dogs are slaughtered," and I mean, it is bad, but I mean, like, how is a dog different than a pig? They're not really, in fact pigs are more intelligent, pigs are more loyal, in studies pigs have a lot of tendencies that dogs have, and they [people] have no problem with eating meat.*

As the conversation continued, it became apparent that students were also aware of the implicitly racist attitude of condemning some cultures for eating certain animals, while participating in the same exploitation with other nonhumans:

*Paige: And they're like, "oh, how can the Chinese people, like, commit these acts of savagery and support this exploitation?!" [laughs]*

*Jacob: ...If you're, like, picking and choosing your problems for your own convenience, like, just because you've never eaten a dog, that means you can disgrace someone else for doing it? Yeah, like, eat pigs and cows and whatever else you want, but just...like, it's really strange...*

Joy (2010) explains that violent ideologies like speciesism and carnism depend upon mental classification systems to uphold cultural narratives. Schemas are psychological frameworks that organize and interpret information; schemas that humans construct around nonhumans, for instance, determine our interactions with them (Joy, 2010, p. 14). As others (Adams, 1990; Pachirat, 2011) have pointed out, the consumption of nonhumans can only occur through a powerful system of categorizing, distancing, and segregating. Adams argues that in order for individuals or societies to consume animals, the product ("meat") must remain

disconnected from its origin as a living animal (p.14). In her theory, Adams problematizes euphemism and metaphor, proposing that the separation of nonhuman animals from “meat” occurs through literal objectification, linguistic distancing, and social narratives or “texts” of meat. According to Adams, the cycle of objectifying animals begins when the oppressor is permitted to “view another being as an object” (p.58), and a living animal is violently transformed into only its fragmented body parts. Through the process of butchering and consuming the referent (nonhuman animal), “the object is severed from its ontological meaning” (p. 58). Pachirat (2011) concurs: “[non-human animals] have been manufactured and constructed into ‘primal’ and ‘subprimal’ cuts, shrink-wrapped, and boxed in ways that render them unintelligible as animal...the linguistic leap from *steer* to *steak*, from *heifer* to *hamburger* is enacted” (p.30). Because animal objects are possessions, Adams continues, “they cannot have possessions; thus, we say ‘leg of lamb’ not a ‘lamb’s leg,’ ‘chicken wings,’ not a ‘chicken’s wings’” (p. 59). As well, the meat industry refers to animals as “‘food-producing units,’ ‘protein harvesters,’ ‘converting machines,’ ‘crops,’ and ‘biomachines,’” (p. 58), elaborating upon Descartes’s (1993) assumption that non-human animals literally, are machines that are incapable of thinking or feeling (p.3). Further, the covering of animals with plant- derived seasonings and sauces further obfuscates them from their living origins and highlights the absence of an animal referent. In more recent work, Adams (1994, p. 27; 2010, p. 51, 2014, p. 19) has refined the structure of the absent referent to conceptualize non-human animals as “mass terms.” She argues that

mass terms “have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity,” (2014, p. 19), which further permits our subjugation of nonhumans.

This seems closely related to Derrida’s (2002) observation that the tendency of philosophers to group all non-human animals in the same category is problematic as it denies individuality and multiplicity (p. 383).

As these students observed, conforming to the authority of social narratives and symbolism about particular species seems to override internal self-evaluation and critique. Western carnists view the Yulin dog meat festival as an opportunity to degrade non-Western cultures while evading taking responsibility for the atrocities of factory farms, vivisection labs, and fur farms, which far surpass Yulin (Eisnitz, 1997; Joy, 2010; Pachirat, 2011; Scully, 2002; Willett, 2015).

**Misconceptions about veganism.** Students in this study also expressed frustration about the misconceptions about veganism that seem to exist amongst the general public. According to the students, incorrect assumptions about veganism were oriented around four main areas: expense, enjoyment, concern, and attitudes. Participants felt that others perceived veganism to be inaccessible from a financial standpoint:

*Paige: Oh yeah, people also think it’s expensive...*

*Sam: Well yeah, if you eat at The Coup every day...*

*Jacob: I feel like a lot of people think that being vegan is kind of pretentious, or like snooty, or highbrow, unnecessarily.*

Participants emphasized that the foods they ate were generally inexpensive and easy to find: rice, potatoes, beans, and legumes. Students also noticed that the

people around them assumed that they were discontent with their choice to be vegan:

*Sylvia: Oh man, when I was younger, like, I went vegetarian when I was 9, and I remember being like 10 years old or something at my friend's house and her mom...was like "you can have this pepperoni pizza and I won't tell your parents," and I was, like, that's not the point [laughs] they didn't tell me to go veg...*

*Michelle: Yeah, my mom had those sun chips, like the cheddar or whatever, and then she goes "oh so sorry you can't have any!" like, no, it's my choice...*

*Sam: Yeah, my friend, when I told him he was like, "yeah, well you can come over to my house and we can feed you all the meat you want!" and I was like uh, no thanks...*

*Sylvia: Or when people ask you, oh so like, when will you stop being vegan? And I'm like uh, don't plan on it...*

Positions of misplaced sympathy and pity from carnists may stem from further assumptions about veganism as restrictive or militant. As well, presuming that decisions made were not their own suggests that some view children and teenagers as incapable of independent research and arriving at their viewpoints on their own terms. Similarly, participants felt that others were disingenuously concerned about their health:

*Jacob: B12 everyone's saying...*

*Paige: Yeah, but no one would ever ask...you wouldn't just go up to any old meat eater and be like, "oh my god, like, are your protein levels okay? Are your b12 levels okay? You wouldn't just ask about that, but suddenly you're vegan and everyone is just concerned...oh my god, I like, need to know, where are your blood tests?"*

*Stephanie: I guess the day after [thanksgiving], my uncle texted [my mom], and said, "Stephanie has to start taking protein pills because her hair's going to start falling out and dying," like it was just super, super...*

*Sylvia: Concerned?*

*Stephanie: Yeah...*

The association between meat and good health is purely symbolic and cultural; studies have consistently demonstrated that animal "products" are harmful to human health (Campbell & Campbell, 2005; Craig et al., 2009; Davey et al., 2003; Bouvard et al., 2015, World Health Organization, 2015). The concern of carnists

about the health of vegans seems to function primarily as a coping mechanism to justify one's own habits and perpetuate the stereotype of vegans as nutritionally deficient.

Finally, participants felt that carnists assumed vegans were judgmental:

*Paige: A lot of the time people think that, like, by you choosing to eat a vegan diet, or you eating in front of them or something, that you're automatically making a commentary on what they're eating...*

*Jacob: People take it so personally if you offend, like, any little bit of their food, like, [...] you can just tell it's so deeply rooted as a part of them, which it shouldn't really be...*

Therefore, veganism in mainstream discourse seems framed as unreasonable and sanctimonious, while speciesist systems and structures remain unquestioned. For the students in this study, these misconceptions were significant because they also infiltrated other facets of their lives. Public perceptions about veganism were also instrumental in student identity construction and how students interpreted their school experiences.

### **Identity Construction**

According to Pasupathi & Weeks (2011), building relationships between the self and one's experiences are one way that adolescents create identity. In this research, identity construction around veganism was primarily influenced by familial interactions and conceptions about masculinity or femininity.

**Family interactions.** Although families were not necessarily vegan (two families were vegan), they generally accepted their child's decision to adopt a vegan lifestyle. In five of the families, at least one family member had experimented with veganism or vegetarianism in the past, but eventually regressed back to carnism. There were three families that had no connection to veganism or vegetarianism, and



two of those families had some background in nonhuman animal agriculture. Both vegan families also had connections to nonhuman animal farming through non-nuclear family members, and one parent from a vegan family had been employed in a “processing plant” (slaughterhouse) as a teenager. For the vegan students, family was a source of support, and tensions with family were typically unrelated to veganism. For the students with non-vegan families, tensions that occurred were primarily related to students drawing attention to meat as a “present referent,” connecting the live animal with the body parts that are consumed:

*Stephanie: Oh yeah, I say milk is pus, [laughs] [my mom's] like “what? This is not, that's disgusting!” But I'm like, well, just calling it what it is...[laughs]...Like sometimes she buys, like, rotisserie chicken, and I call it carcass. Like, oh, that's a good-looking carcass....*

The discomfort around vegan adolescents failing to use euphemisms again highlights the necessity of the meat and related industries to linguistically distance live nonhumans from abstracted body parts that are permissible as food. Students also expressed that although families were accepting of veganism, they did not fully understand veganism as a stance against injustice. One participant recalled a conversation with her mother about having a birthday party:

*Paige: We were sort of thinking about what I could do, and I was like, yeah, I want to have a lot of food, um, and, like, I want all the food to be vegan, my mom was like, “what? You'd have to serve meat of some kind, you have to have something that's not vegan!” And I'm like...but it's my birthday, why would I? I don't know, I would never serve people something that goes against all my values, so...yeah, no my mom definitely gets that way [...] in terms of being taken aback where it's, like, “well you have to have something that isn't' vegan,”... like, what? I don't know its just weird...  
Meneka: Well is the assumption that vegan food can only be consumed by vegans?  
Paige: Yeah...*

Parents seemed to view veganism as an individual dietary choice, rather than a political stance demanding that nonhuman exploitation be confronted rather than

dismissed. Parents seemed disconnected with the notion of making vegan food for everyone to automatically accommodate all moral positions. As well, the historically symbolic position of meat as representative of wealth, status, and hospitality (Lokuruka, 2006) may influence familial reluctance to serve only vegan food:

*Erica: In my house, when people come over for dinner, my mom feels like she has to cook meat. And so then often she just forgets about me and doesn't make anything that I can eat...sometimes I just leave, but...*

While students all stated that they never expected their families to accommodate them, emphasizing that they were able to cook for themselves, some students felt annoyed that families prioritized convenience, tradition, and familiar tastes over the needs of their vegan child:

*Jacob: My brother...he loves meat, like, he eats soooo, so, so much meat, so my mom is like, I kind of said when I first became vegan, I was like, oh, like, you don't have to accommodate me....but now I'm like, "you know what? You accommodate his lifestyle of, like, slovenly piggishness of eating meat all the time!" [...] it's ridiculous and, like, my mom will be, like, "oh no we can't go there, he won't be able to find something to eat there!" And I'll be like "ummmm..." but she's, like, she'll be like, "take a look at this menu, see this salad here? It has, like, Caesar dressing," she's like, "maybe if you asked if they could just put an olive oil and vinegar on top, could we go there?" And I'm like, I like I'll say this to her, like, you know what? Either do try to accommodate me, fully, or don't at all. Because I'll just stay home and make something that I like for myself, because I can cook for myself and I'm fine with that.*

*But don't try to pretend you're accommodating for me. Like, it's such a hard thing for you to, like, get like this middle ground, because I just don't want that, right? And like, I just don't get it either, and I'm like, if you can accommodate Rob, and she's like, "well it's not just about Rob, it's about me and your stepdad, and all these other people, we'd like to eat meat too," and I'm like, like every meal? Like try something new once! If that's the case, if you really can't sacrifice that, to actually make a real accommodation, not like your fake accommodations, then I don't want to eat with you, like I'll stay home, I'll make myself my own meal, and then of course my parents get in kind of a huff about it, and I don't care, like I honestly don't, [...] it's also a nutritional thing for me too, I don't want to go to a restaurant to have a meal that's going to give me nothing nutritionally. Because I try to have protein in most of my meals and I don't want to have, like, mixed greens for dinner. It just doesn't make sense. And if it's fourteen dollars, too, I'm like, that's a waste of money, it's a waste of a meal for me, I just, no. One hundred percent.*

Although at times adversarial and confrontational, the role of family seemed to be an integral aspect of developing an identity as a vegan. Difficult conversations about meals seemed to provide vegan students with an understanding of how speciesism manifests in various scenarios, and therefore better equipped them for confronting these issues. Arguments with family members often resulted in acceptance of vegan positions, but generally did not lead to family members becoming vegan themselves. Vegan students were often left frustrated by this acknowledgement of nonhuman issues without any meaningful change:

*Jacob: [...] They'll also always be like talking about maybe becoming vegetarian, and I'll bring up something like watching Earthlings, and they'll be like, "no I don't think I could get through that," and I'm like, well if you can't get through it, then stop, and they always get me in trouble, I stopped this because it was just not worth all the energy, but I used to, like, completely confront them about eating meat, like at the dinner table, and, like, they'd be like, "this is not dinner table conversation, you cannot talk about these horrible things while we're eating a meal," and I'm like, why not? Seriously why not, you're eating it, you're contributing to it, it's completely appropriate for dinner table conversation in my opinion. And I think from a logical perspective it is too, but it was just too much energy and it would, like, evolve into these explosive fights, so I was like, you know, I'm just going to stop, but it was just, I find they're quite hypocritical about everything, like they'll bash the taste [of vegan food] but then like what I'm eating and then they'll bash the ethics but then be really disgusted by what's happening, so. [...] I've just noticed every aspect of hypocrisy with my family [...] they're resistant to fully educating themselves but they're already kind of educated just by having me in the house...*

Jacob's experience was mirrored by at least five other students, who also recalled cycles of productive discussion followed by arguments and feelings of repression. Despite the conflicts around food choice, students seemed optimistic about the home as a pedagogical space with potential to facilitate critical thinking amongst family members. The adolescents in this study seemed to work through identities as both students and teachers, as they informally participated in the educational

facets of activism (Corman & Vandrovcova, 2014; Drew & Taylor, 2014; Socha & Mitchell, 2014).

**Gender expectations.** Students did not initially seem concerned about the connections between gender and veganism. All students did agree that the vegans they knew mostly identified as female, and male vegans in this study did not actively seek out other male vegans for companionship:

*Jacob: Being vegan has been not too hard, but I don't even think I know another male vegetarian at our school. Like, now that I think about it...*

*Sam: Well I don't actually know if I'm the only male, but in my grade, I think I am, but I don't think guys should be afraid, because I told my friends, and they were just like, okay...*

*Meneka: So your friends were accepting?*

*Sam: They didn't really care...*

When I asked Jacob and Sam about whether they ever felt embarrassed to be both male and vegan, they responded fairly confidently about being openly vegan:

*Jacob: Uh, I'm not, but it's silly for me that anybody is like that, but it's just, like, you can tell that there's a lot of subliminal fears, especially with guys our age, of appearing even somewhat feminine, but like there's this whole aspect of like thinking femininity is ridiculous, while thinking masculinity is not...*

As the discussion continued, students pointed out that their peers were especially vulnerable to media and social representations of stereotypical cis-hetero<sup>13</sup> male and female categories. Students noticed that at their school or community recreation centers, female peers seemed segregated to the cardio machines, while males exclusively focused on weights and strength exercises. They observed that as most males transitioned from junior high to high school, they seemed intent on physically transforming themselves to appear more muscular. Some students postulated that because veganism in mainstream media is generally marketed as a

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<sup>13</sup> Cisgender means that a person's gender identity matches the sex assigned to them at birth. Cis-hetero refers to people who are both cisgender and heterosexual.

tool for weight loss rather than strength, it is not perceived as being compatible with building muscle. The associations between meat and masculinity are confirmed by Ruby & Heine (2011), who demonstrate that manhood is typically socially constructed, rather than assumed biologically. For instance, masculinity across cultures is mostly earned through social displays, rituals, and competition (p. 448). The authors also assert that manhood is precarious and requires constant validation, which connects to the desire among young male adolescents to strive towards hyper-masculinity through building muscle and eating meat. Because vegans and vegetarians have a greater empathic response to the suffering of nonhuman animals (Filippi et al., 2010), it is conceivable that the patriarchal view that men must not be emotional contributes to the perception of veganism as inherently inappropriate for males. As diet is a means of better understanding individuals (Ruby & Heine, 2011), my study suggests that some male vegans are already confident in both their gender and vegan identities.

### **Schools**

Both society and family seemed to be powerful forces that shaped the identities of students who participated in this project. It would be reasonable to suppose that the influence of these two dimensions of experience is also engaged in student perceptions of school. Schools can be concentrated microcosms of society that reinforce competition and conformity (Thirukkumaran, 2016) while students are simultaneously working to build identities as individuals. The vegan students I spoke to had much to say about how their schools might unintentionally facilitate the repression of vegans while sometimes appearing to support them. The findings

related to how students discussed veganism in conjunction with schooling fell into two main categories: relationships and curriculum.

**Relationships.** Interactions between peers and teachers helped determine the school experience of these participants. One of the most salient findings that emerged through this work was that students in upper elementary (grades 5-6) generally felt isolated, uncomfortable, and sometimes ridiculed because of their veganism; this resulted in a continuous sense of anxiety that overshadowed much of the school experience.

*Maddie (12): For me everybody's pretty against it. [...] Sometimes when I'm eating they'll say "eeewww" or "that looks disgusting" when they look at my food. They're like, a lot of people, like my best friend, she's, like, really Christian. And she will say, well, God says these animals are meant to be eaten. And then a lot of people will say, [...] they won't be like, oh, being vegan is bad, but they'll be eating their pepperoni stick and be like, well why are you vegan? Or they'll be like eating a cheeseburger, and they'll, they won't be like, mean about me being vegan, but they'll be really, really judgy about it...asking me as many questions as possible, are your parents making you be vegan? Are you, how do you live? Stuff like that, and then, I just don't really know what to say, I'm just living my own life...*

In contrast, students in higher grades felt significantly more comfortable about their veganism. When older students reflected back to their time in elementary, they agreed that it was generally more difficult to be perceived as “different” in lower grades. They also alluded to the myth of vegetables as repulsive being circulated by media<sup>14</sup> and accepted by parents and children:

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<sup>14</sup> According to Harris & Bargh (2009) most advertising on television networks watched by children is comprised of food products with low nutritional value (p. 671). The authors also found that children were more likely to attribute positive qualities and tastes to foods that were familiar to them through advertising. They conclude that “viewing enjoyable television advertising for unhealthy food, therefore, is also likely to lead to...long-term negative effects on actual diet” (p. 672). Furthermore, vegetables in general seem to be portrayed negatively in media consumed by young people: in an episode of the *Powerpuff Girls*, the Broccoloids are

*Michelle: I definitely think it's different between high school and elementary and junior high.*

*Stephanie: It's just when you're younger, the thing is to not eat fruits and vegetables.*

*Alina: I agree...*

*Meneka: It's cool to not like vegetables...?*

*Stephanie: That's what they'll put on TV and stuff.*

*Maddie: When there's teams [for school sports], like they'll have a good team and a bad team, they'll put broccoli on the bad team...*

*Meneka: Who puts broccoli on the bad team?*

*Maddie: Um, well, like, kids in my class.*

*Meneka: Oh, so the kids do it?*

*Alina: Parents do it too, they just put this thing around vegetables where it's like, forcing kids to have them?*

*Sylvia: But every time I talk to my friends nowadays, they're like let's go get smoothies!*

*Jacob: I honestly think it's, like, worse for little kids too for sure, like I don't know, I think, like, younger kids[...]...because people will always be like, "high school's terrible," but I've found that, like, school has gotten generally better as I've gotten older [...] and I've found younger kids to be, like, the meanest of all to be honest. Like even being in younger grades I find that young kids can have a lot more like animosity towards each other, whereas if you get older people just start to not care as much.*

The older students theorized that differences between elementary and high school were largely due to social development processes; this view echoes existing research (Joy, 2010; Plous, 1993). Because young students are still making sense of the world, they accept and strive towards the values, behaviours, and expectations that are dominant. Media, family, and other adults function collaboratively to ensure that children understand how nonhumans can be classified as pets or sources of food, entertainment, or inquiry (Joy, 2010; Plous, 1993). Because younger students are still also developing emotional regulation strategies, they are more concerned with resolving ideas that don't make sense than the feelings of other people:

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the main antagonists, in the video game *Skylanders*, Broccoli Guy is an antagonist, and in the television series the *High Fructose Adventures of Annoying Orange*, the Broccoli Overlord is a huge adversary. The students I interviewed did not specifically cite these examples, but were aware that vegetables seem to be portrayed negatively in popular culture.

*Paige: Well, I think people are just doing they're own thing more [in high school], whereas when you're younger there's, like, more new stimuli in the environment and stuff like that, so they're, yeah, there are sharper learning curves so you're sort of um, figuring out like, what's normal, what other people do, what should I do? So there's sort of, I don't know, learning conformity in a way, so if something's different, it's like "oh why is that different?" [...] A lot of the time, younger kids are more, they're just more uninhibited and more...they'll just tell you, like, "that's weird," or "why do you do that?" whereas when you're older you're like...people might hold back their opinion more because they don't want to offend you or something if they DO think it's super weird or something.*

*Josh: Like, [...] people start realizing that people don't just do things, like, willy-nilly, for weird reasons, like there's a reason behind it. So I find way more often [in high school] we'll get, like, questions about the benefits of what we do, and, like, why we're doing it, for a constructive reason, and the person may not click with it themselves, but it's more coming from a place of wanting to understand it than a place of wanting to criticize it. In general. I mean there's still the few ridiculous people.*

Another explanation for the difference between elementary and high school experiences may be that high schools are usually larger and provide more opportunities for friendship and peer support. In this group of vegans, all high school students had at least one (usually more) supportive friend who understood and accepted the decision to be vegan.

*Alina: There's one other vegan that I know of and that's because I took her to the Thai vegan café, and, like, I never expected her to go vegan at all, but she really liked the food and then she started researching it so...I'm lucky to have her...*

*Jacob: Well for us, it's pretty good. [...] In terms of our friends, we have a lot of support. Like most of our friends are vegetarian or vegan.*

*Paige: We have a good group of friends, like not like, it's not like we're only friends with vegan people, but there's like...*

*Jacob: Like fifteen...*

*Paige: There's a lot of so many people at our school have gone vegan within the last...year.*

*Jacob: And it kind of got the ball rolling...*

*Paige: Yeah...*

*Sylvia: Most of my friends are vegetarian anyway, but most of my friends are so impressed that I make my own food; it's so colorful...*

*Stephanie: Most of my friends are vegetarian or vegan...and, like, very aware...*

*Meneka: So did that happen, did you purposely use choose those people to be your friends, or, like, how did that [happen]?*

*Stephanie: I mean I don't think it's a coincidence, but...like it's just...*

*Meneka: So you didn't actively seek out people based on...?*



*Stephanie: No, I don't like to do that, I don't especially when I'm making new friends, um, I don't like to make veganism, like especially if they're not vegan, I don't like to make it the main topic of conversation, just because it is probably one of the biggest things about me, and one of the most, the things I'm most passionate for, but it's not all of me, and I feel like that's something people often forget...*

In contrast, elementary students had greater difficulty finding positive peer groups. Both elementary students in this study stated that they did not have any vegan friends at school. Peers in elementary, disturbingly, seemed adversarial, rather than neutral to the idea of veganism. A follow-up conversation with Ana and her mother revealed that earlier in the year, Ana had been invited to a friend's house. The parents and friend were aware that Ana was vegan for both ethical and health reasons (she has a dairy allergy). Later that day, Ana had to be picked up by her mother because she was covered in a rash spreading all over her body. Ana's condition progressively worsened, and in addition to the rash, her ears, hands, and throat swelled. Eventually, she was rushed to the emergency room, where she was treated for anaphylaxis. Ana's mother explained, "when push came to shove, the friend admitted she tricked my daughter into believing she gave her vegan chocolate. It was regular milk chocolate" (personal communication, October 25, 2016). Ana began to recover after four hours of treatment, and the friend was deeply remorseful and apologetic. This situation is emblematic of a larger societal disregard for non-dominant positions. While Ana's consequences were physical and life threatening, there is no tangible way to measure the emotional distress that Maddie experiences from constantly being told that her food looks repulsive.

In addition to interactions with peers, student experience was also influenced by relationships with or perceptions about teachers. Unlike the clear delineation

between peer relationships in elementary compared to those in high school, the levels of teacher engagement and support of veganism seemed to vary between grades. Generally, students in my focus groups discussed teachers as being unsupportive, hypocritical, or supportive. Uns supportive teachers seemed focused on discrediting veganism through a lens of “objectivity” or rationality:

*Maddie: Oh [teachers have said] tons of stuff, where they're like you won't be able to live if you don't eat meat. [...] My teacher knows I'm vegan and she doesn't criticize me or anything, but in health she'll show me, oh you have to eat meat, at least two times a day, or whatever, like you have to eat fish, and they'll be like oh you won't get any protein or anything...*

*Stephanie: In grade 10 I went to a normal catholic school, and I was in social class and we had to write position papers, and we could choose our topic, which was really cool, so I wrote mine on animal agriculture, animal rights and stuff. And I got such a bad mark on it, so I went up to him, [...]well, I went up to him and asked what I could do, and what was going on, and he said that my opposing argument was too opinionated or something, and he made some weird excuse up for why he would give me...it was something about how it was not legitimate enough. Because there's always a pro to...you know what I mean?*

*Meneka: Oh, he thought it was biased?*

*Stephanie: Yeah...*

The marginalization of work that challenges an anthropocentric status quo extends beyond high school and into post-secondary education. As Glasser and Roy (2014) observe, scholars “may be hesitant to push intellectual and institutional barriers for fear of losing professional respect or employment” (p. 90). In K-12 schooling, students who are academically penalized through the fallacy of objectivity because they choose to take up nonhuman issues may also feel hesitant to push boundaries in the future. Some teachers were not necessarily unsupportive, but were viewed by students as hypocritical because their actions did not align with their stated values:

*Paige: This teacher, [...] she was a little bit like, I don't know, she, um....she was like, super, super, like, proud environmentalist type of thing, and I'm not, I'm not trying to*

*be haughty or pretentious myself or anything or think that I'm superior, because I don't, it was just that she was very much about how, that was something she took great pride in, she was very much about being an environmentalist, and stuff like that, and, um, and I sort of would...I would address it, ... and um, also I was, like, very outspoken in that course...so I would address um, like, veganism and issues of environmentalism a lot, and um, I don't know like I never said to her face, like, "[...] you can't call yourself an environmentalist and not be a vegan," but in my head I was kind of thinking, if you're such a huge environmentalist and it's something you really believe in, then it is kind of ironic that... she did talk to me about it one time, um...like, she kind of almost tried to defend herself a bit or something, I was talking about, like, fish or something and she just loves seafood or something like that, she's almost the type who would try to play that card where you're so, so grateful for the work that goes into this, buying humane meat or whatever...*

From the perspective of the students I spoke with, hypocritical teachers, though frustrating, seemed less likely to academically reprimand students for views related to veganism. Paige went on to describe how she wrote a paper about the environmental effects of animal agriculture for that class, and received a good mark. Her teacher later discussed the paper with her, but continued to justify the desire to eat nonhuman animals. While it is possible that Paige simply wrote a stronger paper than Stephanie, Stephanie's teacher was dismissive and did not provide any productive feedback on how she could improve. Optimistically, some teachers were very supportive of vegan students, despite not being vegan themselves:

*Sam: My teachers actually mentioned something about it, I forgot to say this, but um, we were talking about agriculture and she was saying how it's not fair how they're getting treated, when they're getting ready to be slaughtered...*

*Sylvia: Well my teacher thought it was like, cool and, like, the fact that I was looking at something outside of the regular spectrum, he thought that was pretty impressive...and stuff, and he actually, when I graduated at the end of the year, he gave me this book, Eating Animals by Jonathan Foer, so he was pretty gung ho on it, but he wasn't a vegan or a vegetarian himself.*

The presence of supportive teachers seemed to be extremely beneficial to students, and how they viewed their schools as a whole. Sam's teacher seemed open to new perspectives, and throughout the year ensured that Sam had food available for

special lunch days, when food was ordered. Sylvia's teacher encouraged her to take ownership over her own learning and provided her with tools that would empower her (hooks, 1994). The inclusive teaching practices of these teachers suggests that fostering relationships with students and engaging positions that are typically marginalized can occur within the problematic framework of traditional schooling (Thirukkumaran, 2016).

**Curricular findings.** There were numerous significant discoveries related to curricula, so I drew upon Eisner (1985) to broadly classify information in this section within either the explicit, implicit, or null curriculum (p. 103). As detailed in chapter two, the explicit curriculum refers to what teachers, administrators, policy makers, and governments intend for students to learn through classroom activities and materials. The implicit or hidden curriculum describes the unintended values that are transmitted to students through the structure and policies of the school. The null curriculum is the omission of either entire disciplines or specific pieces of information; by avoiding particular topics, schools send the message that these areas are unimportant. Although I used these three areas to organize information according to how it best seemed to fit, there were many instances where all three types of curriculum were operating on some level.

**Explicit curriculum.** The vegan students in my study interpreted various subject areas, and typically discussed the prescribed curriculum, one type of explicit curriculum. The prescribed curriculum in Alberta is the Alberta Learning Program of Studies, a curricular guide for each subject area. In some cases, students also brought up examples of individual lesson plans or material from textbooks, however

these were not analyzed independently of the student's experience of them. There were five subject areas where students felt that nonhuman issues were not satisfactorily addressed: Physical education, English, social studies, health, and science. Science were discussed at length, and ultimately resulted in various sub-findings.

**Physical education.** Students did not expect discussions about nonhumans to occur in physical education, but were confused about how exercise and a healthy diet were not taught simultaneously:

*Erica: [...] On Friday they were, like, cooking hotdogs by the front door...*

*Stephanie: It was sort of weird, because it was for some...it was for a triathlon? So it's like...okay...*

*[Everyone laughs]*

*Meneka: Why do you think that's interesting to you that they were serving hotdogs but nobody else questioned it?*

*Stephanie: I don't know, I think even, like, for a meat eater you'd think like...Like when you think of triathlons or anything like that, heavily sport related, you'd think athletes would know...even meat eaters know that there are carcinogens, like the world health standards...it's just weird to me, like I don't understand...*

*Jacob: Have, like, a cigarette before the triathlon...*

*[Everyone laughs]*

The reference being alluded to by Stephanie is a World Health Organization (WHO) press release stating that “processed meat [is] classified as carcinogenic to humans [...] based on sufficient evidence” (WHO, 2015, p. 1). In the release, the authors specifically use hot dogs as an example of processed meat. As a learning experience, the triathlon potentially conveys to students that exercise, overcoming challenges, and encouraging others are important skills to develop. However, for Stephanie and others in this study, the contradiction of serving a known carcinogen to students also sends confusing implicit messages. The notion that exercise must be followed by an extrinsic reward implies that exercise alone cannot be a positive experience.

Likewise, positioning food as a reward that must be earned obscures the purpose of food as nourishment and discourages mindfulness about one's own hunger and fullness cues.

**Health and wellness.** Discussions about food in school were also prevalent in health classes. Students found the prescribed curriculum in health to be problematic because there seemed to be an emphasis on meat and dairy:

*Meneka: What do you learn in health class?*

*Maddie: That you're supposed to eat meat two times a week, at least.*

*Sylvia: Mine was always focused on how fish was really important, and how if you don't you have to take those fish pills. Yeah. [...] I also think the food pyramid that we have, that has an entire dairy section, where it's like why is that there? What?*

Although Canada's food guide does state that the meat and dairy sections include "alternatives," students did not feel that those alternatives were acknowledged or taught in their classes. In some cases, students were not even given the option to eschew meat or dairy:

*Michelle: When I was in junior high for food studies class we would always just, like, cook stuff, and every single one had to have meat or dairy in it to be healthy, but then I was vegetarian in junior high, and when I said, like, I didn't tell my teacher I was vegetarian but one day I just said I'm not going to eat this, and then everyone was kind of, everyone blew up, like it was a controversy.*

For Michelle, the consternation of both peers and the teacher after refusing to eat meat was demonstrative of a wider discourse rooted in reinforcing existing beliefs, rather than challenging them. The assumption that nonhuman animal "products" are the norm, and that plant foods are deficient was also manifested through academic consequences:

*Ana: For me, in health class they talk, like we're starting to learn about milk and stuff, and I know they're all lying and stuff... like they have these sheets of paper they give everybody in my class and in school...which talk about how milk is, um... made and*

*that process...and when I read it I thought, that is not true, I've watched a lot of documentaries on how it's all made and stuff, and I know they're lying.*

*Meneka: So on the sheets, do you learn that a cow has to give birth in order to make milk?*

*Ana: Um, no they never said anything about that. All they said is that they're out in the fields, they go out and play, they take some milk out of them...*

*Meneka: What about if you don't drink milk?*

*Ana: Um, for me I got an NY because I had to write a project...*

*Meneka: Wait, what's an NY?*

*Ana: NY is Not Yet.*

*Meneka: Oh?*

*Ana: Because I wrote...we're supposed to write on milk and protein in milk and I wrote on SOY milk.*

*Meneka: So what happened? What did you do?*

*Ana: I didn't do anything about that...*

*Meneka: So your teacher...*

*Ana: I guess she doesn't respect that.*

This interaction between Ana and her teacher suggests that veganism is still misunderstood, and that accurate information is needed in schools. It is peculiar that students would learn about cow's milk in schools without a basic understanding of why cows produce milk to begin with (to feed their calves). Ana's situation also points to the oppressiveness of institutions, mirroring the plight of academics who fear personal or professional repercussions for challenging vivisection and other forms of institutionalized violence (Glasser & Roy, 2014, p. 168). Students also expressed the need for more education around food and nutrition:

*Sylvia: Parents and teachers that are like, that grew up with this idea that, like, this is the food pyramid and I don't know, it has dairy, it has meat, and if it doesn't, your kid's going to be malnourished, I think we need certain levels of education around that, like, I don't know, when I was in ninth grade they made us watch, [...] I don't remember which one it was but we watched, like, this vegetarian documentary even though my teacher wasn't even vegetarian as far as I know or anything, and, like, even just having stuff like that where kids are exposed to that, they can start making their own choices, especially when, like, in... I don't know, for me it was in ninth grade, I don't know about other kids if they had anything like that but, um, and something for parents you know, like having information.*

Sylvia's comment summarily encompasses the views of the students I spoke with; participants were less concerned about whether individual teachers were vegan or not, they simply wanted accurate information about nutrition and health. Two students said that their school had a nutrition unit where a vegan lifestyle was one module, and all students viewed this as a positive step that would be beneficial in all schools.

***Social studies.*** The students in my study had trouble recalling instances where nonhuman animals or veganism in connection to world issues were discussed in their social studies courses. Although many students believed that veganism was highly relevant in social studies as it links to food justice, environmental issues, and public health, these connections were not addressed in their schools. Most students remembered learning about the relationship that Indigenous Canadians had with nonhuman animals and the land, specifically citing the buffalo along with the three sisters as agricultural crops. However, students generally struggled to remember other discussions about nonhumans:

*Paige: [...] they talk about the domestication of animals used to plow the fields and whatever, and somehow, like, I had to do an assignment on it where they talk about, like, these animals....*

*Alina: I don't know but it's, like, Europe, like, a long time ago there were five animals that could be domesticated, which was, like, pigs, cows, chickens, it's something like that...*

*Paige: Yeah, I remember something about that...*

Learning about the domestication of particular nonhuman animals represents a highly anthropocentric way of understanding the relationship between humans, nonhumans, and the earth. Aside from issues of Eurocentrism that are at play (other nonhumans have been domesticated in nonwestern countries), assuming that



nonhumans are only relevant when they benefit humans erroneously positions humans as superior and undermines nonhuman cultures and relationships (Corman & Vandrovцова, 2014). Furthermore, the domestication of nonhuman animals was dependent upon emotional and physical violence and domination; the tools and tactics used on nonhumans served as a model for the subjugation of specific human groups throughout history (Patterson, 2002).

**English.** Students also had difficulty remembering whether books they encountered in English class contained nonhuman animals. I was surprised that none of the classic children's novels such as *Black Beauty* and *Charlotte's Web* were mentioned by my participants. Despite the plethora of early childhood literature featuring nonhuman animals (i.e. *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Stellaluna*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*), when I asked students to think back to their earliest years in elementary school, they did not recall any significant books about nonhumans:

*Sylvia: Well, the cat sits on the mat, you know [laughs].*

The memory of a nonhuman animal being used to teach basic literary skills suggests that for this group of students, other literature about nonhumans was either absent or not meaningful. It is also possible that students simply did not remember books that were read to them in elementary. When I asked students if they remembered "farm" animals in any early literature, they alluded to idea of books being used to socialize children to think about nonhumans in ways that are consistent with dominant social views:

*Sydney: Yeah, [...] it was always the positive, happy, farm life. That we all grow up to love.*

The idyllic pastoral imagery of small-scale farms is replicated in popular culture and the media through toys and television programs, emphasizing the inherent goodness of nonhuman animal agriculture. This picturesque imagery functions to protect children, who later become oblivious consumers, from the atrocities of industrial farming. As discussed in chapter 1, small-scale nonhuman animal farming is entangled in the same for-profit system as industrial farming, and therefore remains problematic. When thinking about nonhumans and veganism in English classes for upper grades, students noted that books generally focused on humans, and sometimes portrayed carnism as synonymous with health and strength:

*Jacob: Like, now that I think about it, and like, it's, I find that there's not, we were reading um, Death of a Salesman in English 30, and there's this one line, like, that Bernard, he's anemic, and it's meant to describe him as weak and that he doesn't eat enough meat...*

Stereotypically, Bernard is also not an athlete but is studious. In this case, the play assigned, as an explicit curricular document, reproduces social myths about veganism and establishes a binary between physical strength and intellectualism. As Ruby and Heine (2011) observe, the association between meat and manhood results in vegan or vegetarian males being perceived as more principled but less manly. Some students found that while English classes were not taught with nonhumans in mind, they were given space to examine their personal interests independently:

*Sylvia: I did a book report once, but it was on a book that I chose, called True Colors by Lucille something-or-other. And it was about this girl who I think she goes to a slaughterhouse and checks it out, and she's in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and she gets into this huge animal rights phase, and basically the entire book is talking about animal rights but from the perspective of this girl who's finally figuring everything out about it. But I did a book report on that, it was a choose your own book thing, so it wasn't the teacher, uh, that made me do it or anything.*

Sylvia explained that she had read the book *True Colors* when she was the same age as the protagonist, and used the novel to spur her involvement in animal liberation issues. Sylvia began to attend and organize protests because she related to the protagonist, and used the novel to help understand and cope with the stereotypical comments she encountered when interacting with her peers. Sylvia's experience emphasizes the importance of teachers providing students with opportunities to take ownership of their own learning and to use school as a means of further investigating personal interests and passions.

**Science.** The overt curriculum in science provided many iterations of tension for vegan students. Mirroring nonhumans in curricula more generally, the prescribed curriculum for science was interpreted by these students as incomplete in the ways that nonhumans were located in relation to humans and the earth. Materials and classroom discussions in science centered around environment, energy efficiency, dissection, ethics, and research projects.

*Environment.* When asked to think about how nonhuman animals are contextualized in studies about the environment, students began by stating that nonhumans were not widely considered in school discussions:

*Meneka: I'm thinking science would be logically where you would learn about it, but do you learn about the environmental effects of animals? Eating animals?*

*Maddie: Well we don't really talk about animals that much.*

*Alina: It's such a huge part of society, and we don't talk about it.*

The general absence of nonhuman animals signifies, via the null curriculum, the positioning of human activities and issues as central. The lens of anthropocentrism also appeared to extend into materials such as textbooks:

*Sylvia: [...] every time animals were brought up [in the textbook], it was more in the sense of money and how much money agriculture brings in, and what is Alberta's gross national product with agriculture, and what's BC's and let's compare those. But as far as environment goes, animals were not really mentioned, it was more like let's talk about wind power, let's talk about hydro power, let's talk about this and that...*

The inclusion of nonhumans as agricultural products to serve human ends further reinforces the human/nonhuman binary. Additionally, the emphasis on commercial power and other industries shifts attention away from individual thoughtfulness and accountability towards environmental protection. This prompted me to ask students about how schools seek to foster concrete action amongst students:

*Meneka: So thinking about elementary up until high school, what kinds of things do you learn in school about what you can do as a responsible citizen of the environment?*

*Alina: Take shorter showers...*

*Maddie: They always say to conserve energy, don't play on your device, go outside or something...*

*Sylvia: Carpool, take transit, stuff like that.*

*Michelle: I've not once heard, eat less meat is better for the environment...*

*Stephanie: Also, whenever they bring it up, like, personally I get so frustrated whenever they bring up the environment, and I remember being in science 10, and we were, like, doing some...like, it was a really short environmental unit after you finish the rest...and it was talking about, like,...buying a shower head and do this, and reduce a carbon footprint by driving this, and I was like crying inside the whole time, like, you guys don't know anything! I got so frustrated.*

*Sylvia: Yeah they just talk about sustainable energy and, like, it's dumb but I feel like they very clearly steer away from the obvious choice of just, like, not mass producing animals, you know? Um, but with my school we did like hydroelectric energy and dams and stuff like that, and this is what happens when you drive a car, you know...*

For most of the students in my study, the environmental impact of consuming nonhuman animals was just as relevant as the ethical concerns they had. While encouraging students to participate in daily actions in an effort to protect the environment is commendable, the suggestions students receive in schools are at best incomplete and at worst misguided. The non-human animal agriculture industry is responsible for more global environmental ills than any other industry,

including the transportation industry (Margulis 2003; Myers, 1992; Oppenlander, 2014; Steinfeld et al., 2006; United Nations Environment Programme, 2003), yet the focus of school seems to be on actions that have very little impact. As Stephanie and Michelle pointed out, the water footprint of individuals is influenced most substantially by diet. In a global water footprint study by Mekonnen and Hoekstra (2010), nonhuman animal products were found to have a significantly larger water footprint than crop products (p.5). This was true whether the meat and crops were compared per ton of product or per calorie. Researchers found that the water footprint for all animal-based protein was greater than that of plant products: the water footprint of beef was twenty times larger, and milk, eggs, and chicken meat were 1.5 times larger. The authors predict that the global “increase in the production and consumption of nonhuman animal products is likely to put further pressure on the globe’s freshwater resources (p.5), and recommend that “from a freshwater resource perspective, it is more efficient to obtain calories, protein and fat through crop products than animal products” (p.5). This research also resonates with classroom observations of students when studying food energy.

*Energy efficiency.* Based on the tasks they were given in class, students also noticed contradictions in how science programs addressed food energy efficiency:

*Jacob: There’s, like, one loophole everyone forgets about, and that’s how they teach us the rule of ten. They’re like, never mind!*

*Meneka: Wait, what?*

*Jacob: Oh, when you learn about how energy goes...*

*Paige: Like when energy gets lost as you go up...*

*Michelle: Oh, trophic levels.*

*Jacob and Paige: Yeah.*

*Jacob: ‘Cause, like, people are like, “oh we’re meant to eat animals and it doesn’t do much for the environment,” but like, if you eat plants you’re skipping all these energy*

*levels. You manage to conserve a lot of energy that way, and it's actually more environmentally friendly.*

*Paige: Yeah, every time something goes into the food chain...*

*Jacob: Yeah, it's like common sense, every time you like...*

*Paige: Yeah, to the power of ten, you like, lose energy...*

*Jacob: They like, do exercises with you and...*

*Paige: Like doing the math and stuff...*

*Jacob: And they're like, if there's one field and you're growing corn, how many fields could that feed? Versus if there's one field growing grass that feeds cows, how many people can you feed? So they teach you that! They teach you that it's good....so then you put it together that you can actually feed more people on a plant based diet, so like...*

*Paige: Yeah and then as soon as you put it on a test it's not real life [...], people are like, "I just want to pass this test!"*

*Alina: Like, we've done trophic levels and people just live in their little world.*

*Meneka: So when you do discuss trophic levels, does the teacher maybe make a point of saying, based on this theoretical knowledge, how can you apply that to your real life?*

*Stephanie: No*

*Jacob: No*

*Paige: Not really...they talk about pesticides going up the food chain or stuff like that...*

*Josh: Yeah there's just, like, all these problems about not being able to feed anybody and then you see like, get this simple rule of ten, and then you do the calculation in like five minutes and you're like "I solved it! I did it! I have solved world hunger, right here and now in five minutes!" and but then it's like...nobody acknowledges it.*

By addressing trophic levels only within the realm of the theoretical, the functional value of learning becomes transactional and the only concern is passing a test. As Paige, Alina, and Jacob mention, the disconnect between calculations on a worksheet and a wider global need for food justice (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011) suggests that frameworks of scholarship in high schools are fragmented rather than unified. By distancing new concepts, such as trophic levels, from their wider contexts, students are disempowered from making meaningful changes and alternative viewpoints (vegan positions) are more easily dismissed. The narrative of human dominance is also expressed through specific teaching and learning activities, such as dissection.

*Dissection.* In my investigation, all high school students articulated some degree of apprehension about dissection. For Alina, the linguistic positioning of nonhumans as mere objects in the conquest of human inquiry was especially troubling:

*Alina: Well I did the dissection the other day, I didn't participate but I was really mad because my teacher was like, "sheep are really dumb because they don't have as large of a cerebrum as humans do, that's why their cerebrum is so small is because they're dumb." She was like, "you can just grab a brain and then throw it in the garbage, and then once we're done with the eyes you can just throw them on top of the brains..." and I was like, oh my gosh, please have some respect...*

In this instance, nonhuman animal otherness is exemplified by the teacher's representation of sheep as unintelligent. Assuming a lack of intelligence facilitates and permits the dismemberment of sheep body parts as well as the unceremonious and haphazard discarding of those parts. As well, the teacher's instructions here highlight the nature of nonhuman lives as insignificant and disposable. The criterion that humans have developed and used to measure and categorize intelligence has ranged from measuring brain size to counting neurons (de Waal, 2016), and in this case cerebrum size. However, de Waal (2016) asserts that experiments designed to hierarchically rank animals have been consistently prejudiced in favour of humans, with an implicit motive to prove humanity's superiority. Instead, de Waal (2016) argues, those of us in the human community would strengthen our relationship with the nonhuman world by trying to understand how nonhumans surpass us, biologically and cognitively. For instance, species such as octopi can physically transform to camouflage into their environments, and many species outrank humans in memory and recognition tasks (de Waal, 2016; Westoll, 2011). The commodification of nonhumans in science

classrooms extended from the physical animals to the conceptual construction of nonhuman animals as tools to serve human ends:

*Meneka: Was there ever discussion about the ethics, or the sourcing of nonhuman animals?*

*Stephanie: We never discussed that...*

*Jacob: We did- in science, talked about the sourcing...*

*Paige: Yeah, I think?*

*Jacob: My teacher had talked about how they're bred in captivity and then bred for the specific purpose of killing, and yeah, so...*

*Paige: I've heard differently...*

*Jacob: Well, McSween told me that the supplier that she used for the frogs we dissected were, like, because this, this is like...*

*Paige: Oh, I don't know about frogs...I was thinking like sheep...*

*Jacob: Oh no, this was just frogs...*

*Paige: It might have been meat by-product...I'm not sure...I can't remember, like, I can't remember where they were from, but I don't think they were bred for the purpose...*

*Jacob: But the frogs, she said they were bred for the purpose of killing. And back then I wasn't really that involved with, like the ethics side of it, so I did the dissection. But, like, I um, now I just don't like the idea of any animal being used for the purpose of commodification, I don't think they're meant for that? To be a product really. It's kind of like, people go up in arms when humans are treated like objects, why should animals? But yeah there's...she kind of told us about that sourcing. Um, so it like, in a weird way, it sort of comforted people. They're like "Oh! They're not just taking these frogs from their homes and killing them!"*

*[Everyone laughs]*

*Jacob: So they [students] kind of liked it...but it's almost worse, because you're bringing life into the world just to end it.*

The lessons of science teachers here underscore the insignificance of nonhumans used in dissection; information about sourcing was either absent, glossed over, or acknowledged solely as a means to neutralize student empathy. Furthermore, Jacob's teacher was careful not to elaborate on the treatment of frogs bred specifically for supply companies. While Oakley's (2009) research indicates that frogs captured from their natural habitats are more frequently used in student dissections, frogs bred in captivity are not immune from mistreatment. As for-profit businesses, supply companies are under no moral obligation to treat their



nonhuman animal “products” respectfully (injured frogs are typically discarded, Oakley, 2009). Nonhuman animals supplied to classrooms suffer through every step leading up to their deaths, from their confinement and handling to transportation; the lab environment alone is extremely stressful (Physician’s Committee for Responsible Medicine, 2016; Sapontzis, 1995). As well, most frogs used in classroom dissections are killed in an alcohol solution prior to being killed, taking 15-20 minutes to die (Balcombe, 2000). This privileging of human observation and inquiry over a nonhuman’s entire lifetime of experiences exposes an overt speciesist message in science activities.

The overarching pedagogical purpose of dissecting nonhumans seemed to be unclear, as students who objected to dissection were not typically offered meaningful alternatives:

*Alina: Like, [the teacher] doesn’t know I’m vegan I don’t think, but, like, I talked to her and I said I don’t really want to do this, but she said, “you can go and you just don’t have to cut” basically...So, I like, watched but I don’t know, it was weird because everyone was, like, grossed out, and I wasn’t grossed out at all, I was just sad about it...*

*Meneka: So the option that was offered to you, it was...*

*Alina: It was basically do the same thing, just look at the pictures they took of it, or like, just watch so it wasn’t really another option. But I didn’t have to, like, cut or directly participate I guess. Because if you’re in the dissection group you like...*

*Stephanie: Yeah, you’re like put in groups and you each have a dissection thing. Like there’s at least two people in the group who don’t do anything.*

*Meneka: Oh okay, so your point is that the option that was offered to Alina was the equivalent of doing the same thing but just not being involved?*

*Stephanie: Yeah.*

As Alina and Stephanie note, the “alternative” offered to dissection was essentially to observe other students conducting the dissection. According to Oakley (2009), students who are uncomfortable with dissection and offered no equivalent alternatives must find their own coping mechanisms to address their discomfort (p.

62). "For educators," writes Oakley (2009), "this raises the question: Are these reactions or coping mechanisms appropriate for students to experience as a result of a science activity?" (p. 62). Other students in my study did recall that teachers verbally offered alternatives without being prompted to do so by students:

*Paige: I know at our school, bio...they in all the dissections that I've done since being vegan, and even before that, they offer, like, they've, the teachers have offered up the option of opting out, and doing a worksheet instead or, like, a booklet, or something like that, like, they've given us that without, like you don't have to ask...but some people who are even just sort of queasy, or don't want to do it for religious reasons or something like that, they don't have to do it, and they don't really question, like, why you don't want to do it, so that's been really nice. Um, so yeah I was able to just do worksheets and stuff like that instead. Um, I don't know, you're still in the room and it smells gross.*

Although Paige was satisfied with the alternative assignment she was provided with, the implicit message of a worksheet rather than a hands-on activity that more effectively mirrors an actual dissection (such as computer or rubber models) is dismissive of non-dominant perspectives. In Paige's case, the worksheet was provided as a consolation to all students who objected to dissection, but space was not provided for individual students to express and discuss their concerns. Therefore, the worksheet functioned as a mechanism to diminish opportunities to challenge the dissection activity. The commodification of nonhumans in science was also prevalent in applications beyond dissection:

*Jacob: I didn't take bio after, like, grade ten because ten was just general science and then I took physics, but there was something in physics that I kind of just had to do.*

*Meneka: What was it?*

*Jacob: Um, like, there's an electrostatics unit, and to charge it you need fur to do that. So, like, for some of the labs, you need to rub an animal hide against it, I don't know if there's any other material that could like mimic the process...there probably is...but, like, our school is old and these animal hides are probably like, 20 years old, and that was just like the only way that you could do the lab, like rub the animal fur on the ebonite rod. So you can't like ...like there's just nothing you can really do. So, like, I didn't really touch the hide or anything, which, like that's as far as I could go really*

*with people and then they'd just, like, do it for me or something...but even then I'm like...it doesn't make a difference because they're purchased 20 years ago or something, but I'm like, could we not purchase something else? Something a little more sustainable, and I bet synthetic would probably be cheaper, so I don't know...*

*Meneka: So you didn't actually learn alternatives?*

*Jacob: No, no we didn't learn alternatives. Because there's just, like, charging a rod to repel a pith ball or something.*

Again, the physical transformation and distancing of a live nonhuman animal from the object to be “used” in scientific inquiry points to a need to obfuscate nonhumans from their contexts. Dislocating the nonhuman animal from their original state as a live being permits humans to engage in activities that would be difficult to partake in if the nonhuman’s history and narrative as a live being were known. Additionally, the nonhuman fur in Jacob’s class was framed as unobjectionable because it was old and rooted in tradition. By depending upon Jacob’s willingness to pick his proverbial battles, the prescribed curriculum in this instance enables nonhuman exploitation as a normative framework. The production and consumption of fur, along with the ethical and environmental repercussions of the fur industry are left unquestioned. The students in my study also observed that general discussions in science about ethics were also highly anthropocentric.

*Ethics.* In science classrooms, learning about human and nonhuman ethics was either absent or primarily centered upon the ultimate benefit to humans:

*Paige: We very briefly discussed ethics in bio when we were talking about, like, Dolly the sheep and cloning, but it...it's kind of interesting because that discussion of ethics mostly just comes back to how it would effect humans, and how it would be unethical if we were to start cloning humans, you know.*

*Jacob: But it's okay for a sheep!*

*[Laughter]*

*Stephanie: Dolly the sheep, we had the exact same discussion, my teacher, like, I don't know what you guys did, but I remember something about, like, cloning human organs instead of animals, the transgenic animals or I don't know what he was saying, but he personally thought this should totally be a thing, because if we already kill animals for*

*fur and food, then why can't we kill them for organs to benefit us? Like me and Erica...[exchanges a knowing glance with Erica]*

*Michelle: It's just frustrating because no one seems to CARE about the animal. No one seems to see that. So even if teachers were to bring up, like, ethics and the environment, and the animals, I just feel like no one would care...*

*Jacob: No one really cares when you tell them anyway. They're just like, [that's] nice, and then they let it go. They're like, "good for you!" that's, like, the good response, where they give you a thumbs up and then never talk to you again.*

*[Laughter]*

In the example above, both Paige and Stephanie's teachers legitimize the commodification of nonhumans by emphasizing the value to humans. Through a largely capitalist rationale of de-individualizing nonhumans into a collective economic unit, ideas that are unacceptable for humans become morally acceptable for nonhumans. Both teachers reinforce the socialization process of categorizing certain species as predestined for human consumption and "use," rendering the consent, experience, and treatment of nonhumans invalid. As well, the frustrations articulated by students about the general apathy about nonhumans in schools suggest a privileging of speciesist viewpoints in the school environment. This dominant perspective was maintained in elementary science projects.

*Research projects.* Both high school students and elementary students recalled that nonhuman animal research projects were common in lower grades, but observed that assumptions about species were apparent before even beginning the research:

*Maddie: Well, our, um class we've done this a couple times, but we did it in grade three and now we're doing it again this year. You, like, can pick an animal or, I did an animal, I did the fox, and you could pick a plant or you could pick an insect. And you have to do all this, this huge research on it, what it eats, if it's a protected animal or not, but um....*

*Sam: Yeah, we did this too when the author Cathy Beveridge came in, and we were like, seeing all these catch phrases for animal rights, and it was a species goes extinct every 60 seconds or something, and there was a bunch of stuff about animals and how they're getting treated bad, and we had to do a project and say the good stuff about the animal, and the bad stuff, why what's happening to them...*

*Paige: That's actually interesting because I remember doing those projects and it was lit when you got to do those projects, like if you got to do an animal, that was the best project, and I, like, don't recall anyone picking a farm animal, or even when I was younger I was so upset, I had encyclopedias this big that were just animal encyclopedias, with stuff about animal biology, and I don't remember ever reading about any farm animals, like it was always more exotic animals and things like that.*

*Meneka: Did any of you learn about the intelligence of nonhuman farm animals? Like did you learn about pigs and their families, or cows?*

*Jacob: We just learned they're inferior. That's pretty much it.*

*Piaget: You don't learn anything about farm animals.*

*Jacob: I mean, from birth you're meant to think that anything that's not human is inferior. There's nothing that opposes that judgment, ever. So the assumption that animals are inferior to us is just maintained. There's nothing to disprove it, there's nothing to put any value to life, we just think they're inferior to us.*

*Michelle: Anything that I found out about the intelligence of farm animals has been research that I've done on my own.*

*Maddie: [We] learned about, like, animals that live in ecosystems, and about how they live, [but] they totally like cut out all the farm animals, like we never learn about that, that farm animals have families, we never talked anything about that. Whenever we have, like, an animal research project, we have this list that we have to choose from. So, you didn't get to choose your own animal, you had to choose something on the list, so there weren't any farm animals, there was, like, the octopus, stuff you would never actually see in Alberta, just random animals, like, why do I need to learn about this? I kind of want to learn about the animals that are here.*

*Michelle: Yeah we were always told to pick something like exotic.*

*Jacob: Or wild, they were, like, wild animals, because they wanted you to learn about how like...*

*Paige: And you couldn't do a pet either.*

*Jacob: Because they want you to learn about, like, how they build dens...*

*Paige: Yeah how they interact with their environment.*

*Jacob: Not, like, my dog lives in my house. So they want you to learn about ...they wanted me to talk about their habitat, like habitat was a big thing...*

*Paige: So they don't want, like, a habitat on a farm.*

*Josh: [laughs] Yeah.*

*Paige: Even though those animals live outside of a farm.*

*Jacob: Yeah, like everything has a habitat, but oh no, not that!*

*Paige: Like what, they exist without humans? Imagine!*

The overt exclusion of "farm" nonhuman animals through imposing conditions on student research immediately conveys a hierarchical message. The removal of "farm" nonhuman animals from the category of "animal" combined with the clear understanding that these "others" are not human erases them from the sphere of

learning and denies the possibility of establishing connections with them. Alienating “farm” nonhuman animals results in a failure to acknowledge their position within the definition of “animal” and reinforces their status as commodities. As Paige and Jacob note, the emphasis on ecosystem, habitat, and environment maintains the assumption of “farm” nonhuman animal dependence on humans and implies that these species lack the capacity to survive independently. While selective breeding over generations has resulted in “farm” nonhuman animals who possess massive quantities of flesh on weak, underdeveloped skeletons, instinctual behaviours persist. Despite being raised in confinement, pigs who are provided with adequate space and resources automatically revert back to natural behaviours such as cooperatively building communal nests, walking several meters before eliminating, rooting, and developing complex social relationships (Rollin, 1995, p. 74-75). Despite being far removed from nature for much of their lives, cows, chickens, ducks, and turkeys similarly adopt intuitive lifestyles in herds or communities when they are rehomed to sanctuaries.

**The null curriculum.** In addition to the overt messages that students received through the written or prescribed curriculum, students recognized that certain subjects were not discussed in schools. In this investigation, the null curriculum, or information that is intentionally excluded was reflected in three main ways: through classroom discussions and activities, general discussions with peers, and field trips.

**Classroom.** Students noticed that nonhuman animals were largely absent from most discussions and activities from elementary through junior high. They also observed that supplementary classroom materials mirrored this exclusion:

*Meneka: When you look at your textbooks that you've used in science or other classes, do you feel like those textbooks are accurate in their representation of the environment and animals?*

*Stephanie: No.*

*Michelle: It's like they purposely make something up.*

*Stephanie: Yeah when they talk about the environment and stuff...they miss out the dairy and meat industry...*

Michelle and Stephanie's statements highlight the sterility of the classroom; the avoidance of particularly "messy" subjects such as nonhuman animal agriculture mirrors the social distancing of nonhuman animal killing. The complete segregation and removal of nonhumans from both mainstream and scholarly discourse assists in allowing the meat and related industries to remain socially invisible and evade scrutiny. Michelle's theory that textbooks are intentionally inaccurate does not seem far-fetched considering the great lengths schools go to in order to protect powerful industries:

*Meneka: Do you think that people in general, like in the school system, do they even know how it works from a very basic standpoint? Like, that a cow needs to be pregnant to be milked...?*

*Everyone: No!*

*Sylvia: No! Holy cow, [...] there's this one guy, I kid you not, I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and another 10<sup>th</sup> grader was, like, talking to me, they're like, but don't you know their udders explode if they don't get milked? And I was like, do you think that, like, a woman who's breast feeding, do her breasts explode if she doesn't get, if she doesn't feed her baby? Like, obviously not! Like, it's obviously uncomfortable for the cow, but if they have the calf, that was not taken away from them, then you know, nature normally...do you think that way back before humans the udders were just, like, exploding everywhere? Like, they have no concept of it...*

*Paige: I feel like so many people are so surprised when you tell them that cows only produce milk when they're pregnant. Like they've never heard that before, they're shocked.*

Students overwhelmingly agreed that very basic information about how food derived from nonhumans is not accurately discussed in schools. Some students also pointed out the hypocrisy of school milk programs, which encourage milk consumption without explaining to students that male calves must be killed in the dairy industry:

*Sam: So when they take the milk, there's no milk left for the babies...*

*Maddie: And then they just kill the babies...*

*Meneka: When you're learning about milk in health class do you learn about what happens do baby calves?*

*Ana: Well the guide paper things, they say things like they keep the female cows for more milk and let them wander around and stuff, but then for the males um, I don't remember what they said about the males, I don't think they mentioned them...*

The deliberate avoidance of nonhumans as instruments of food production in learning materials helps the dairy industry retain a privileged position in schools. Moreover, children from elementary and into adulthood learn that certain nonhuman animals are so insignificant that despite literally ingesting them, their narratives and histories are irrelevant. This process nourishes the myth of human superiority and extinguishes the possibility for students to critically analyze the implications of industries that depend on nonhuman exploitation. For these students, discussions with peers also reflected a general lack of knowledge about food systems.

**Peer discussions.** The presence of missing information was also reflected in conversations between peers:

*Jacob: There's all these people too, like, I feel like... I hardcore believe that almonds have been targeted. [Laughs.] Because everyone's like, "boycott almonds!" And I'm like, do you know how much water goes into meat and dairy and all these things, and like, dairy industries are corrupt. Like that is no secret, like even on the news they don't even hide that. They're like, "the dairy industries are mad about milk consumption nation wide has gone down by five percent and they want to stop the trade deal to*



*import foreign cheese,"...they go, like, nuts if their industry is threatened even a little bit, and nobody knows how much water goes into milk, or meat, and, like, I even, like, before I watched Cowspiracy, I was like, "I'm not going to boycott almonds." But then I watched this, and I was, like, I don't care about almonds! I'm going to eat all the almonds I want because it's nothing compared to eating a hamburger or drinking a glass of milk...I'm like, the world can handle almonds...*

*Alina: Plus almond milk is, like, really diluted it's not, like, pure almonds. It's not like meat at all.*

*Stephanie: When I was in California, my friend who wants to be some sort of environmentalist, anyway, we were talking about, and this was when California was worried about the drought, but when it was, everyone was freaking out about it, and almonds and how they're shutting down almond production facilities in California to help the drought and stuff, and she was like "oh my god, like, the almonds!" and I was trying to explain to her, like, because the only way you can get to people who don't really know is to try to educate them, like, without casually slapping it on them...but she made the argument, she was like, "but that's on a different scale, like when you eat almonds, you don't eat just one almond at a time you eat like a TON of almonds at a time..."*

*Jacob: But a handful of almonds isn't even equivalent to, like, one hamburger.*

*Everyone: No, not at all!*

*Jacob: I saw this thing where it was a single patty from MacDonald's and I think it was equivalent to two or three months of showering, like, straight. Like, without turning off the tap, whereas one almond everyone's flipping out over how it's two gallons of water for an almond, and it's like even if you take handfuls of almonds, that's not two months of showering, right?*

The willingness of classmates to boycott almonds without examining other destructive industries suggests that the messages of nonhuman animal consumption are deeply rooted and arranged strategically to deflect attention to other areas. The failure of peers to address the water consumption of meat and dairy indicates a conflict with the metanarrative of milk and meat as inherently good. As well, snubbing almonds under the rhetoric of environmentalism allows carnists to justify their existing habits while maintaining a self-congratulatory position as accountable and responsible. The null curriculum was also prevalent in class field trips.

**Field trips.** The students in my focus groups had all attended some variation of a zoo at some point between elementary and high school. Glaringly, none of the

students had ever visited a nonhuman animal sanctuary or wildlife rehabilitation center at any point for a class or school initiated trip. In some cases, the pedagogical purpose of the trip seemed unclear to students (as well as to me):

*Maddie: Like we, for a school field trip we went to the cobs farm maze, and they have this one section on the three little pigs, and they actually have three pigs there, and it's just like this tiny area and they have to go over to this small little house...*

*Meneka: Sorry, with the pig section was it a room that they were in, or?*

*Maddie: No...*

*Sam: It was a fence.*

*Meneka: Like a fenced off area?*

*Maddie: Yeah, it was just a tiny little fenced off area.*

*Sam: And it was, like, a wood fence, hay everywhere, just like, three little shelters.*

*Meneka: What did the shelters look like?*

*Maddie: Well they were supposed to look like the three little pigs, so it was like one was, like, hay, one was brick, one was sticks.*

*Sam: And then there were tomatoes that you could feed the pigs. So...*

*Jacob: [laughs]*

*Sam: I don't know why there were tomatoes...*

*Meneka: Was this a class field trip?*

*Maddie: Yeah it was a class field trip, and it was like this, it was a really tiny area, they were all kind of clumped together...*

*Meneka: I don't get why, was the point of it that your class would learn that that's how pigs are?*

*Maddie: No, it was for decoration, for us to see....it didn't even smell good!*

*Sam: Yeah it smelled nasty. Like, I didn't even go on her field trip but I went another time [...], and it was, like, really small, like the size of this room or smaller.*

*Maddie: It was NOT the size of this room, it was like maybe the size of these two tables. In the area...like they were normal size pigs, and they were just like...they didn't even build their own home, they have this cardboard home with this imprint. It's for, like, pictures or something? And then there's another thing right beside it that was not in the area, like the enclosed area but it was right in front of the fence, you know those cardboards that you can put your face in?*

*Paige: Oh no...Yeah.*

*Maddie: Like the big bad wolf? So you're supposed to be the big bad wolf or something.*

Despite not receiving any formal information about pig behaviour, sentience, or natural environments, students intuited the bizarreness of the set-up. Aside from recognizing that the level of confinement was disproportionately small relative to the size of the pigs, Maddie understood that the three "houses" did not respect the

pigs' needs or natures. Although the observation of the pigs could vaguely be considered educational, the other characteristics of the display are clear indicators of entertainment, negating any meaningful learning about human and nonhuman relationships. The tomatoes, for instance, primarily locate the pigs as a spectacle to serve the human gaze. Similarly, the wolf cutouts and houses reduce the pigs to caricatures invented by humans and deny them agency as individuals who are complex and intelligent.

Students also noted that zoos were not ideal in providing a complete picture about nonhuman animals:

*Ana: Umm, for me, they have these little poster things, like, these little things just standing there, which you can read from, but you don't see much of [the animals], they just walk slowly, they don't run around looking for prey and all that.*

*Sylvia: I remember with my school field trip to the zoo we had these little papers, I remember because I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and it felt kind of juvenile because we had to do a little drawing of the animal once we saw it, and then um, I don't know, write down three facts or something from the sheet, um, but yeah that was kind of it, it was more an excuse to like, "let's get the kids out of the school and do something fun!"*

For Ana and Sylvia, the primary learning opportunities were derived from zoo signs because nonhuman animals were either absent or their behaviour was clearly representative of a captive, rather than natural environment. However, as Fogelberg (2014) asserts, zoo signs can authoritatively communicate misinformation rather than the guidance that patrons expect. In her analysis of zoo signs, Fogelberg (2014) discovered that zoo signs are frequently inaccurate, vague, or outdated, blurring their credibility as teaching tools (p. 789). Furthermore, the anonymous authorship and lack of references on zoo signs (p. 793) elevates their authoritative status and permits the dissemination of inaccurate information without consequence. Similarly, Pedersen (2010) problematizes zoos in great

depth, suggesting that zoos replicate Foucauldian notions of surveillance, reproduce colonial fascinations with the “exotic,” construe nonhuman behavior as performance, and contradictorily serve nonhumans as food while professing to conserve them. The students I spoke with were quick to point out that learning about nonhumans is not necessarily dependent upon zoos:

*Sylvia: I think that there's always these arguments with people that are like, think that zoos are good for like protecting animals, and breeding them and whatever, but to me that only makes sense when it's animal sanctuaries, trained professionals who know what they're getting into when they take care of animals, and it's actually taking care of them and not using them for profit in the sense, and I think also, the difference between animal sanctuaries and zoos is that zoos in, like, for example in the Calgary zoo I'm pretty sure we have penguins and giraffes and stuff, when penguins and giraffes are not made to live in Canada really...so then, with sanctuaries they keep the animals there, in the habitat where they're supposed to be.*

*Meneka: I think besides the educational value, the argument is zoos are supposed to be fun for kids.*

*Sylvia: I can think of a lot of things that are a lot of fun and potentially cheaper, but...*

*Meneka: What would you do instead?*

*Sylvia: Well, I mean if you had to learn about, like, nature and animals and whatever, I think that you can visit nature conservatories, you can go camping, I've gone on class camping trips, those are the best, those kind of skills or whatever, but I guess those are kind of expensive... There's still television. There's like planet earth and blue planet, like I could watch that for days...*

As for-profit institutions designed to maximize traffic and income, zoos were generally regarded by the students as unnecessary. As Sylvia notes, the alternatives to zoos fill in the gaps that zoos leave unaddressed. Wildlife conservation facilities actually aim to release nonhumans back to their original environments, and television programs or films more accurately represent nonhuman behaviour in the wild. Sanctuaries are also more salient examples of organizations working to save and better the lives of nonhuman animals, as they are generally run through volunteers and donations. Sanctuaries also highlight the omission of particular species from zoos, and provide opportunities for students to consider the

relationship between humans and nonhumans without objectifying their bodies or behaviour.

**The hidden curriculum.** The students in my study received messages not only through planned activities and intentionally excluded subject matter, but also through the unintended values communicated through the implicit/hidden curriculum. These values were transmitted through a climate of normalized violence, food availability in schools, and the suppression of vegan discourse.

**Normalized violence.** In discussions with peers, it was evident that vegan students were more aware of casual violence towards nonhumans than other students seemed to be:

*Maddie: We were walking home with Sam's friend, and we saw gophers, his name's Justin, and he was just like, "awww, too bad I don't have my gun with me!"...it's like he would have shot him! We weren't even vegan at that time...*

*Meneka: So how old is that kid, Justin?*

*Sam: He's in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.*

*Meneka: So he's pretty young.*

*Maddie: He's 12.*

*Sam: And he's getting a cross-bow from his grandpa.*

*Meneka: That's interesting, that's pretty violent language to say that I'm going to shoot that gopher...so do adults not find it bizarre when children use violent language towards nonhuman animals?*

*Jacob: Not really, like I feel like our parents do too, like if there's a bird squaking outside they'll be like, "how much would I love to kill that bird," and it's like... I don't...*

*Stephanie: Well I was kind of raised like that...I grew up, well my dad lives outside of Taber in the middle of nowhere, and when I was little I used to go out there, and his brother used to breed all of his cattle and stuff, we could um, what's it called, brand them, so I actually helped them brand the cows and stuff, and I saw...*

*Meneka: How was that?*

*Stephanie: It was fine. At the time. I thought it was fine.*

*Sylvia: There was this girl at work who's like, can you take my shift, I need to brand the cattle at my farm, and I was like, oh god...*

*Stephanie: That's why I feel bad blaming especially kids for doing that, and then going to eat meat, because I was one of them...it's just, at the time I was so disconnected that the separation of physically eating them...but actually I was witnessing, like I even saw my dad whipping them and trying to get them to...*

*Sam: Same with horses, people are saying oh it's natural for the horse to get whipped.*

*Meneka: Really? People say that?*

*Sam: Well, I've seen people say it, I've heard people say it, yeah, but when people are like trying to get their horses to move...they like, the spike boots...*

*Stephanie: Spurs.*

*Sam: Spurs, yeah. Like...*

*Sylvia: My friend was into horse jumping for a while and they had these, you put a bit in a horse's mouth to hold the reigns or whatever, and there was this bit that, like, it would, like, basically if you pulled hard enough if the horse was misbehaving, then the, the spinny roly thing inside the bit would get stuck on their tongue, and make it more painful for them, and it was just a normal thing for my friend, and she was like showing it to me and saying this is a cherry bit, and this is how it works right...ummm yeah.*

Corman and Vandrovcova (2014) write, “harm enacted through objectification and exploitation is not only physical but also psychological and emotional” (p. 151). For vegan students, the remarks by peers and adults reflect a culture of human supremacy, where the injury of nonhumans for various purposes and under a range of circumstances is considered humorous, socially acceptable, or beneficial for humans. The lighthearted dialogue taken up by peers linguistically contrasts the violent content of the messages and diminishes the gravity of nonhuman exploitation. This commonplace linguistic othering of nonhumans implicitly reinforces social expectations that privilege human feelings over nonhuman lives. As Stephanie and Paige (below) point out, individual students are largely unaware of the gradual socialization processes that distance humans from nonhumans:

*Paige: Honestly, when I ate meat at the time, I did not think I was partaking in the appreciation of animals, like I would not even go that far to be like, I was drinking milk and being, like, oh yes, this smiling cow on the label, like I wasn't even, I was barely even associating it with a cow, it was just an entity that was very separate from animals, whatsoever, but when it was, like, you knew it came from a cow and stuff, but it wasn't anything you gave a second thought to because it was so normalized, kind of, which is messed up.*

While some students theorized that nonhuman exploitation is sometimes socially justified through a lens of nonhuman animal appreciation or respect, Paige opined

that the existence of nonhumans is often fully erased from the “product” being consumed, maintaining the position of nonhumans as absent referents (Adams, 1990). The consumption of nonhuman “products” is made tolerable by not only the linguistic but also the conceptual distancing of nonhumans as separate from food. In addition to the normalization of violence through peer conversations, vegan students were aware of particular messages being sent through the availability of food in schools.

***Cafeterias and food availability.*** Nearly all students in my study stated that they typically brought their own food for lunch, stating that cafeteria food for vegan students was inadequate. One student, who attends an alternative public high school said that her school was accommodating on the days she stayed for lunch. When I asked students what they did if they forgot their lunch, elementary students stated that they would receive a granola bar or would call their parents. High school students would leave the school and find options within walking distance or drive to a restaurant with vegan options. Most students avoided the cafeteria altogether:

*Erica: I don't think we have anything vegan in our cafeteria? Well they have a rotating thing based on the day, it's usually some pasta with some really sketchy sauce, or um, like a meat...of some sort, but they all look the same...um, and the meat could be a hot dog or....but in our vending machine we have cliff bars, but they usually run out fast, because whenever I walk by they're gone...*

*Paige: Um, I don't even ....I never get food from our cafeteria, but I know they have, like, things that you can buy...like a little thing of carrots and celery...and like ranch dip...or like apple slices or something like that...*

The limited vegan options in cafeterias reflects a wider school environment that unintentionally teaches students that certain foods and viewpoints are unimportant. The lack of vegan food choices also positions the cafeteria as a site where oppressive practices intersect: the literal nonhuman animal bodies on the menu are rooted in

physical violence and exploitation, while the absence of plant foods excludes vegans from the discourse and the space. This marginalization of vegans also extended to extracurricular school activities:

*Erica: And then for a lot of clubs and stuff, they order pizza. And I'm pretty sure they don't even get vegetarian pizza.*

*Jacob: It's like Hawaiian, like disgusting pizza.*

*[Everyone laughs]*

*Maddie: Our class this year just entered this contest, and we won some money from it, so we're going to have this huge pizza party, and I don't really know...because I contributed my extra time for it, but then, I don't want to eat all this meat right...*

To Erica and Maddie, programs outside the curricular framework operated in conjunction with the same assumptions of “normative” eating as other areas within the school environment. While groups as a whole benefited from the ideas and work contributed by vegan students, these students were not socially recognized or validated alongside their peers. Unintentionally, these activities also convey an association between certain foods and celebration, suggesting that unconventional foods cannot be celebratory or exciting. As well, the use of food as an extrinsic reward displaces the function of food as a source of sustenance and nutrition. Despite citing ethics and environment as primary motivators in the decision to be vegan, most students in my study were also concerned about the health and nutrition messages sent through school food programs:

*Ana: It sucks because, like, we have this thing where every Tuesday or Wednesday we get these different snacks. And, like, this time they had pepperoni sticks, and then this other time, I think it was last week, we had these rice crackers and everyone was like “oh you can't have that!”*

*Meneka: Why did they think you couldn't have it?*

*Ana: Well because, um, one of them uh, had the cheddar cheese on it and the other one was original.*

*Meneka: What is that?*

*Maddie: It's just, like, bright powder that they put on, like whey powder or something, like not actually the real cheese.*



*Meneka: Oh okay so you're saying that when kids are getting meat, dairy, or eggs, they're not even getting, they're getting highly processed meat, dairy, and eggs maybe. Is that something you agree with when you look around at what other kids are eating?*  
*Sam: Definitely.*

For Ana, the interaction with classmates about food (provided by the school) reveals multiple layers of meaning. The surveillance and policing of non-dominant viewpoints enacts power and employs a sense of control over the food choices of others. The statement by Ana's classmate assumes that Ana is incapable of making her own decisions about what to eat, and positions the dominant viewpoint as a paternalistic authority. This authority is further carried out through the distribution of food that is assumed to be universally consumable. There are also colonial implications of circulating dairy products in schools that are ethnically diverse. The majority of people of colour and indigenous populations are lactose intolerant (Ornelas, 2014) and do not have a tradition of cow's milk consumption. Cow's milk, and its associations with health, embodies a Eurocentric conception of nutrition that is not compatible with the global norm. School milk programs have historically been attached to the notion of perfection, connecting the development of children with the development of nations. The inherent "perfection" of cow's milk was emblematic not only of the supposed nutritional qualities of the drink, but also of the perfectability of bodies and the superiority of specific bodies (DuPois, 2002). This positions bodies that cannot produce lactose as "deficient" and implicitly implies that children who do not adopt Western dietary norms as weaker (DuPuis, Harrison, & Goodman, 2011). Thus, the cheese crackers handed out in Ana's school symbolically communicate the power of the West to define social dietary norms and

promote a homogenization of diets. As some students pointed out, serving plants rather than nonhuman animals would make food accessible for everyone:

*Stephanie: It's sort of like, it's sort of backwards too...just like an environment where you're trying to learn and thrive...and then they think the only thing we want to eat is chips...like, greasy stuff that does the opposite for [you], it's just weird, and also if you only provide the healthy stuff, they're going to have, it sounds bad, but they're going to have no other choice but to eat it...so it doesn't really matter if they don't like it, which is not true, if that's what you're serving, that's what they'll eat.*

*Alina: At my school, like once in a while, I'll eat watermelon or something like that and it's not...it's like once a week or once every two weeks or something, and it goes so fast.*

Stephanie and Alina's comments suggest that learning environments could be improved through better nutrition and understandings about food production.

While Stephanie argued for an entirely vegan cafeteria, other students suggested that a more moderate approach would be beneficial for incremental change:

*Sylvia: I think just vegan options. There aren't any. There's not, like, vegan options for MEALS at [my school]. Unless you're getting your little carrot stick thing or your chips, not a meal, so in my opinion just like having something where it's like, if you want you can replace the meat with tofu, or if you want you can take off all the meat altogether, or just expanding stuff, like, there's lots of stuff that's accidentally vegan, like peanut butter sandwiches or whatever...it doesn't have to be, like, super weird and stuff, so in my opinion that could be a thing that could help battle that, and I also think small steps are necessary, so you could start with a couple of vegan dishes, and vegetarian dishes...*

*Michelle: And you don't have to advertise them as vegan.*

*Sylvia: Yeah, just advertise them as hummus and pita.*

For Sylvia and Michelle, being accommodated through school cafeterias would have been a sufficient compromise. Sylvia's suggestion of incorporating some plant based meals into existing cafeteria menus not only includes vegans, but provides all students with more opportunities to diversify their diets, incorporate more plants into their meals, and develop reflexive habits about food. In addition to receiving unintentionally exclusionary messages through cafeterias, students felt that vegan perspectives were implicitly suppressed.

**Repression of vegan students.** In addition to vegan ideas being excluded across multiple curricular areas, students as individuals felt as if they needed to monitor their behaviour to avoid confrontation:

*Alina: I'm not very good at like, words. Like I don't want to start a fight....A lot of the time I don't say stuff because I don't want to like give veganism a bad name or like, I don't tell people right away because I don't want people to think "oh you told me in the first five minutes of me meeting you."*

*Jacob: [laughs] Yeah it's just...*

*Alina: So I just try to avoid it...kind of...but like, I don't know most of my friends are really good about it, they appreciate it and think it's good, but it's adults I guess.*

*Stephanie: I just sort of try to be sort of low key with it, [...] like in the beginning I was more announy with it, but now I just try to be more low-key and I think the biggest way to spread anything positive about veganism is to just be, like, an example of like, good health and being compassionate and everything, and we talked about this before but diet and everything is so personal and they feel attacked really easily when it comes to diet...*

*Anita: Just, like, randomly, with veganism and certain other things like homeopathy and stuff like that people just get unreasonably angry about it, which is, like, okay, well um, that's fine, get pissed for no reason [laughs] like, I don't know, I think that definitely people are like...I've definitely had some people explode, and they're, like, you think you're better and whatever, stuff like that, and it's like no, I'm just not going to eat the pepperoni and the cheese and just have this salad...*

*Stephanie: Even just, I don't know, there's no point in arguing...*

*Meneka: Isn't that kind of problematic? Don't you feel like that's kind of silencing the vegan viewpoint?*

*Sylvia: Totally, but it's such a battle! Between, like, do I want to be a crazy vegan or do I just want to not get into an argument today and like....it's crazy vegan or you're just getting into a pointless argument that you know you're not going to win anyway, right?*

*Stephanie: People think, like, by saying you're vegan, like even if it comes up in a conversation, you're automatically trying to force them to become vegan...*

*Sylvia: Yeah*

*Stephanie: Or it's like, oh! There's this thing I saw online where it was, like, why is it that vegans are trying to impose their beliefs on people, and it's not the other way around, meanwhile there's posters and everything around, like it's propaganda from the meat industry, but when we try to look at it from a different view-*

*Sylvia: Educate?*

*Stephanie: Yeah from an educational standpoint...*

*Meneka: It seems to me, from what I'm hearing from all of you is that veganism or the idea of veganism or the idea of a vegan is really only acceptable if it's silent and the veganism is hidden.*

*Sylvia: Totally.*

*Stephanie: Yeah.*

*Jacob: Yeah, one hundred percent.*

*Stephanie: Humans are confusing...*

These micro interactions demonstrate how over time, individual students decided that remaining silent and passive in their positions would be more socially acceptable than openly declaring their viewpoints. By classifying vegans as stereotypical “others,” carnists are able to uphold a position of power rather than engage in a shared dialogue that might destabilize the foundations of their beliefs. The carnistic gaze functions to stigmatize and segregate vegans from institutional and social constructions of normality, further articulating the dimensions of power that subjugate non-dominant perspectives. Furthermore, the acceptance of responsibility from vegans to diffuse confrontational situations allows speciesist ideologies to persist as accepted values.

Throughout this study, repression was also expressed emotionally and academically. A salient and common unifying thread amongst the students I interviewed was the immense frustration about being unable to voice feelings. After numerous encounters with other students and adults at their schools, most students quickly recognized that their feelings and emotions would be dismissed or ignored. In some cases, students did voice feelings, only to be unheard by teachers or mocked by peers, while in other situations, students simply remained silent (ie “crying inside”) because they realized their efforts to be heard would be futile. Some students occasionally felt apprehension about the possible consequences of parents and teachers reading this study, requesting that I “strike that name” or in one case stating “I’m a little nervous, actually, to talk about her with this tape recorder on...”

These anxieties reflect a familiarity with being disciplined for challenging dominant discourses.

Students also felt repressed academically, by both the everyday interactions with classmates and teachers, but also by planned curricular structures (textbooks, learning guides, lesson plans). In classroom discussions, students were often knowledgeable about maintaining health on a vegan diet, the environmental impact of nonhuman agriculture, and the ethical implications of nonhuman consumption. However, for these students, there was little space to express this knowledge without, again, being silenced by peers or teachers. In some cases, academic consequences (such as lower grades on assignments that discussed vegan ideas) made students question bringing up these topics in the future. Even when teachers were supportive of individual student interests in veganism, like the teacher who encouraged Sylvia to read about animal rights, there seemed to be a general resistance to discussing these ideas with classrooms as a whole. This evasion from acknowledging the impact of nonhuman agriculture on everyone was also echoed in textbooks and other learning materials. Students felt that textbooks were often inaccurate or outdated in their discussions of environmental and nonhuman issues, but students did not feel that textbooks could be questioned or challenged. In this way, the authority of particular symbols of teaching seemed to surpass student expertise in particular areas and prevented students from intervening or speaking back to curriculum.

## **Surprising Findings**

The most unexpected finding, for me, was the difference between elementary school and higher grades. My conceptualization of elementary school was overly romanticized and idyllic, so I had initially assumed that peers and teachers would be more understanding and open to veganism. However, this research suggests that younger students are often under the greatest scrutiny from both other children and adults. Classmates and teammates more frequently ostracized the younger participants in my study, primarily because conformity seemed to be more accepted and privileged. Additionally, adults seemed to assume that veganism was incompatible with growth and strength in earlier years. Receiving these difficult messages from multiple sources meant that elementary students occupied a space of tension and conflict during a significant period for identity formation. I had also underestimated how knowledgeable and well-informed my participants were. In the many conversations I had with this group, the depth of information that they retained and referred to in casual conversations was surprising to me. Many students were able to name specific nutrients or toxins in various foods, cite specific studies, and recite statistics to support their positions. This proficiency with articulating information likely developed over time as students became more confident in discussing veganism openly. I was also surprised by how naturally students seemed to discuss vegan issues through an intersectional lens. While these participants did not actually use the term “intersectionality,” they expressed an understanding of how human and animal liberation are entangled. This awareness of the interconnected nature of social justice issues was significant to me because

many adult activists and strong voices in the mainstream vegan movement do not understand these links. Finally, I was surprised by the contrast between supportive and unsupportive teachers. The level of resistance and mistrust about veganism maintained by some teachers had academic and emotional consequences for students. I was surprised that Ana's teacher, for instance, refused to mark an assignment written on soy milk rather than cow's milk. I had assumed that most people, regardless of whether they are vegan or not, know that soy and cow's milk are nutritionally comparable. This lack of understanding by teachers impacts not only vegan students, but also those who are lactose intolerant or allergic to cow's milk. Likewise, I was surprised that some teachers who were not vegan themselves were willing to support and encourage vegan students. In Anita's case, a book given to her by her teacher was pivotal in helping her develop an identity as an activist, and thus continued to have a lasting positive impact even when the class was over.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the position of vegan students in relation to their learning environments. By analyzing focus group transcripts through a critical animal studies lens, the data revealed a general marginalization of vegan perspectives. The experience of vegans was discussed through three interconnected domains: society, identity, and schooling. The emergent themes in education revealed dominant speciesist messages through the explicit, null, and hidden curricula. The chapter concluded with a brief description of the findings that I found most surprising. The next chapter will examine some implications of this research

and describe the curricular recommendations of participants. Directions for future research will also be discussed.



# Chapter 5: Conclusions & discussion

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## **Introduction**

In this dissertation I investigated how vegan youths experience school. This research is situated within the context of an Albertan meat-centric and conservative social landscape, which illuminates the need for alternate positions to be elevated into current dialogues about schooling. Although scholarship exists around the need for more humane and critical approaches to understanding human relationships with nonhumans through education, little attention has been afforded to research that specifically examines the tensions between youth veganism and Calgarian schooling. In this dissertation I took up the non-hierarchical principles of Critical Animal Studies to position students as theorists, who have a specific experiences and relevant ideas about how curricular structures can be reconsidered. The understandings, observations, and personal anecdotes revealed through these student experiences signify a particular wisdom and thoughtfulness about curriculum that warrant consideration and reflection from those of who seek to enrich the field of education. The implications and recommendations from this study provide insight into potential further research on vegan student experience and educational reform.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

Through a series of focus group sessions with vegan youths, I learned that students discussed their experiences through three main interconnected domains: society, identity, and schools. Socially, I was surprised to uncover a clear

delineation between linguistic conventions in lower grades in contrast to upper grades. Younger students in my study were more likely to use “he” or “she” pronouns when discussing nonhuman animals, whereas older students unintentionally objectified nonhumans by referring to them as “it.” Students across elementary and high school noted that their people and surroundings seemed hypocritical, as messages claimed to both love nonhumans and simultaneously contribute to their suffering and deaths. Students also felt that veganism was not fully understood by society, citing a misplaced concern over particular nutrients for vegans, without considering the potential health problems of a standard North American diet.

Student identity was strongly connected to families, and in this study, families were largely supportive of their child’s decision to be vegan. Despite this support, carnist families remained resistant to educating themselves about veganism as a social and political stance, rather than merely a dietary choice. Students experienced familial tensions as a result of family resistance to consider veganism more seriously. Students noticed that male vegans seemed to be less common than female vegans, and suggested that because veganism is often marketed in mainstream media as a diet or weight loss tool, it is often viewed by males as incompatible with the goal of building muscle. Some students also pointed out that social expectations about gender associate meat with masculinity, which seems to make veganism less appealing to males. Nevertheless, the two male students in this study stated that they felt confident in their decisions and did not feel isolated or ostracized by their peer groups for being vegan.

Student discussions about schools thematically represented the implicit, explicit, and null curriculum, though in many cases, several forms of curriculum operated simultaneously. Students stated that relationships in school were salient, as they had the potential to either marginalize or support vegans. I was, again, surprised by the contrast in peer relationships between elementary school and higher grades. Although younger students had close friends who were supportive of the decision to be vegan, they also seemed to be ridiculed, mocked, and questioned by peers much more frequently than older students. According to these students, unsupportive teachers existed in both lower and higher grades. In some cases, students were academically penalized because teachers were unwilling to accept veganism as a valid position. Similarly, supportive teachers were also present across all grades. Students emphasized the especial importance of these teachers in helping them feel safe, invited, and encouraged, even if the teachers were not vegan themselves.

Participants in this study problematized curricular messages in five main subject areas: physical education, health and wellness, social studies, English, and science. In physical education, students received contradictory messages about the role of food. In one case, students were served hot dogs after a triathlon, which, as students pointed out, negates the health benefits of physical activity. Participants also stressed that the information provided in their health and wellness classes seemed to focus on the importance of meat and dairy, with little emphasis on alternative ways to meet nutritional needs. One student, for instance, received an “incomplete” on her assignment because she chose to write on soy milk rather than

cow's milk. In social studies, students observed that the links between food justice, environmental ethics, and public health were not addressed, despite being compatible with much of the content in the prescribed curriculum. Curiously, these students did not recall books in either elementary or high school that centered nonhuman animals. While some students remembered problematic aspects of certain books, well-known stories that invoke compassion towards nonhumans were not brought up. This suggests that such books may not have been meaningful, or may have been overshadowed by other school experiences.

In science, students across grade levels noticed that nonhuman animals were either not discussed, or were only discussed as tools to serve human ends. In both textbooks and classroom discussions, teachers emphasized environmental protection through daily activities such as shorter showers, recycling, and taking transit rather than driving, but the role of nonhuman animal agriculture in environmental degradation was not taken into account. Students in high school also noticed that while energy efficiency was discussed through calculations of trophic levels, these discussions were left in the realm of the theoretical. Participants in high school had a range of experiences around the dissection of nonhumans, but ultimately teachers valued and emphasized actual dissections over alternatives. This positioning of nonhumans as tools to serve human inquiry and curiosity was replicated in discussions about nonhuman animal cloning and research, where teachers seemed to consider the notion of ethics as only applicable to humans. In research projects about nonhuman animals, schools explicitly discouraged students from investigating the lives of "farm" nonhuman animals; students posited that this

omission functioned to shield people from the possibility that these animals could have habitats, families, and purposes aside from the ones created for them by humans. When I asked students about textbooks, they agreed that textbooks were not accurate in their representations of nonhuman animals and nonhuman agriculture.

Students observed that many of their peers as well as adults lacked basic knowledge about the processes involved in meat, dairy, and egg production. For instance, students stated that people are surprised to learn that cows must be impregnated in order to produce milk. Nearly all students stated that they had visited a zoo at some point during their K-12 schooling, but none of the students had visited a nonhuman animal sanctuary. Some students had also taken part in school field trips to entertainment-centered attractions where nonhuman animals were merely props in more elaborate displays. These participants perceived such trips to be counterproductive and felt that they did not provide a complete picture of nonhuman animal behaviour.

Students noted that violence towards nonhuman animals was implicitly reinforced and normalized linguistically, as both adults and peers seemed to intuitively objectify nonhumans in day-to-day conversations. For most students, there were also implicit messages about both vegans and nonhumans in school cafeterias, where it was generally difficult to find nutritionally adequate meals. Participants in this study tended to avoid their school cafeterias, and most either brought food from home or left to find off-campus options. Schools seemed to unintentionally repress or police vegan attitudes, behaviours, and opinions. Vegan

students were sometimes subjugated through peer conversations, academically by teachers, or socially by the wider school atmosphere. Many participants in this study had learned to self-censor in order to avoid confrontation or tarnish the image of veganism.

### **Student Curricular Recommendations**

In my conversations with vegan students, I found that despite feeling frustrated with the existing system of public education, students had insightful suggestions for making schools more compatible with a biocentric, rather than anthropocentric, epistemology. As one aim of this study is to renegotiate the power dynamics in spaces of formal education through the inclusion of student voice in pedagogical discourse, I offer the ideas of my students as invaluable viewpoints in the expansion and development of curricular studies. In particular, participants in this research challenged conventional understandings of formal learning by recommending greater accountability and intersectionality in K-12 education.

### **Accountability**

When I asked students what they would change about teaching or learning in Albertan schools, their immediate instinct was to point out that information was often biased or inaccurate. This critique expanded into a desire for truth and transparency about the ways nonhumans are treated and used:

*Alina: The realism, just, like, realistics about the health and, like...*

*Sam: Oh, I would put, like, some of the videos...but not, like, Earthlings because it's kind of graphic, but some of the other ones that aren't so graphic...It gives a good lesson to the kids about why you shouldn't be eating meat or dairy.*

*Stephanie: A field trip to the slaughterhouse.*

*Stephanie: Stop the whole milk is good and everything is good.*

*Sylvia: I was thinking about having speakers come in and explain things, even if it's from a health perspective, or an environmental perspective, or an animal rights*

*perspective, and also, like, virtual dissection instead of physical dissection on a computer, if you have to do that through curriculum.*

*Paige: I feel like they should also talk about animal testing, for scientific purposes, because like I've read articles about that and it's you know, it's so commonplace in the industry and it's actually shown to be so ineffective and I don't know, like, I really think something else should be developed, or some kind of voluntary human testing but...um, but I think there should be more information on that and the realities of the actual side, of how effective that is and also, like, the ethics of animal testing and the conditions these animals are in, and the manipulation that they're subjected to.*

Paige's suggestion to include realistic discussions about vivisection in classroom

contexts, along with the desire communicated by the other participants for accurate

information about nonhumans in the food industry indicates an understanding of

students as mature individuals who are capable of grasping the problematic nature

of these industries. Paige's point also reveals a wider social reluctance to reveal and

address vivisection, as there are very few texts on this topic that center the

experience of nonhuman animals. An exception in the field of scientific research is

the memoir, *They all had eyes: Confessions of a vivisectionist*, where Slusher (2016)

details his experience in various vivisection labs and argues against the common

notion of vivisection being a necessary evil that betters humanity. One criticism

against having realistic discussions with students about nonhuman animal use and

consumption is that young students are especially vulnerable to violence and

brutality. When I brought this up with my participants, they pointed out that most

topics can be discussed in age-appropriate ways, which they felt was favorable to

complete avoidance:

*Erica: I think that at a young age, you're taught how to respect people. And, how you should act around different people and which things are right and wrong in terms of social situations, and, like, as you progress through elementary they also talk to you about, like, if you're led astray, like, kids who start drinking and doing drugs and that kind of stuff, so I think if you start working in talking, because if you have respect for people, why don't we talk about respect for animals?*

*Paige: Because obviously a lot of the material would be kind of harsh, I think there are a ton of issues that are really complex, that you learn in school but you learn them in more simplistic terms when you're younger, and they build on that, so it's less...I don't know, it's not everything all at once, like really overwhelming to a child and not something that they would totally be able to process, so it's the same way you would teach any concept in school, I think you would do that with what goes on in terms of like, veganism and animal agriculture and things like that.*

Here, Paige's point alludes to Vygotsky's (1978) zones of proximal development and Bruner's (1960) theory of scaffolding. Essentially, with the help of more capable others (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86), students can gradually and independently learn new information. As Bruner (1960) infers, "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (p. 33). Weil (2004) concurs: "While it's important not to overwhelm young children with the ills of the world... it is critical to awaken children's compassion and sense of citizenship; to raise their awareness...[and]...to take responsibility in age-appropriate ways" (p. 39-40). For the students in my study, accountability also meant more education around nonhuman animal issues for adults:

*Sylvia: My point also would be that [adults are] not intentionally unfair a lot of the time, like I think there are still some adults that are really uneducated when it comes to things, like, whether it's their own choice to not be educated or whether they weren't exposed to it, I think that's a big portion of it...*

*Stephanie: Also, I don't think with the uneducated people who aren't really aware of it, I don't think it's just unfair to the vegan kids, I think it's unfair to all the kids....Because especially for the kids that aren't aware and aren't exposed to it, they're just oblivious to the fact of what's going on in their body, what's going on in the planet, and with the animal rights side of that too, the ethics, they're just completely oblivious to it, that's what starts this whole thing, they're being fed that information from a young age. So then they grow up to believe in this sort of false reality of, you know...*

*Sylvia: It's kind of similar to like before people knew that smoking cigarettes was as bad for you, and everyone was like oh, smoking's cool! It makes you hot and whatever, and then we actually figured stuff out, and people were, like, oh no...oh no, yeah. And then they actually stopped, right? And I think, in my opinion that's a really good example of how education really can solve a lot of things if people just know, and know how dire it is...especially when it comes to heart disease, and that's the main one, how much veganism can battle that, it could be really good...*



*Paige: I think that people don't actually, I think from a parent's perspective, ideas of having to eat meat, it's just what they were taught, and people like don't actually really know anything about nutrition, they're just like "oh you need to eat this for protein, you need meat for this, drink milk for calcium," but they don't actually know the process of how milk interacts with calcium in your body, or your bones or anything, they just use that because it's so commonly repeated that they assume it has to be true. And, you just don't really question that, but people don't really know anything about nutrition, and they REALLY don't know anything about where their food is coming from and what the reality of the whole ethical side of it is...like...*

*Michelle: My grandma grew up on a farm, so obviously she's always saying eat your meat, like it's the old knowledge and it just gets passed down and no one questions it.*

As these participants observed, the narrative of nonhuman animal consumption is widely entrenched and replicated through intergenerational communication of knowledge and ideas. This solidification of specific ideas as obvious realities or unquestioned truths stabilizes hegemonic discourses (Foucault, 1975; MacDonald; 2003; Van Dijk, 2006) and reduces possibilities for critical examination and analysis. As Sylvia mentioned was the case with cigarettes, educating adults can be a vital component of challenging and shifting commonly accepted, yet harmful, messages. The urgency of this need for further learning at all levels is evidenced by the growing health, environmental, and ethical concerns raised by nonhuman animal consumption on a planet with finite resources. Stephanie's comment articulates the gravity of these topics; while vegan students are undermined by messages encouraging nonhuman animal consumption, remaining unchallenged in their original viewpoints ultimately penalizes all students. In addition to voicing the need for greater accountability in educational spaces, students in this study seemed interested in adopting an intersectional approach to learning and understanding.

## Intersectionality

Although most students did not explicitly use the term “intersectionality,” they enthusiastically brought up the desire to learn about the interconnectedness between oppressions. Most students recognized that topics and justice issues were fragmented both in school and in the wider social networks of human and animal liberation:

*Erica: A lot of the time people put all their energy into one thing, like both apply, like, regular thoughts that other people have to that idea or even other things that other people are battling with...Because our school started [a social justice] club, and Jackie, my cousin and I were the leaders for our year, and it's like all they want to talk about is one thing, and other things in the world don't matter...so there's like Calgary, Calgary-wide meetings for them, and some of them don't have things to say about other issues going on, it's like they didn't exist...like their issue was more important than everyone else's issue...so I think that, like, if there was a way for people, like, you'd think that if people were struggling with something, it would be an opportunity to understand that other people were struggling, but I think sometimes people get so wrapped up, especially with media, because there's this war of, this is right, this is wrong, all these things so then they forget...*

*Jacob: It also seems like a huge clash in terms of two social communities...which is like the Black Lives Matter movement, and, like... vegans can be really insensitive to the Black Lives Matter movement, and then the Black Lives Matter movement gets really upset with the vegan movement because they're, like, they'll like put animal lives almost on the same...because I think that Black Lives Matter movement is a bigger issue, right, like it's ridiculous, and for them it's so why are you so, not really standing by me and expect me to stand by you...*

*Paige: It's like don't...two things can both be horrible but you don't need to, like, everything has it's own place for importance and why that issue is valuable and deserves attention, but I know you're talking about me, because when there was, it was hashtags, like some vegan twitter account feed went viral because they were like 'black live matter? What about animal lives matter?' or something like that, like okay, animal lives matter, but like, that's not something that you bring it into, yeah, and I think that definitely, I've heard a lot of people be like why do you care about like, oh animal rights, like, why don't you, and people haven't said this to me because I'm passionate about human rights issues too, but like, I know that some people are like, oh why are you so passionate about veganism but, like, not about human rights or something like that...like, you can be both...*

Erica's comment reveals how despite efforts made by schools to acknowledge and support marginalized students, these efforts do not achieve meaningful community building and solidarity between oppressions because they do not surpass the competitive and hierarchical model of school systems as a whole. As Erica explains, students can remain fixated on propelling certain movements forward without realizing the common roots of these struggles. Similarly, Paige and Jacob's statements illustrate the problematic nature of assuming that individuals are not capable of understanding and supporting both human and nonhuman justice issues. This dynamic of competitiveness between groups to determine that one is more oppressed than the other is problematized by Martinez (1993) who argues that the "oppression Olympics" is impossible to win. There is no objective measure to determine an individual's experience of oppression, and more saliently, a discussion focused on competing dialogues of oppression derails coalition-building efforts amongst various groups. Furthermore, many people belong to more than one marginalized group. When I asked students how they felt this fragmentation between groups should be addressed, they suggested that reforming or adding to existing K-12 classes would be worthwhile:

*Jacob: Like a social justice class, that would be so good, analyzing different social justice movements...*

*Paige: Yeah that would be so good.*

*Erica: Or even doing it through the social studies curriculum, like to address all the issues. Rather than...*

*Michelle: Because when you think about it, racism, sexism, speciesism, and all of them are so...connected...*

*Erica: Things that are happening now, and a lot of the current affairs topics that we talk about are like things that are purely based around one idea, whereas it's not connected...*

*Michelle: It's so easy to make the connections, you just have to make them in the first place...*

*Meneka: What about students who wouldn't voluntarily take that sort of a class?*

*Alina: That's why it should be incorporated into Social Studies. Social studies needs to change so much. Even the name is not accurate to what is taught. It's just like, I have friends in other parts of the world, and Social Studies is not a term that they're familiar with, it's like history to them. And, like, we probably learn similar things to that, but social studies seems more intelligent, like you learn about social issues and stuff like that, but you really don't.*

*Jacob: It seems very progressive, but it's not progressive.*

This conversation was expanded when I asked students to think about their experiences with activism and how that might connect to school:

*Meneka: Do you learn about activism at school?*

*Jacob: Barely, we talk about black panthers...a little bit, and we talked about the civil rights movement a tiny bit in social 30, but in general, um, no.*

*Paige: I would love to learn more...*

*Jacob: I would as well...*

*Erica: I went to [a local charter school] for junior high, and um, they have a whole course [on activism], but it's basically around advocating for yourself and things you believe in...so, like, it was a charter school so obviously that's not in the curriculum, but the school's kind of built around this idea of like advocating for [people] to speak up for themselves, but, like, part of that course we also talked about, um, like advocating for groups, as I personally learned a lot about that because it's almost an hour of your day.*

In my study, Erica was the only student who had actually experienced a formal class devoted to activism. Though she acknowledged that the class was not perfect, she was very complementary towards it and suggested that similar courses would be valuable in the public school system. Other students agreed that they would be interested in taking courses related to activism, even if these courses were not specifically related to veganism. When I asked my participants if there were any other ideas that they wanted to implement in schools, they stressed the need for greater awareness about the links between food and environment:

*Stephanie: Definitely, like, a really strong environmental focus on animal agriculture...what it deserves.*

*Sylvia: I think with environmental stuff, especially, [it] would be important because that can be extremely non-biased...Because people get really up in arms when they think that veganism can be really biased when you talk about the cruelty against animals, but when you talk about the environment, these are actual facts, like you can't argue with that, the same water and grain that a cow needs to get slaughtered, you could feed and, like, give water to so many people that wouldn't have that otherwise.*

*Maddie: I would just make the whole cafeteria go vegan because...like, I wouldn't put it out as 'oh this is vegan', I just wouldn't have any meat or dairy there because I feel like people wouldn't [miss it]...like we don't have any vegetarian options, like even the salad has chicken in it...so, I feel like if you just, like, meat can get pretty expensive, and if you just made your own, grew your own vegetables it would be a lot cheaper because then you don't have to buy all this meat....*

*Meneka: Like a garden program or school garden?*

*Stephanie: It could be a resource for kids too, when learning about plants and stuff...then they could see what they're eating.*

*Maddie: Yeah if you had your own garden, then, like, they could learn about it...Yeah and in health, sometimes you'll, like, make pizzas and stuff, and like, they all have the pepperoni, or you'll make chicken salad sandwich or something. But I feel like it would be a lot safer, because you can get really sick from raw meat, so I feel like they could cut out all that stuff, and it would just be a little more safe and better...*

The instinctive understandings of school gardens expressed by these students are mirrored in the knowledge generated by scholarly discourse on this topic. Unsurprisingly, school gardens strengthen school environments in a myriad of ways: they lead to better nutrition and knowledge about food, academic achievement, closer relationships both within the school and with the wider community or neighborhood, improved familial relationships (because parents often volunteer), and generate a sense of connection with the school (Graham et al., 2005; Ozer, 2007; Parmer, Salisbury-glennon, Shannon, & Struempfer, 2009). Though Ozer (2007) cautions educators that school gardens have significantly more positive effects when they exist on an ongoing, rather than occasional basis, and further warns that garden projects should involve all students instead of select groups, there is little debate that school gardens enhance educational environments.

As well, I feel that students here are craving a departure from a disposable culture, where food comes pre-packaged and is only accessible through a monetary transaction. It seems to me that students want to feel as if they are valuable contributors to the functioning of a school community, and that they want their schools to be places of communal interaction, sharing, and collaborative growth, in contrast to the disconnected individualism of a typical cafeteria.

### **Implications**

The conversations I had through focus group sessions with my participants yielded significant knowledge about the experience of Calgarian vegan students in K-12 settings. This study produced four major implications and recommendations for educational practitioners, administrators, and theorists. First, my results suggest a need for meaningful examination of how student voice can be more closely attended to in educational settings. Students are often experts in specific, hidden pockets of information that are inaccessible to most adults. The narratives of my participants could be used to reconfigure and reconceptualize how schools address students with views that challenge pervasive and dominant discourses. Although my students had developed useful coping strategies, one major challenge that continues to warrant attention from larger structures in schools is the silencing and policing of particular positions. Student voice can also mean renegotiating the possibilities for who can be a teacher and who can be a learner, even within traditional models of schooling. For instance, these students have been researching the topic of veganism over several years, and have developed an intuition for explaining new ideas and issues in a way that is easily accessible to both peers and

adults. This identity of students as also teachers, if nurtured and engaged rather than undermined, could potentially assist wider school communities in examining their values and actions.

In addition to the importance of student voice, this research implies that students would benefit from a variety of supportive relationships. For this group of students, relationships with parents, peers, and teachers were vital in establishing confidence and security. Most parents, though often difficult to deal with, ultimately accepted and respected their child's decision to be vegan. Likewise, peers, especially in higher grades provided a source of support, and I believe encouraging more positive peer relationships in elementary grades would be advantageous. Though many students had unsupportive teachers, they were also quick to point out that teachers who were accommodating and understanding, regardless of their own views, were instrumental in helping students feel included and cared for. Interestingly, no student had equally strong relationships in each of these domains, so I would infer that further developing all areas would contribute even more positively to student identity formation.

Another implication derived from this study is the need for reform within current structures of public schooling. As students in this study observed, there is much information circulated through lessons, textbooks, and class discussions that promote inaccurate or misleading information, or in some cases information is omitted. This finding suggests that the prescribed curriculum, especially in social studies, science, and health should be re-evaluated through a less anthropocentric lens. Participants in this study observed a lack of basic knowledge about food from

both peers and adults. Accordingly, prescribed curricula would benefit from the inclusion of information about nonhuman animal agriculture as a major contributor to environmental destruction, discussions about food justice as related to nonhuman, human, and earth liberation, and more inclusive discussions about the health effects of consuming nonhuman animal “products.” Relatedly, this research suggests that there should be a greater emphasis on the ethics of nonhuman animal “use” in scientific research, as well as honest discussions of nonhuman sentience. Practitioners interested in holistically understanding schools could also be responsive to the ways that food exists in current school systems; regardless of whether plants or nonhuman animals are being served, most cafeterias disconnect food from its source, and disengage students from the narratives of food production. While most of the students I spoke with were humble enough to merely ask for vegan options at their schools, I believe that having nutrient dense food consistently available would be of great value to all students. This study revealed student frustrations about the myth of meat consumption as necessary being passed down from adults to children. Their suggestion that adults must be open and receptive to modifying their original viewpoints based on new information should also be carefully considered.

Finally, this study has implications about the implicit and null curricula. Students noted that knowledge about justice and activism, as well as the connections between forms of injustice are not fully addressed in their schools. They also observed that nonhuman animals seemed to be invisible in various facets of educational dialogue, mirroring their invisibility socially. Considering how



oppressive relationships are reinforced in school environments can help students, teachers, and others better understand how unintended values, such as human supremacy and privilege are transmitted.

### **Significance**

This study extends existing research in the fields of education and Critical Animal Studies by bringing the lived experiences of vegan students into the center of scholarly dialogues. Although vegan youths are represented in literature, the majority of studies about this population focus on diet and nutrition. The participants of this study are also specifically located within a context of provincial pride in ranching and “beef” production. Therefore, this study has significance for the Calgarian community, as it demonstrates a counter-narrative to the assumptions of veganism as being anti-Albertan. In my conversations with these youths, identity was constructed with the knowledge that traditions can evolve and accommodate new information.

Despite having close friends or immediate family members who worked in the oil, gas, or meat industry, many of my participants demonstrated great resilience and conviction in their positions. This suggests that widely accepted provincial identities may be increasingly unstable, as populations expand to encompass a variety of perspectives. It is also conceivable that as vegan populations grow in larger cities such as Calgary, nonhuman animal consumption may eventually be stigmatized. This study was also significant for the students who participated, as their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes are not typically invited and included in conversations about what schools can do differently. Although I explained to my

participants that it would be unlikely that immediate changes would occur, they were satisfied enough to know that their voices would be amplified through this dissertation and subsequent publications. In a follow-up conversation with one of my participants, I also learned that participating in this study inspired her to pursue a PhD one day.

The inclusion of vegan student experiences in the fields of education and Critical Animal Studies is also meaningful because this specific group, and how they perceive school, has not previously been examined. By amplifying their narratives, educators can gain insight into the realities of how this particular marginalized group navigates the challenges of public education. In particular, this study resulted in several specific recommendations from participants about how they could be better supported in school. This work contributes to the field of Critical Animal Studies by including student voices in discussions about pedagogy. While informed by other critical traditions, CAS has maintained a unique interest in fusing street activism with scholarly work, arguing specifically against theory without practice. Critical Animal Pedagogy, a sub-field of CAS, is an area where this research in particular extends existing work. Although other scholars have observed and critiqued the problematic nature of anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, and neoliberalism as standard and expected components of schooling (Bell & Russell, 2000; Corman, 2012; Drew & Socha, 2015; Jones, 2009; Kahn, 2010; Lupinacci, 2013; Nocella II, 2011; Weil, 2004) my study is the first to center the voices of vegan youths and argue that their stories warrant attention in theoretical work. I believe the insights revealed by these students can offer meaningful opportunities to

transform pedagogical spaces. While my participants modestly offered recommendations for reform within the constraints of a problematic system of education, I am certain that their stories can also be employed to dismantle this system and reconsider what education might look like: privileging the liberties of all rather than a few, the inclusion of interspecies collaboration, and new understandings of “teacher” (i.e. nonhumans as teachers, students as teachers).

Lastly, this study was significant to me. I was initially interested in studying vegan students because I saw myself reflected in them. I pursued this research with the hope that in some way, I could gain more knowledge and information about how to enhance my teaching practice. The discoveries of this research were surprising and exciting to me; they helped me better understand vegan students, but also raised new questions and areas for further inquiry.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This research project produced valuable insights into how vegan youths experience school. Throughout the process of examining these experiences and their links to curriculum development, I noticed several exciting areas for future research. My study delved into the identities of ten students who represented a sub-category within an already small population of vegans. Accordingly, this research would be complemented with more work on larger numbers of vegan students. One of my most surprising findings was the difference in experience between older and younger students; my initial assumption was that high school students would feel more isolated and restricted than elementary students, yet my findings were the exact reverse. Elementary students actually struggled extensively, and high school

students generally felt more comfortable in their identities. I would be interested in expanding the age range of this study to also include vegans in lower elementary grades as well as post-secondary students to see if experiences continue to improve with age. Another aspect of this study that could be further investigated is how vegans who represent other minoritized groups form identities around veganism and school. For instance, I did not interview students from various races or cultural backgrounds, gender or sexual minorities, disabled students, or students from a range of economic backgrounds. My study was also geographically specific and informed by the histories and traditions of Western frontier culture. It would be fascinating to contrast geographical differences between vegan students and how this contributes to how students in various locations understand and navigate through school. This study also raises questions about vegan teachers and other adults who support students in educational spaces. The insights from these individuals could also glean significant data about working within a school system that seems largely anthropocentric. Similarly, the findings from this study would be enhanced through further research investigating the perceptions of non-vegan students and adults. Because this is the first time that the experience of vegan students has been closely examined within scholarly discussions in curriculum, I believe there is great potential for future research in this area.

### **Learning from the Research and Pragmatic Action**

In this thesis, I have problematized the ways in which a dominant discourse (carnism) and its hegemonic presence in schools functions to silence and marginalize vegan students. As an integral component of my teaching practice, my

reflections on this work have led me to believe that institutional spaces of education must be dismantled in order to fully realize a world free from capitalist values. However, in the mean time, this research can illuminate some specific instances of resistance that can be implemented within the current system of schooling. While I acknowledge that these ideas represent my own calls to action and are not necessarily a prescription for all teachers, I believe they may have some value in applying the theoretical components of this study to real world situations.

### **Holistic approaches to food**

In this research, I learned that students wished that the assembly line approach to food, demarcated by cafeterias or canteens, is not helpful in the goal of nourishing children. In addition to physically separating eating from the classroom as a signifier of knowledge production, packaged and highly processed foods distanced students from the origins of their meals. Furthermore, most cafeterias did not involve students in the production or preparation of school lunches. This model could be at least partially be addressed by introducing more holistic approaches to food and eating. A school garden program represents the most ambitious way of attending to the problems associated with traditional lunches. In this way, students could work with teachers, existing cafeteria workers and chefs, along with parent volunteers and the local community to grow foods ethically and sustainably. Learning about horticulture would also tie in to prescribed learning outcomes in biology, social studies (sustainability), and health and wellness. Older students could also help with food preparation to learn tangible skills and fulfill volunteer requirements. There are also ways to address food more inclusively without a

garden program. Administrators have the authority to change existing cafeteria options, and it would benefit students to have more plant-based options for full meals. As nearly every student in my study pointed out, complete vegan meals were generally missing, but could be fairly inexpensive to include. Schools could also diversify existing menus by adding more nutrient rich options such as smoothies (thrift store blender, plant milk, fruit).

### **Activism**

Based on the students I interviewed, activism is not typically taught in Calgarian public schools. Although some teachers discussed activism in a historical context through the prescribed curriculum in social studies, it seemed that contemporary conversations about activism and the role that students can have in these movements was generally not considered. This may be attributed to the incompatibility of activism, as a form of resistance against ingrained dominant belief systems, with the emphasis that public schooling places on neoliberal values such as compliance, competitiveness, and submission to authorities. Regardless, student interest in activism seemed high for the students I interviewed. Therefore, I believe that discussions about political activism can take place either as an extension of social studies outcomes or separately, as either an independent course or an after school program. A close interrogation of activism must begin with history and context to balance media representations of activists as violent radicals. I would teach this class by first discussing significant historical forms of resistance, such as the civil rights movement, women's liberation marches, movements for disability liberation, rights for gender and sexual minorities, and environmental movements.

An understanding of these actions would be accompanied by deep discussions about why activism is important, and how current systems (such as child labor laws) are a direct result of activism (in the same vein, there is much work yet to be done). Involving students through their personal passions and interests is also significant. Students typically have concerns about the injustices of the world and are already often preoccupied with the uncertainties of their own futures. Learning the steps to organizing volunteers, communicating with institutions, and various approaches or tactics of resistance (leafleting, marches, sit-ins, teach-ins, vigils) are necessary tools for resisting these injustices. Within the context of school, students can begin by challenging school policies, procedures, or structures that regiment and suppress them, such as standardized tests or washrooms that are exclusionary.

### **Reconceptualization of adult/ child and human/ nonhuman binaries**

In my research, I found that students who had spent years independently researching veganism and the effects of nonhuman animal agriculture on humans and the environment were often dismissed, ignored, or academically penalized in school. These individual acts of suppression illuminated the fallacy of classrooms as neutral spaces and further entrenched the dominance of existing cherished narratives. Within the constraints of a problematic system, teachers can make efforts to challenge these power dynamics. Although encouraging individual students to pursue topics that are of interest to them, this study emphasizes the need for all students to have opportunities to learn from one another. This might mean providing a student with time to share their research on subjects that are intentionally excluded or purposefully diminished because of corporate interests in

prescribed curricula. For instance, Aggie Days or the Calgary Stampede may send resources and field trip opportunities to schools, but these should be accompanied by discussions about nonhuman treatment, environmental sustainability, and food ethics. Vegan students would be excellent leaders and mentors in elevating these topics into public school classrooms. Furthermore, teachers ought to challenge the notion that humans have nothing to learn from nonhumans. Nonhumans can be positioned as valuable teachers, and classroom visits to volunteer with and observe nonhumans in sanctuaries can allow students to observe the natural languages, behaviours, families, and societies of nonhumans.

### **Recognition of schools as structurally oppressive spaces**

Finally, I would argue that overcoming the difficulties in dismantling current systems of education requires unified revolution through the mobilization of thousands of bodies. This means that the entrenched myths of capitalism as inherently valuable and necessary must be challenged, year after year, in every classroom. Put simply, teachers must show students the ways in which schools (alongside other social institutions) intentionally condition people to ignore ingenuity and creativity in favour of unquestionably following authority and remaining docile. This might mean pointing out militaristic approaches to arranging classrooms in rows of desks with an authority at the “front”, the expectation of adherence to bells rather than individual shifts in interests or desires, the quantification of learning through standardized tests, the segregation of students based on age, and other imposing arrangements. By recognizing the problematic



nature of capitalist, Eurocentric, and militaristic approaches to education, students will be better equipped to resist and eventually topple these structures.

### **Summary**

In this research project, I coupled understandings from the fields of education and Critical Animal Studies to elevate the experiences of vegan students. Through a series of focus groups, I learned that these students have meaningful perceptions about society, identity formation, and schools. Students were also candid in providing pedagogical recommendations, which I feel warrant consideration from practitioners. The conclusions of this study suggested a need for greater student voice, strong relationships, and curricular reform. Particularly, teachers, administrators, and curriculum development specialists must be aware of the messages sent through the explicit, implicit, and null curricula. This study is significant because it represents the first time that vegan student experiences have been reflected upon in the field of education. Examining the scope and demographics of the study could further develop the findings of this work. Additionally, this study revealed several ways in which teachers can utilize the findings within the constraints of the existing public school system.

# Appendix A

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## Letter of Invitation



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April 2016

Dear

I am writing to invite your child to participate in a University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education research study entitled:

**Animals, sustainability, and food choice: A critical analysis of curricular discourse**

The researchers request your permission to study the experiences of vegan teenagers through focus group research. The purpose of this work is to better understand the school experience of vegan teenagers, with the hope that these findings can be used to eventually provide programs to better support this group of youths. This research will be presented at academic conference(s), published in academic peer-reviewed journal(s) and may inform future studies.

This research will assist us in understanding the unique position of teenagers who are vegan, but occupy a space within a larger non-vegan school community. It will expand our knowledge of how students understand and situate themselves as activists or advocates within their schools, as well as how teaching and curricular practices may impact their experience.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The researchers are asking permission to use the following two types of data:

1. Audio recordings from focus group sessions.
2. Photographs of artifacts, visuals, and other resources brought by the students.

There will be 1-6 focus group sessions, and if the researcher needs further information from an individual, that person will be contacted for a single one-on-one meeting. In the future, presentation of the information your child provides will remain anonymous. Data will be stored at Meneka Thirukkumaran's home in a secured and locked filing cabinet, and/or in password-protected electronic form on a computer for a five-year period. Only Dr. Panayotidis and Meneka Thirukkumaran will have access to the data now and in the future. No one except the researchers will be allowed to listen to audio recordings.

Your child's input in this study will be extremely valuable. Your child was invited as a possible participant in this research project because of their strong interest in veganism and/ or your child's participation in animal liberation activism. Dr. Panayotidis and Meneka Thirukkumaran hope your child will consider contributing and furthering our understandings about the connections between curriculum and non-dominant perspectives of students.

**Thank you for signing the attached research consent form and returning a scanned copy to Meneka Thirukkumaran by April 20, 2016.** If you or your child have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (403) 479-9722 or at [meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)

Thank you,

Meneka Thirukkumaran  
Werklund School of Education  
University of Calgary  
[Meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:Meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)  
(403) 479-9722

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca)

## Parent Consent Form



### Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Meneka Thirukkumaran, Doctoral Candidate  
Werklund School of Education  
(403) 479-9722 or [meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)

### Supervisor:

Dr. E. Lisa Panayotidis  
Werklund School of Education  
[elpanayo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:elpanayo@ucalgary.ca)

### Title of Project:

Animals, sustainability, and food choice: A critical analysis of curricular discourse

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Dear Parents/ Guardians,

Thank you for indicating your interest in allowing your child to participate in this project. Your informed consent is an important aspect of this research. I want to invite you to read this form carefully as it describes the purpose of this study, what you will be asked to do, and how the information I collect will be managed. This form also outlines how your child's name and any personal information will remain confidential.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only one component of your informed consent. If you would like more details about a part of this study, or information that might not be included here, please feel free to ask. Again, I would encourage you to read this form carefully to make sure you understand the information.

The expected time frame for the collection of data from you is from late April 2016 until the end of June 2016. The data will then be analyzed and the results will be written up by November 2016. The estimated completion of my doctoral dissertation will be in February 2017. I anticipate that the focus groups will last approximately 40 minutes and will occur at a time and place that we have mutually agreed upon (such as a public library). Because I am interested in having deep,

meaningful conversations with you child, it is likely that we will meet more than once and up to six times. If I need additional information from an individual, I may request a single one-on-one follow-up meeting with that person. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD research study. The purpose of this work is to better understand the school experience of vegan teenagers, with the hope that these findings can be used to eventually provide programs to better support this group of youths. Your child's participation in this project will aid in expanding the current understanding of what school is like for those who have non-dominant viewpoints. Your child will contribute new ways to understand schools and curriculum, which will benefit researchers, principals, and me as doctoral student. I also hope that your child's involvement can allow them to reflect on their experiences and think about what it means to be a teen vegan activist/ advocate.

### **What will my child be asked to do?**

If your child decides to participate in this study, with your consent, your child will be asked to think about and describe their experiences as a vegan student. The focus group sessions will take place at a time and place that is convenient to all students in the study. I will focus on asking the group mainly open-ended questions, and I hope this will allow our dialogue to develop as new ideas, experiences, and thoughts emerge. With your permission, I would like to audio record these conversations so that I can transcribe (write up) what we discuss. This will allow me to think deeply about new questions and wonderings that we can explore in our next conversation.

For our first focus group session, your child will be asked to bring an artifact that symbolizes their interest in veganism or animal liberation activism. This artifact can be an object, a drawing, a piece of literature or your own writing, a website, or anything else that is significant to your child. These artifacts will be the starting point of our discussion. With your child's permission, I would like to photograph this artifact as well, because it may add depth to my analysis of what vegan teenagers view as important.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no consequences if your child chooses to withdraw. Your child will have two weeks after the final focus group session to withdraw (or at any time prior to this date). If your child withdraws, I will not use any information your child contributed to the study, and this information will be securely destroyed.

### **What information will be collected and what happens to this information?**

If your child chooses to participate in this study, the following information will be collected: Your child's full name, age, home phone number, and email address. Your child's name and those of the other participants will be kept confidential and pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used in the transcripts and final document. Your child may choose their pseudonym. Data from the focus groups will be viewed by me (the researcher), and my supervisor (Dr. E. Lisa Panayotidis). No one else will have access to the data. No school or school district, and no neighborhood will be identified in the final dissertation or subsequent publications.

The verbal discussions from our focus groups will be transcribed into written texts, and these records will assist me in interpreting the results. I will look for themes and meanings, so the interpretations will be mine. I will send your child the transcripts (written copies) of your child's words, along with my interpretations. I hope that this will include your child in the research process and allow them to change, omit, or expand upon their initial ideas. This transcript will be sent to your child's personal email address, and your child should not share it with anyone. Your child will have three weeks to look over the transcripts, and if they do not respond within that timeframe, agreement will be implied and I will proceed with the data analysis.

All confidential information will be stored either digitally on a password protected computer, or in a locked filing cabinet. Upon completion of my dissertation, all electronic and hardcopy data will be securely kept for five years, and then destroyed.

Data withdrawal during the final stage of the dissertation/ publication will not be possible but that if a participant wishes to withdraw their consent at this stage, I will guarantee that future publications do not include data from that individual.

### **Are there risks or benefits if my child participates?**

There is minimal physical risk from participation in this study. For some, discussions about nonhuman animals or vegan experiences can evoke emotions and may be uncomfortable. I will make every effort to anticipate potentially triggering information, and offer the option of taking a break. Your child will be offered support through counseling at the University of Calgary and community counseling services if a discussion is triggering or distressing to them. Again, your child may withdraw from the study at any time.

The University of Calgary Wellness Centre:  
Phone: 403-210-9355, Option #2  
Room 370  
MacEwan Student Centre  
2500 University Dr NW

Eastside Family Centre:

Phone: 403-299-9696  
#255, 495- 36 St NE (In Northgate Mall)

South Calgary Health Centre:  
Phone: 403-943-9374  
31 Sunpark Plaza SE

Sheldon Chumir Walk-In Crisis Service:  
(403) 955-6200  
1213 4 St SW

**Confidentiality:**

If your child decides to participate in the study, their name and identity will be kept strictly confidential through the use of a pseudonym (made-up name) that your child will choose. Everyone participating will be asked to keep our discussions confidential. However, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed because there will be other people participating in the focus group.

**Signatures:**

The signature of the parent indicates that 1) you understand the information provided in this form, and 2) you agree that your child will be included in the research project. You may withdraw your consent at any time with no consequences.

Parent or Guardian Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: Meneka Thirukkumaran

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/ Concerns:**

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Meneka Thirukkumaran  
PhD candidate, Werklund School of Education  
(403) 479-9722 or [meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)

And

Dr. E. Lisa Panayotidis  
Werklund School of Education  
[elpanayo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:elpanayo@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The researcher has kept a copy of the consent form.



## Youth Assent Form



### Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Meneka Doctoral Candidate  
Werklund School of Education  
(403) 479-9722 or [meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)

### Supervisor:

Dr. E. Lisa Panayotidis  
Werklund School of Education  
[elpanayo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:elpanayo@ucalgary.ca)

### Title of Project:

Animals, sustainability, and food choice: A critical analysis of curricular discourse

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Dear Youth,

Thank you for indicating your interest in participating in this project. Your informed consent is an important aspect of this research. I want to invite you to read this form carefully as it describes the purpose of this study, what you will be asked to do, and how the information I collect will be managed. This form also outlines how your name and any personal information will remain confidential.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only one component of your informed consent. If you would like more details about a part of this study, or information that might not be included here, please feel free to ask. Again, I would encourage you to read this form carefully to make sure you understand the information.

The expected time frame for the collection of data from you is from late April 2016 until the end of June 2016. The data will then be analyzed and the results will be written up by November 2016. The estimated completion of my doctoral dissertation will be in February 2017. I anticipate that the focus groups will last approximately 40 minutes and will occur at a time and place that we have mutually agreed upon (such as a public library). Because I am interested in having deep, meaningful conversations with you, it is likely that we will meet as a group more

than once and up to six times. If I need additional information from an individual, I may request a single one-on-one follow-up meeting with that person. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD research study. The purpose of this work is to better understand the school experience of vegan teenagers, with the hope that these findings can be used to eventually provide programs to better support this group of youths. Your participation in this project will aid in expanding the current understanding of what school is like for those who have non-dominant viewpoints. You will contribute new ways to understand schools and curriculum, which will benefit researchers, principals, and me as doctoral student. I also hope that your involvement can allow you to reflect on your experiences and think about what it means to be a teen vegan activist/ advocate.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to think about and describe your experiences as a vegan student. The focus group sessions will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you and your parents or guardians. I will focus on asking the group mainly open-ended questions, and I hope this will allow our dialogue to develop as new ideas, experiences, and thoughts emerge. With your permission, I would like to audio record these conversations so that I can transcribe (write up) what we discuss. This will allow me to think deeply about new questions and wonderings that we can explore in our next conversation.

For our first focus group session, you will be asked to bring an artifact that symbolizes your interest in veganism or animal liberation activism. This artifact can be an object, a drawing, a piece of literature or your own writing, a website, or anything else that is significant to you. These artifacts will be the starting point of our discussion. With your permission, I would like to photograph your artifact as well, because it may add depth to my analysis of what vegan teenagers view as important.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no consequences if you choose to withdraw. You will have two weeks after the final focus group session to withdraw (or at any time prior to this date). If you withdraw, I will not use any information you have contributed to the study, and this information will be securely destroyed.

### **What information will be collected and what happens to this information?**

If you choose to participate in this study, the following information will be collected: Your full name, age, home phone number, and email address. Your name and those

of the other participants will be kept confidential and pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used in the transcripts and final document. You may choose your pseudonym. Data from the focus groups will be viewed by me (the researcher) and my supervisor, Dr. E Lisa Panayotidis. No one else will have access to the data. No school or school district, and no neighborhood will be identified in the final dissertation or subsequent publications.

My pseudonym will be: \_\_\_\_\_

The verbal discussions from our focus groups will be transcribed into written texts, and these records will assist me in interpreting the results. I will look for themes and meanings, so the interpretations will be mine. I will send you the transcripts (written copies) of your words, along with my interpretations. This will be sent to your personal email address, and should not be shared with people other than yourself. I hope that this will include you in the research process and allow you to change, omit, or expand upon your initial ideas. If I do not get a response from you within three weeks, agreement with the transcript will be implied, and I will continue with the data analysis.

All confidential information will be stored either digitally on a password protected computer, or in a locked filing cabinet. Upon completion of my dissertation, all electronic and hardcopy data will be securely kept for five years, and then destroyed.

Data withdrawal during the final stage of the dissertation/ publication will not be possible but that if a participant wishes to withdraw their consent at this stage, I will guarantee that future publications do not include data from that individual.

### **Are there risks or benefits if I participate?**

There is minimal physical risk from participation in this study. For some, discussions about nonhuman animals or vegan experiences can evoke emotions and may be uncomfortable. You will be offered support through counseling at the University of Calgary or through community counseling services if an interview is triggering or distressing to you. Again, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

The University of Calgary Wellness Centre:  
Phone: 403-210-9355, Option #2  
Room 370  
MacEwan Student Centre  
2500 University Dr NW

Eastside Family Centre:  
Phone: 403-299-9696

#255, 495- 36 St NE (In Northgate Mall)

South Calgary Health Centre:

Phone: 403-943-9374

31 Sunpark Plaza SE

Sheldon Chumir Walk-In Crisis Service:

(403) 955-6200

1213 4 St SW

**Confidentiality:**

If you decide to participate in the study, your name and identity will be kept strictly confidential through the use of a pseudonym (made-up name) that you choose yourself. Everyone participating will be asked to keep our discussions confidential. However, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed because there will be other people participating in the focus group.

**Signatures:**

The signature of the participant indicates that 1) you understand the information provided in this form, and 2) you agree to be included in the research project. You may withdraw your consent at any time with no consequences.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: Meneka Thirukkumaran

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/ Concerns:**

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Meneka Thirukkumaran  
PhD Student, Werklund School of Education  
(403) 479-9722 or [meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:meneka.thirukkumaran@ucalgary.ca)

And

Dr. E. Lisa Panayotidis  
Werklund School of Education  
[elpanayo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:elpanayo@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca)

A copy of this assent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The researcher has kept a copy of the consent form.

# Appendix B

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## Interview Guide

### Focus Group Introduction Scripting:

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. Although I will not be able to financially compensate you, I want you to know that you will be helping teachers, administrators, and researchers better understand what school is like for vegan teenagers.

I am hoping that throughout this project, our focus groups will be conversational, rather than you simply responding to my questions. To begin, I will ask you to bring an artifact (such as a book, video, or photo) that has impacted your decision to become or stay vegan. We will share these in a group. Then I will ask you some questions about your experience as a vegan in high school. From there, I might ask follow up questions or share my interpretation of your statements. Because all participants share a similar experience, I am hoping we can draw upon our common understandings about veganism and schools as starting point for our conversations.

As you know, I will be audio recording our focus group sessions so that they can be transcribed. Then I will look at all the sessions and look for similarities, themes, and important ideas. Again, you will be able to choose a pseudonym (made-up name) so any personal experiences will remain as confidential as possible.

### About the research:

I would like to briefly tell you about the project that brought us together. I worked as a teacher for several years, and I found myself feeling uncomfortable in situations where nonhuman animals were harmed. I went back to university and researched where nonhuman animals were in the field of education. I became interested in teen activism, and how some viewpoints might cause tension in a school environment.

### Opening Questions:

Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to become a vegan? What led you to veganism?

What do your friends and family think of your choice to be vegan?

So what's it like to be vegan in high school?

**Ongoing Conversation:**

Can you tell me about a time when you felt confident or reassured in your decision to be vegan?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt challenged in your decision to be vegan?

What do you think might have helped you during this difficult time?

Thinking about your identity as a vegan, what is a typical day like for you?

Can you describe a time when someone surprised you with their response towards your veganism?

Have there been any positive influences or mentors for you in relation to your veganism?

In what ways do you feel like you are or could be a positive influence on someone?

Do you think there are some challenges to being vegan in school?

What is lunch time like for a vegan at your school?

Have you ever been asked to dissect a (nonhuman) animal for science? How did you feel about it/ what happened?

Did your science teacher discuss nonhuman animal ethics in lessons on dissection?

Do you think that identifying as male or female has an impact on how others perceive you as a vegan?

Do you feel like people understand why you are a vegan?

What advice do you have for teenagers who are thinking about becoming vegan?

What are some misconceptions you think people have about veganism? Would you like to clear those up?

Some people think that kids and teenagers should not be allowed to vegan because they are still growing and need lots of energy. How would you respond to that statement?

What do you like most about being a vegan?

Thinking back to your whole school experience in high school as a vegan, if you could go back in time and change anything, would you?

How would you define an activist? Do you see yourself as an activist?

What about an advocate, is that different to you?

How do you respond to questions about your veganism?

How important is image to a vegan? Have you ever wanted to keep your veganism a secret?

**Closing the Conversation:**

Looking towards the future, what do you think school would be like for vegan teens?

What motivates you to keep going through difficult times?

If you were a teacher, what sorts of discussions do you think it would be important to have with your students?

Thank you again for making time to meet with me. I appreciate your honesty and willingness to share your personal stories.



# Appendix C

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## The 10 Principles of Critical Animal Studies (Best, Nocella, Kahn, Gigliotti, & Kemmerer, 2007):

1. Pursues interdisciplinary collaborative writing and research in a rich and comprehensive manner that includes perspectives typically ignored by animal studies such as political economy.
2. Rejects pseudo-objective academic analysis by explicitly clarifying its normative values and political commitments, such that there are no positivist illusions whatsoever that theory is disinterested or writing and research is nonpolitical. To support experiential understanding and subjectivity.
3. Eschews narrow academic viewpoints and the debilitating theory-for-theory's sake position in order to link theory to practice, analysis to politics, and the academy to the community.
4. Advances a holistic understanding of the commonality of oppressions, such that speciesism, sexism, racism, ableism, statism, classism, militarism and other hierarchical ideologies and institutions are viewed as parts of a larger, interlocking, global system of domination.
5. Rejects apolitical, conservative, and liberal positions in order to advance an anti-capitalist, and, more generally, a radical anti-hierarchical politics. This orientation seeks to dismantle all structures of exploitation, domination, oppression, torture, killing, and power in favour of decentralizing and democratizing society at all levels and on a global basis.
6. Rejects reformist, single-issue, nation-based, legislative, strictly animal interest politics in favour of alliance politics and solidarity with other struggles against oppression and hierarchy.
7. Champions a politics of total liberation which grasps the need for, and the inseparability of, human, nonhuman animal, and Earth liberation and freedom for all in one comprehensive, though diverse, struggle; to quote Martin Luther King Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
8. Deconstructs and reconstructs the socially constructed binary oppositions between human and nonhuman animals, a move basic to mainstream animal studies, but also looks to illuminate related dichotomies between culture and nature, civilization and wilderness and other dominator hierarchies to emphasize the historical limits placed upon humanity, nonhuman animals, cultural/political norms, and the liberation of nature as part of a

transformative project that seeks to transcend these limits towards greater freedom, peace, and ecological harmony.

9. Openly supports and examines controversial radical politics and strategies used in all kinds of social justice movements, such as those that involve economic sabotage from boycotts to direct action toward the goal of peace.

10. Seeks to create openings for constructive critical dialogue on issues relevant to Critical Animal Studies across a wide-range of academic groups; citizens and grassroots activists; the staffs of policy and social service organizations; and people in private, public, and non-profit sectors. Through – and only through — new paradigms of ecopedagogy, bridge-building with other social movements, and a solidarity-based alliance politics, is it possible to build the new forms of consciousness, knowledge, social institutions that are necessary to dissolve the hierarchical society that has enslaved this planet for the last ten thousand years.

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