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Abstract

This thesis takes a discursive-rhetorical approach to becoming vegetarian and vegan. Previous studies have pointed to complexity and variety in definitions, types and criteria of vegetarianism, making 'objective' studies difficult. Meat is also one of the most highly prized but ambivalently valued foodstuffs. The cultural and social meanings of diet in terms of 'identities' are well established but the rhetorical approach taken here explores identity as accomplished through social practices of accounting. Rather than seeing variation and disagreement as problematic, analytic focus is on the complex and varied construction of social categories/identities in accounts and the practices of justification and criticism. Cultural ambivalences are recast as dilemmas of identity and account-giving.

Diary and serial interview 'case-material' was collected from 23 new and aspiring vegetarians and vegans. Participants' accounts are shown to handle a number of dilemmatic aspects of vegetarian/vegan identity; notably, a *dilemma of moral superiority* and a *dilemma of abstinence*. These dilemmas are discussed in terms of stereotype-avoidance, commitment, and the co-construction of self and Other. Such identity-management is argued to fundamentally involve *relationships*. Seen as contexts, texts and resources for account-giving, relationships highlight both local and biographical elements in self-construction, the inter-dependence of self-narratives/identities and the need for managing them, especially when identities are changed. A number of other rhetorical resources and practices used in the management of identity are also drawn out, including the discourses of lapsing, desire and temptation and accounts of suppression and repression. The management of dilemmas of accounting through presenting the self as ambivalent, conflicted and divided is underlined. Following recent work by Billig (e.g., 1999a), ambivalence and repression are further considered as discursive *activities* as well as claims. This leads to a discussion of identity, contradiction and repression in terms of prohibition, desire and transgression.

It is suggested that becoming vegetarian or vegan may be characterised as a matter of narrating autobiographical change and the continued negotiation of various dilemmas of identity. Social psychological theories of identity and identity change are criticised and the importance of argumentation, ambivalence and commitment are emphasised. The value of a more 'populated' case-study perspective within discursive psychology is also stressed and the study of discursive avoidance and repression is illustrated and recommended.

Key words

1. Vegetarianism and veganism
2. Dilemmas of identity
3. Discourse and rhetoric
4. Repression
5. Prohibition
6. Relationships

Becoming Vegetarian and Vegan:

Rhetoric, Ambivalence and Repression in Self-Narrative

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A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University
April 2002

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks, first and foremost, to Mick Billig for the unfailing interest, enthusiasm and encouragement, the generosity with his time, and both the quantity and quality of the scribbles.

Thanks also to Deirdre Lombard for the dependable helpfulness and the chats. Thanks also to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding me over the last three years, and a Master's year before that.

An obvious debt is owed to all the participants, especially the prolific Nicola, Paul and Cathy, for their openness in talking to a stranger, their perseverance with their diaries and interviews, and for the enjoyable stories and conversations. On this subject:

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. But that, along with plaguing subtle people with obtuse questions, is what being an ethnographer is like.

Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*
(1994 [1983]; p. 230)

Thanks for allowing me to plague you with questions and if I didn't quite 'get it right' I hope that what I have written doesn't appear obtuse. That people are subtler than writing is, perhaps, some defence.

Finally, in this thesis I write about absences but writing it has involved absences of another kind: apologies to my family and friends for my own absenteeism and general reclusiveness due to work and especially to Hilary for not being there properly.

1

Introduction

This thesis explores diary and interview accounts from new vegetarians and vegans in terms of the discursive constitution and management of identity. Diet is more than a nutritional issue and vegetarian or vegan ‘identity’ is argued to involve more than just eating certain foods. It is a social accomplishment tied up with ways of talking, styles of explanation and accounting practices. Analyses based on a view of language as a rhetorical social practice through which identity is constituted and contested will support a raft of arguments about vegetarianism in particular and identity change in general. Of particular interest will be the negotiation of dilemmatic aspects of becoming and being vegetarian or vegan.

The cultural significance of diet and the place of food in social life have been amply demonstrated by sociology and social anthropology. Food practices, food-ideologies and investments in them have the capacity to socially divide as well as unite. Indeed, diet is understood socially in terms of identities. Previous work has stressed contradiction and ambivalence in UK attitudes towards meat, between different ideologies and groups but also within dominant common-sense itself. The choice to reject this nutritionally and symbolically highly valued food, often for moral reasons, is a matter of social controversy. Although (indeed because) becoming vegetarian or vegan may assuage certain nutritional anxieties (e.g., health or moral), it is suggested that it raises new *social* anxieties of identity and accounting. It is argued that when this cultural ambivalence is played out in conversation these multiple meanings, oppositions and tensions become dilemmas of account-giving, which are dilemmas of *identity*. Further, social argumentation is seen as being reflected in private concerns and ambivalences.

Vegetarianism & veganism in the UK are voluntary and involve a decision and process of *conversion*. Moreover, previous work has stressed the potential for social conflict which can accompany adoption of a vegetarian diet. It is hoped that, more than for established vegetarians, the period of transition from meat-eating to vegetarianism or to veganism will raise particularly interesting accounts in terms of social conflicts and reflection on personal/inner ambivalences.

Vegetarian and vegan identities in particular are explored but this also forms a basis for illustrating and discussing the discursive study of identity in general, in which the importance of the particular is stressed. Much social psychological work on ‘identity’ and identity change is argued to be flawed due to its unwillingness to engage with the socio-historic particularities of identities: cultural myths, stereotypes and ideology and discourse in general. In short, ‘identity’ should not be approached as a universal cognitive process but as a rhetorical activity. Notably, the account of identity change offered by Self-Categorisation Theory emphasises conformity and self-stereotyping and this is challenged through an exploration of the dilemmatic character of vegetarian identities, resources for accounting and their deployment in context. Accordingly, a structuralist perspective on the symbolic-linguistic cultural understandings of meat and meat-avoidance specifically is important but forms only the background to an empirical exploration of individuals’ actual accounting within ambivalent rhetorical contexts. This discursive-rhetorical perspective is able to explicitly engage with the discursive navigation and negotiation of vegetarian and vegan identities as a social practice of account-giving, which previous studies have not addressed.

The topic of ethical food avoidance, vegetarianism and veganism remain relatively neglected topics within the social sciences and have attracted almost no research attention within social psychology of any hue. The majority of publications on vegetarianism are written from a campaigning stance or else are histories of vegetarianism. Academic attention has been confined to social anthropology, sociology and dietetics. This study is, to the author’s knowledge, effectively the first social psychological study of UK vegetarians and the first rhetorical-discursive analysis of accounts of going vegetarian and vegan.

Previous studies emphasise that vegetarians are not a homogenous group but encompass considerable differentiation and variety in terms of diets, motivations and definitions. This study eschews realist approaches which privilege analysts' criteria and classifications of vegetarian or vegan motivations and identities, or which take at face value respondents' self-definitions and reports. Instead, analysis will focus on how these controversial issues and complexities of being vegetarian/vegan are dealt with rhetorically by account-givers. Therefore the analysis does not seek to resolve these 'problematic' aspects to vegetarianism; rather vegetarian identities are seen as characterised by such arguments and these become the object of study. It will also be argued that characterising vegetarianism as an expression or indication of alienation or 'gastro-anomie' in contemporary dietary practices misses this argumentative nature of social identities. These, along with postmodern accounts of identity, downplay argumentation and personal investment in identities, which are especially relevant to committing to a new identity.

As well as highlighting the need to study cultural understandings of vegetarian identities in particular, and accounting practices in context, the study also aims to include a more idiographic, biographical and autobiographical perspective. In contrast to the 'depopulated writings' (Billig, 1994) of cognitive social psychology, conversation analysis and postmodern accounts of identity, analyses are essayed which attend and attest to individual personal histories and trajectories. Accounts are read as argumentative constructions but also as reflecting rhetorical contexts - as situated within individual lives as well as local interactions.

Chapter 2 introduces food and diet as a topic of social scientific interest and discusses previous studies of voluntary vegetarianism. The cultural meanings of meat and meat-avoidance in terms of identity are also explored, and the importance of controversy and commitment is underlined. Chapter 3 positions the study within the context of social psychological accounts of 'identity' and identity change. Non-discursive approaches to identity are criticised but a more autobiographical, narrative approach to identity and identity change than is typical within discursive psychological work is also laid out. Chapter 4 describes the participants and recruitment methods and the procedures for collecting the diary and interview material. Analysis begins in Chapter 5 with accounts of motivations and conversions. Comparison is made with previous

studies but this is also a point of departure from less discourse-based studies of vegetarian accounts. The complexity of accounts is brought out and the need for a rhetorical rather than content-analytic analysis is demonstrated. In Chapter 6, the rhetorical-argumentative aspects of vegetarian identities are developed with a focus on social conflict and criticism in accounts. Chapter 7 addresses the issue of vegetarian 'lapsing' but shifts focus from analysts' accounts of 'what really happens' to looking at ways of talking about lapsing and temptation. In Chapter 8 the ambivalence of desire and temptation is more deeply analysed in terms of prohibition, transgression and the divided subject.

2

The social scientific study of food and vegetarianism: Identity, ambivalence and argument

- I. Approaches to the study of food and eating: The 'social appetite'
- II. Meat-avoidance and contemporary vegetarianism
 - Survey data
 - Studies of vegetarians and vegetarianism
- III. Varieties of vegetarianism: Definitions, diets and motivations
 - 'Objective' and 'subjective' criteria
- IV. Motivations, meanings and rhetoric
 - Ideology and analysis
 - Ambivalence and argument
- V. Explaining the rise of contemporary vegetarianism: The management of food ambivalence and anxiety
 - Uncertainty, anomie and anxiety
 - Crisis, coherence or controversy?
 - The process of becoming vegetarian and vegan

The aim of this chapter is to introduce contemporary vegetarianism in the UK as a topic for social scientific study. Earlier studies will be reviewed and foci of previous and potential interest will be identified. A rationale for the present research is begun which will be continued in Chapter 3. Specifically, it introduces a structural, symbolic-linguistic understanding of food, drawing largely on writings within anthropology and sociology. This is followed by a shift to a discursive-rhetorical perspective on identity emphasising ambivalence and argumentation. The chapter also takes up the idea of vegetarianism as a device for the management of food-

ambivalence and food-anxiety, and suggests that, rather than assuaging or avoiding anxiety, a vegetarian identity itself brings new dilemmas of identity which require on-going management through accounting.

Surprisingly, vegetarianism remains a topic that is relatively neglected by the social sciences and social psychology especially. This is surprising because, it will be argued, vegetarianism has much to recommend it to sociological and social psychological study. Its neglect is partly accounted for by the comparatively recent emergence of food and eating as an area of major interest within the social sciences. Although vegetarianism might be studied under the rubrics of, for example, social movements or theories of deviance, most studies draw on the study of diet and eating and so it is primarily this literature that will be considered.

I. Approaches to the study of food and eating: The ‘social appetite’

Some nutritionists (e.g. Yudkin and McKenzie, 1964) have suggested that humans like to eat what is *good for them*. Some anthropologists have subsequently argued that humans tend to choose what is good for them on the basis of *evolutionary* selectivity and adaptation (e.g., Harris, 1985). Others have argued for the importance of *culture* as the primary determining factor in diet, pointing to the huge range of potentially edible items which are ignored by each culture:

Indeed, any given culture will typically reject as unacceptable a whole range of potentially nutritious items or substances while often including other items of dubious nutritional value, and even items with toxic or irritant properties.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 51)

Beardsworth & Keil also draw attention to the distinction made by Mennell between the physiological and psychological phenomenon of *hunger* and its transformation into the social or sociological phenomenon of *appetite*. Foreshadowing somewhat arguments to follow:

[I]t is no exaggeration to say that when humans eat, they eat with the mind as much as with the mouth. Indeed, the symbolic potential of food and eating is virtually limitless, and food items and food consumption events can be imbued with meanings of great significance and surpassing subtlety, according to the occasion and the context. (Beardsworth & Keil; 1997, p, 52)

Food practices, then, are far from being only a matter of nutrition and a topic solely for nutritionists.

In *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture*, Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo (1992) trace the study of food in the social sciences back to Audrey Richards' (1932) pioneering anthropological study on hunger and work in a South African Bantu tribe. While various antecedents could be found – for example, Veblen's (1899) observation of the lavish food and drink of the wealthy as a means of social display – it was, however, in the 1960s and 1970s, with the work of structural anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss (1965, 1968, 1970) and Mary Douglas (1966, 1975), that the social and cultural study of food and eating took off. Lévi-Strauss sought to understand food and eating as a cultural system where 'taste' is culturally shaped and socially controlled. He maintained that food is 'good to think with', seeing food as analogous to language. Like Lévi-Strauss, the structuralist and semiotician, Roland Barthes (e.g., 1975) saw food as a *sign* as well as a need, and as therefore permitting 'communication by food' and requiring a linguistic understanding (1975; p. 51).

Mary Douglas pioneered a structuralist and semiotic understanding of food in Britain, decoding its symbolic and metaphorical meanings. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), following the principle that where there is meaning there must be a system, Jewish dietary prohibitions are explained in terms of the anomalous position of pigs within a classificatory system based upon cloven-footedness and chewing the cud. Her later work has focussed on British food and the constitution of the meal, its combination-conventions and meal formats (1984). Meals are argued to differ in importance and grandeur within the framework of the day (from breakfast to dinner), the week (with the Sunday dinner as high-point), the year (e.g., birthdays and Christmas dinners) and life-cycle series (e.g., anniversaries, weddings and funerals). All meals, however, can

be seen to figure the common structure and to encode social boundaries, primarily those of the family (1975). Her work seeks to demonstrate that food and how we eat it “are symbolic of a particular social order, thus the patterns she discusses stand for much more than themselves” (Caplan, 1997; p. 2). Deciphering these cultural codes that underlie food practices gives insights into the rules governing everyday life and allows “a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration” (Lévi-Strauss, 1968; p. 87, in Caplan, 1997).

Structuralist understandings of food have been criticised by subsequent work. Notable in this respect is Harris (1978, 1985), whose form of cultural materialism rejects Douglas’s analyses of food taboos in terms of symbolic meanings, and instead reinterprets food-prohibitions from the point of view of practical logical attempts to adapt to the physical and economic pressures of the environment. The cultural emphasis of the anthropological work of the 1960s and 1970s has also been criticised for saying nothing about individual differences, relationships of power, and changes in food practices. In *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, Goody (1982) points to internal social differentiation (within society) and argues that eating must involve political economy at both the level of the household and the state. Similarly, Mintz (1985) takes a historical perspective on the social relations involved in the production and consumption of sugar.

An emerging body of sociological work on food and eating has grown quite rapidly in recent years and the topic’s past neglect within the discipline, commonly pointed to in texts, no longer holds true. Recent introductory texts on the sociology of food include: Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo (1992); Whit (1995); Wood (1995); Lupton (1996); McIntosh (1996); Beardsworth & Keil (1997); Warde (1997); and Germov & Williams, eds. (1999). As the latter notes, the significance of food within social life is vividly portrayed in popular books and films: “*Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* shows the importance of food to family life and personal identity. *Babette’s Feast* contrasts a pious lifestyle or moral austerity with the sensuality and carnality of food as a feast of sight, texture, taste and smell – a spiritual experience of worldly pleasure. *The Wedding Banquet* deals with food as the basis for social meaning in the form of food

rituals...” (Germov & Williams, 1999; p. 4).¹

Beardsworth & Keil (1997) provide a good overview of the social importance of food and the range of perspectives within social anthropology and sociology. They write:

Particular foods and food combinations, in particular cultures, can be associated with festivity and celebration, with piety, religious observance and sacred ritual, and with the rites of passage which mark crucial status transitions in the life cycle. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 52)

Food is also powerfully associated with hedonism with certain foods seen in terms of luxury and self-indulgence. But counter-posed to pleasure are other social pressures for discipline which foster guilt and anxieties about over-indulgence, leading to ambivalent attitudes towards these foods. Other foods may also bear associations with health, restraint and moral rectitude.

Food and the exchange of food can be associated with rewards, affection, approval, relations of dominance or mutual interdependence between individuals: “Food represents a powerful symbolic resource for the expression of patterns of social differentiation [...and...] can, and frequently does, play a crucial role in symbolizing and demonstrating social distinctions” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 52-3). Several feminist studies of food and the performance of gender have underlined the common patterns of inequality in food provisioning and food preparation activities and the different ‘entitlements’ to food between men and women in both quantity and kinds of foods (Murcott, 1982, 1983, and Murcott, ed., 1983, for the UK; and Charles & Kerr, 1988, for the US). Men typically receive the larger portions (Pember Reeves 1979). Particular foods are associated with one sex rather than the other - most strikingly red meat is seen as a quintessentially masculine food. Gender is also of profound importance to issues around body-image: women are much more likely to be on weight-reducing diets and to develop eating disorders such as *anorexia nervosa* and *bulimia nervosa* (Caplan, 1997).

¹ The powerful social meanings and uses of food and eating are also illustrated with film by Fiddes (1991, p. 124), who reminds us of the climax to Greenaway’s *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* in which the brutal murderer played by Michael Gambon is forced to eat his victim.

Bourdieu (1984), building on the ideas of Veblen and Elias, argues that the upper classes use food as a means of differentiating themselves from lower classes just as they use music, art or clothes. Again, certain foods are seen as fit for wealthy members of society. However, as the lower classes seek to emulate the tastes of the rich, the preservation of status differences may require tastes to continually change.² Still other foods, such as confectionery/sweets, may be regarded as more appropriate to children or the old. Also, Barthes (1973), in his essay ‘Steak and Chips’, reflects on this dish as a symbol of French national identity and has elsewhere made a similar point about French cuisine in general (1997 [1975]; p. 24).

Thus food choices may be used to express social differentiations of gender, age, class, taste, ethnicity, nationality and regional identities. As Beardsworth & Keil (1997) note however, diets also *reflect* differences – in the inequalities and relations of power such as the limited budgets of the poor and the authority of adults over children. Issues of social and individual identity and of freedom of choice will be discussed further below, but we may note now that particular foods come to be ‘charged’ with meanings symbolic of different identities. It is to the particular, and particularly interesting, case of flesh foods, their avoidance and their meanings, that we now turn.

II. Meat-avoidance and contemporary vegetarianism

As mentioned, Beardsworth & Keil emphasise that “all cultures are highly selective in what they actually define as food” (1997; p. 51). They also observe that “large numbers of people in the developing world are effectively vegetarian” (1997; p. 218) but that this is not a matter of *choice*, noting the general correlation between increasing affluence and increasing meat-consumption in developing countries. In fact, high levels of meat consumption can be seen as characterising the ‘affluent diet’

² It might also be argued, however, that status may not always be assessed in economic terms and also that ‘lower status’ groups may also seek to differentiate themselves from wealthier groups, who may also appropriate influences from the tastes and styles of lower status groups. Thus previously low-status items (perhaps suitably relocated and represented) may acquire a trendy/chic/stylish cachet (e.g., the wave of ‘sausage-n-mash’ restaurants). Thus, rather than the poor pursuing the tastes of the rich, there are various groups and more complex processes of differentiation, emulation, appropriation and reinvention of each others’ tastes. This can be seen to reinforce rather than undermine Bourdieu’s point about the use of cultural resources, including food, in the operation of groups, which is also underlined by the intensely aspirational nature of much consumer behaviour.

and meat is “probably the most universally valued of foods across the broad spectrum of human cultures” (1997; p. 193).³ Harris (1985) makes much of nutritional bases for ‘meat hunger’ and accounts of it in primitive societies. And yet, crucially, meat and animal products are also by far the most common foci of taboo, regulation and avoidance (Simoons, 1961).

As well as the widely-known taboos against eating pig (rejected by both Jews and Moslems) and cow (Hindus and Sikhs), there are less well-known but widespread prohibitions, including those against eating chickens, eggs, horses and dogs. By modern British meat-eating standards, the consumption of, for example, cats, dogs, horses, whales, dolphins, monkeys and apes would be regarded largely with horror but all are considered food by other peoples. In addition, eating any species of wild animal not covered by the term ‘game’ would be considered unthinkable and taken for granted by the average Westerner though “our not-too-distant forebears [...] were happy to feast upon a veritable menagerie of wild creatures should their status and the occasion permit” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 209). Other animals are, for us, less clearly ‘taboo’ and would depend on the sensibilities of the individual - for example, camels, goats, kangaroos, turtles...

The avoidance of *all* forms of flesh-food is much rarer but also has a long-established and worldwide history.

[T]he vegetarian ideal as a concept which embodied a moral imperative – ‘thou shalt not kill for food’ – made its first impact on history in India and Greece at around the same time, 500 BC, within the lifetimes of both Buddha and Pythagoras.⁴ (Spencer, 2000; p. xi)

³ However, the relative scarcity of meat is, perhaps, also significant to some of the high value placed upon it.

⁴ Earlier, but perhaps less influential, origins may be found in the founder of Jainism, Mahavira, born in India in 599 BC. Although Pythagoras is the most celebrated of the ancient Greek proponents of vegetarianism, there were many others, most notably Ovid, Plutarch, Seneca, Plotinus, Porphyry, Theophrastes, Crates and Celus (see esp. Dombrowski, 1985). Nor were these limited to Pythagoreans, but included a few Cynics and Stoics among them. Gregerson (1994) argues that, “This fact is indicative of the extent to which vegetarianism and anti-vegetarianism have often existed side by side on the part of different members within the same philosophical school or even the same religion” (1994; p. 24).

Meat avoidance in the West remained confined to relatively small numbers and exceptional individuals in Britain until urbanisation in the nineteenth century and the founding of the Vegetarian Society in England in 1847. The term ‘vegetarian’ was officially adopted at this time, adherents being referred to as ‘Pythagoreans’ prior to this. Even in England, however, it is only in recent decades that vegetarianism has become a ‘mass’ phenomenon. It is this contemporary vegetarianism within the West, and Britain especially, which is the object of this and previous studies. The details of the history of vegetarianism throughout the world and in the West are not necessary for present purposes – contemporary vegetarianism in Western societies may be considered as a distinct phenomenon for study in its own right in many respects.⁵

In addition to the high numbers involved and the rapid rate of change, modern vegetarianism is distinguished by *voluntary* rejection rather than the absence of available flesh foods found in developing countries, and by *dissent* from the norms of society rather than accordance with traditional and religious vegetarianism. Moreover, there is an important dimension of *personal change and transition* within this changing Western cultural scene: “vegetarians in Western cultures, in most instances, are not life-long practitioners but converts. They are individuals who have subjected more traditional foodways to critical scrutiny, and subsequently made a decision to change their eating habits, sometimes in a radical fashion” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 253).

Survey data

There is much evidence documenting marked changes in patterns of meat consumption in the UK in recent decades (e.g., MAFF, 1991, 1994, Murcott, 1997, 1998). Beardsworth & Bryman (1999) and Fiddes (1997), for example, draw attention to the long-term decline in the consumption of red meat since the 1960s and a similar decline in pork consumption since the 1970s. This must however, they stress, be seen alongside an increase in the consumption of other types of meat, most notably poultry and a growth in the fast food and ready meals markets. Though sales of meat in overall terms have not fallen dramatically, there has been a distinct shift away from

⁵ Several comprehensive studies of the history of vegetarianism exist, e.g., Barkas (1975), Dombrowski (1985), Gregerson (1994), Spencer (2000) and also Twigg (1981, unpublished) for vegetarianism in the UK 1847-1981.

red meats to white meats and a move away from butchers to supermarket meat counters. Most significantly for this study, there has also been a dramatic increase in the number of vegetarians (see below). Highlighting actual change in food habits not just attitudes, Maurer argues that, “without vegetarians there is no vegetarian movement” (1995; p. 144). But also, *national* reductions in meat sales do not make a vegetarian movement or even a single vegetarian: Vegetarians are also significant as they do not just reduce or restrict their meat intake but *abstain* from meat – and so they highlight issues of having a vegetarian *identity* (though it will be seen that among vegetarians abstention may not always be total and discrimination between red and white meat is also seen).

Rationing records show that in 1945 there were 100,000 vegetarians in the UK. Spencer sums up recent developments and the situation today:

Membership of the [Vegetarian] Society itself doubled in the 1980s from 7,500 in 1980 to 14,970 in 1991 [...]. But the broad figures within society itself, where the term ‘vegetarian’ is ill-defined and allows for some consumption of fish, show the number of people who avoid red meat to have increased from around 2.2 million in 1984 to 8.2 million in 1991, which is 16% of the UK population. Historically, of course, in the West, this is the greatest number of vegetarians ever to exist within a meat-eating society who are not part of any one idealistic or religious group, who have broadly abstained from meat for a variety of different reasons, though they broadly share the same view of society itself.

(Spencer, 2000; p. 325)

Less inclusive definitions of vegetarianism in many polls and surveys yield somewhat lower rates. For example, an NOP poll for Dalepak and The Vegetarian Society in May 1998 reported that 7% of 1004 adults interviewed agreed with the statement, “I am a vegetarian and eat no meat at all”. A Taylor Nelson survey of 1000 adults for the RSPCA in June 2000 found that 5% did not eat meat and an additional 4% (a total of 9%) did not eat red meat. The corpus of survey findings indicates that approximately 6%, or over 3 million adults in the UK, avoid all meat. In addition to this, growing numbers of people are decreasing their intake of meat and red meat in particular. A 1997 NOP poll for Seven Seas and The Vegetarian Society, surveyed 1479 adults, of

whom 41% reported eating less meat nowadays and 11% could imagine becoming vegetarian the future. The figures for vegans in the UK indicate an increase from 100,000 vegans in 1993 to more than 224,000 (1/4 million) vegans in 1997 (Realeat/Gallup 1997). A year 2000 survey among students found rates of veganism of 1% (see below).

The survey data also suggest a number of features about the UK vegetarian population. Polls consistently suggest greater levels of vegetarianism among *females*, the *young*, and in the *South* of Britain. For example, a JMA Student Omnibus poll of 1141 students aged 17-24 in January 2000 reported vegetarianism to be at 4% in males but 11% in females (which suggests that the higher rates among the young may be attributable to young females specifically). Vegetarianism across the sample was 8% and a total of 18% did not eat red meat. In the same poll, an additional 1% were vegan. A Gallup poll of 18-35 year olds reported that 14% of 'Southerners' are likely to be vegetarian (Miller Lite, December 1991). Spencer argues that vegetarianism has lost its former links with the working class and, later, the middle class, and that "there is no doubt that converts to the diet are growing across the class structure, though they are thinnest among the top income groups" (p. 324-5). The survey data does not contradict this assessment.⁶ More striking is the consistent finding that the single most commonly-given reason for being vegetarian in Britain today is a moral objection to animal slaughter: 44% compared to 22% giving health reasons (May 1997 NOP poll). This rise in vegetarianism is also seen in the US, Australia, Holland and Germany, where the vegetarian population shares similar characteristic skews towards females and the young (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Spencer, 2000; and for Australia, McLennan & Podger, 1997).

These polls already point to the importance of the definitions and criteria for 'vegetarianism' and of distinctions between types of diets, meats and motivations. Studies of vegetarianism in the social sciences have attempted to examine these aspects in more detail. It is to these that we now turn.

⁶ Beardsworth & Bryman (1999) find lower rates of vegetarianism in students whose fathers' occupations fall under the semi/unskilled manual.

Studies of vegetarians and vegetarianism

The topic of vegetarianism has attracted only modest academic interest within the social sciences. Possible reasons for this will be discussed after a review of the approaches, findings and limitations of these studies. As introduced above, many of these studies have attempted to address the same stubborn issues, including the variety versus cohesiveness of vegetarianism, and the process of conversion. A different perspective on identity will be suggested which may offer a way past some of these difficulties.

In one of the earliest studies of contemporary vegetarianism, American nutritionists Dwyer, Mayer, Dowd, Kandel and Mayer (1974), looked at various aspects of a sample of 100 young adult American vegetarians using interviews, dietary histories and questionnaires. Following on from an earlier study which found that the diet, lifestyle and particularly the social aspects of vegetarianism were associated with reports of physical and psychological changes, they classified subjects on the basis of social affiliations:

‘*[J]oiners*’ or group-affiliated subjects followed precepts involving emphases on macrobiotics, raw foods, yoga, or health foods. ‘*Loners*’ were unaffiliated with such groups. (p. 530; emphasis added)

A range of patterns of avoidance was also found, and subjects were divided into those with ‘*far-reaching*’ or ‘*circumscribed*’ avoidances. An interaction between the two dimensions emerged: joiners were found to be more likely than loners to have far-reaching patterns of avoidances. Religious, health-related beliefs, and reasons for vegetarianism were also studied. The most common response to the question ‘why are you vegetarian?’ was related to *health*, followed by *ethical*, *metaphysical*, *ecologic*, and *food preferences*. Variety in both range of avoidances and in motives were found and the authors stress that vegetarians should not be considered as a homogenous group. They express concern for the health of joiners with far-reaching avoidances, who “[in] many respects [...] behaved as cultists or quasi-religious groups” (p. 535) and may have ‘misconceptions’ in their beliefs about health and diet.

A later US study by Freeland-Graves, Greninger and Young (1986), which compared vegetarians and meat-eaters using 150 matched pairs, suggests that this link with so-called 'cultism' has declined but found lower involvement in traditional religions among vegetarians. The authors also report that parental influence was not a strong factor in becoming vegetarian but suggested that collective social support may be important for maintenance: vegetarians were more active socially and tended to form supportive networks of fellow vegetarians.

Another questionnaire study of vegetarians in the US by Amato & Partridge (1989) again looked at reported motivations, but found that *moral* reasons were most commonly given (67%), followed by *health* (38%), *spiritual* (17%), and *distaste* (12%). They also report that most (57%) gave multiple reasons and that motivations tended to change over time. The study also suggests that vegetarianism may have a significant impact on personal relationships, with very negative parental reactions and major changes in family relations common, sometimes including the breakdown of relationships. They also found that respondents commonly characterised their conversion as precipitated by a dramatic and often distressing experience (p. 74-6). The sample was self-selected however, and therefore is perhaps unrepresentative of the vegetarian population as a whole, even in the US at that time.

One of the earliest significant studies of vegetarianism in the UK is found in Julia Twigg's essay, *Vegetarianism and the Meanings of Meat* (1983). Taking a structuralist approach, sociologist Twigg traces the cultural and ideological meanings and associations of meat. These are seen to cluster around a strong but uneasy valuation of meat as *powerful* in various ways. The prestige of meat within the 'dominant meat-eating ideology' is contrasted with a vegetarian ideology which explicitly inverts a received hierarchy of foods. Traditionally low-status foods such as vegetables are placed at the top of this 'inverted hierarchy' and red meat, normally the most prized food, becomes the most devalued, with fish and dairy foods occupying the middle ground. Such cultural and ideological meanings of meat will be returned to later after a discussion of *empirical* studies of UK vegetarians and vegans.

III. Varieties of vegetarianism: Definitions, diets and motivations

The most significant empirical study of the vegetarian population in the UK is found in Beardsworth & Keil (1992a): “[a] qualitative study of the dietary beliefs and practices of [...] vegetarians and vegans” (p. 253). Semi-structured interviews of a ‘snowball’ sample of 76 adult vegetarians and vegans in the East-Midlands focussed on their motives and experiences. Importantly, the authors also set vegetarianism in the context of broader debates within the sociology of diet and address the issue of the rise of contemporary vegetarianism.

Beardsworth & Keil suggest a ‘taxonomy of forms of vegetarianism’ on the basis of dietary exclusions. Following the same sort of inverted hierarchy described by Twigg, vegetarians’ diets are seen as ranged along a continuum, with the least strict at one end avoiding only red meat and, at the other end, those avoiding all animal products. More elaborate than Dwyer *et al.*’s (1974) ‘circumscribed’ and ‘far-reaching’ avoidances, it is comprised of six types, with progressive distinctions between meat, fish, eggs, dairy produce, vegetarian cheese, and vegetable foods. Foods are consumed at *and below* the food given for that type, e.g., a Type 3 vegetarian eats everything a Type 4 eats plus eggs.

Type 1: Meat consumed

Type 2: Fish consumed

Type 3: Eggs consumed

Type 4: Dairy produce consumed

Type 5: Rennet-free cheese consumed

Type 6: Vegetable derived products consumed

Figure 1: *A Typology of Forms of Vegetarianism*

(From Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a, p. 265)

This study did not look at the diets of meat-eaters but the question of sub-types within meat-eaters and the blurring of the boundary between them and Type 1 vegetarians may be considered implicit: The typology could be extended into meat-eating to

identify those meat-eaters or vegetarians who discriminate between meats – for example between veal, red meat and fowl (the avoidance of *red* meat is indicated by the survey findings above). Beardsworth & Keil do report that “in the cases that came to light meat was consumed only rarely, and in particular circumstances” (p. 265), suggesting a fairly clear boundary between vegetarians and non-vegetarians.⁷ A rather different picture of meat-eater/vegetarian group distinctiveness is put forward by Willetts (1997) which will be detailed below.

Like Dwyer *et al.*, Beardsworth & Keil stress that within vegetarianism there is great diversity – in both diet and motivations given. Vegetarianism is seen as “a complex of inter-related beliefs, attitudes and nutritional practices” (1992a, p. 253). There is a tension, then, of which Beardsworth & Keil are aware, between this complexity and generalised accounts of it. For the six types of diets above, Beardsworth & Keil emphasise that “membership of such categories is not fixed” and that individuals may move up and down the scale over time (1992a, p. 266). Types of diets are, then, seen as informed by and linked to personal biographies and individual ‘vegetarian careers’. However, the typology itself may be further seen as posing certain problems.

Such a taxonomy is undermined somewhat by variation within types. This is acknowledged by Beardsworth & Keil at least for vegans (Type 6): “veganism [...] permits the consumption of no animal products (although this prohibition itself may be applied with varying degrees of strictness)...” (1992a, p. 263). But, equally, the notion of a single continuum is at odds with possible *alternative* hierarchies or patterns of food avoidance across vegetarians. Most pertinently, the definition of vegetarianism given by the Vegetarian Society is difficult to place within the above typology. The Society’s guidelines allow an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet (Type 3 above) but the eggs must be free-range not battery-farmed (not mentioned in the typology) and the cheese must be calf-rennet-free vegetarian cheese (Type 5). Also, products can carry the Vegetarian Society-approved ‘V’-sign trademark only if they do not contain slaughterhouse by-products and other common additives: for example, animal fat, gelatine, animal glycerol; and, for the Vegan Society’s trademark sunflower

⁷ And elsewhere: “At the least strict end, some individuals may on occasions consume meat (usually white, more unusually red) and yet still think of themselves as vegetarian” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 263).

endorsement, a host of other ingredients such as skimmed milk powder, cochineal, lactose and casein.

A further, related matter which appears to be of greater concern among vegans than vegetarians is the issue of animal substances which are not found in the product itself but are used in their *manufacture and/or development*. The Vegan Society-published product list, the *Animal Free Shopper* (Vegan Society, 1997), states, “the manufacture and/or development of the product, and where applicable its ingredients, must not involve, or have involved, the use of any animal product, by-product or derivative” (4th edition, 1997, p. 212). Examples include the use of isinglass (from fish) to filter wine or the use of charcoaled bone in the manufacture of sugar, and these are potentially of concern to vegetarians too. Information and awareness becomes an increasingly important limiting or mediating factor for avoiding this invisible animal involvement (and can be extended almost indefinitely as the seemingly endless hidden use of animal products is explored). This highlights the importance of the certification of products by both the Vegan and Vegetarian Societies and, so, the criteria of these organisations. They are not only a source of information but are sources that are likely to be respected and trusted. The importance of trust and scepticism of sources of information has gained some attention within studies of the public understanding of science (e.g., Wynne, 1994) and for writers on *risk* (notably Beck, 1992 [1986]).

The Vegetarian Society’s definition is one popularly used or aimed for (whether coinciding with individuals’ standards or consciously followed by them, or both) and there is a strong case to be made that a typology of vegetarianism should reflect this popular benchmark.⁸ The importance of the criteria and definitions of the Vegetarian and Vegan Societies is reflected in one of Beardsworth & Keil’s data extracts:

Our washing-up liquid, our washing powders ... cosmetics, toiletries, are all when available,... vegan, by definition of the Vegan Society (Male, Type 6)
(1992a, p. 265)

⁸ The companies which pay to put the sign on their products assume consumers are guided by them. Vegetarian shoppers and diners do not as yet enjoy the clarity and protection of a *legal* definition for ‘Vegetarian’ products and dishes. The Vegetarian Society is pressing for such a legal definition and its criteria would be likely to be influential - and so to be of yet greater significance - if this happens.

Many vegans see the extension of animal product avoidance beyond diet as fundamental to their veganism, often avoiding leather, silk, certain toiletries and household products, and sometimes wool, for example. Some vegetarians avoid leather goods, and even many meat-eaters shun furs and cosmetics tested on animals. Patterns of ‘vegetarian’ avoidances are not limited to foods consumed and it must be borne in mind that for many it is not purely or ‘essentially’ a *dietary* issue. A definitive taxonomy, even a provisional or approximate one, may simplify, conceal and mislead as much as it succeeds in clarifying.

‘Objective’ and ‘subjective’ criteria

While such efforts at categorising and defining vegetarianism according to diet undoubtedly have value, difficulties with these broad, general accounts are also instructive and point to conceptual problems for the researcher. Beardsworth & Keil acknowledge and develop the complexities of the topic further than other studies, particularly in the chapters devoted to vegetarianism in their later book on food and society (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997) wherein the six-type taxonomy does not appear. Here they clearly identify a fundamental issue rarely confronted in the vegetarian literature or surveys: the conflict between analytic and respondents’ own criteria for ‘vegetarianism’:⁹

[V]egetarianism is by no means a straightforward concept, and it has many varieties which shade into one another. The researcher inevitably faces the problem of *whether to generate a set of objective definitions of varieties of vegetarianism and work in terms of these or, alternatively, to work with the subjective definitions of respondents*, which may be somewhat variable and even positively idiosyncratic. (1997, p. 224; emphasis added)

They conclude, “the conceptualisations must be as worthy of attention and analysis as the observed or reported patterns” (1997, p. 226) and, so, take self-defined

⁹ Maurer (1995) does include a footnote which makes the point that: “However, people’s self-definitions may not reflect the “no meat, poultry or seafood” criteria; apparently, many people who occasionally eat meat consider themselves vegetarians.” (p. 159).

vegetarianism and veganism as their principal object of study.¹⁰

Most of the studies focus on self-defined vegetarians but if the broad usage of the single term ‘vegetarian’ is taken to indicate an unproblematic group, this blanket account - stretched to cover all *soi-disant* ‘vegetarians’ - may shroud important differences and meanings. Willetts (1997), for example, makes a number of strong claims about the nature of vegetarianism and vegetarian identity on the basis of self-defined ‘vegetarians’ within her sample. Of the 134 adult residents of South East London who were interviewed and completed questionnaires, “nineteen identified themselves as ‘vegetarian’ and four as ‘vegan’, together representing 17 per cent of the resident sample” (p. 115), the rest being referred to as ‘meat-eaters’. In contrast to Beardsworth & Keil’s findings on vegetarian meat-eating, Willetts reports that:

[F]or the majority of vegetarians meat was something prepared by them at home and was a regular part of their diet. Indeed, most people took it for granted that fish, at least, was part of the vegetarian repertoire. (Willetts; p. 116)

Further, she also contends - challenging Twigg’s ‘inverted hierarchy’ of avoidances - that, “there was little evidence of any patterning in the foods that were given up [...] and there was little sense of having arrived at vegetarianism” (Willetts; p.117), and she argues that:

My research suggests that meat-eating and vegetarianism are not as different as is often suggested. In many instances it is impossible to see a clear distinction between the diets of the two groups. (Willetts; p. 114)

The prevalence of vegetarian meat-eating is central to her account but she argues that meat-eaters and vegetarians not only have similar diets but also hold similar *views*:

It is surprising that vegetarianism is so marginalized when the majority of vegetarians in this study eat meat, still more when *both consumer groups hold*

¹⁰ The adoption by individuals of the ‘official’ criteria offered by the Vegetarian and Vegan Societies may be viewed in some ways as a meeting of objective and subjective criteria.

broadly similar views on environmental issues such as animal rights and factory farming. (Willetts; p. 122; emphasis added)

Her construal of animal rights and factory farming as ‘environmental issues’ is misleading and easily contested. Animal rights is quite clearly a moral philosophy which values *individual* animals not just the conservation of the species, and as such should, like concerns for the *welfare* of animals, be considered - as are *human* rights - as distinct from environmental issues. Factory farming, too, is as much or more about the welfare of animals and the health-anxieties of consumers as about the environment. The umbrella term ‘environmental issues’, like ‘vegetarian’, is here used to *mask* rather than clarify meanings.¹¹ Willetts’ gloss of attitudes highlights the pitfalls of any over-simplified analytic account. Even with regard to attitudes towards meat-eating, Willetts suggests that vegetarians are more than tolerant, and themselves value meat both nutritionally and culturally:

Research in South-East London suggests that vegetarianism does not necessarily involve abstaining from meat and eating meat does not place vegetarians in a precarious moral position, at least in their own eyes. Meat was consumed both as a momentary ‘lapse’ and also as a regular part of their diet. While meat-eaters were less forgiving of such ‘indiscretions’, *the latter readily expanded their definitions of vegetarianism to incorporate the consumption of meat.* Indeed, *for most participants^[12] meat was seen as a central component of a proper meal and was endowed with beneficial properties, both physical and cultural.*

(Willetts; p. 128; emphasis added)

And:

No sense of elitism existed in which people were seen to be better vegetarians the more they avoided animal products. Indeed, in most cases, they were *also non-judgmental about the diet of the ‘meat-eaters’ and did not attempt to proselytise.* As a (fish-eating) vegan said: “I don’t think a vegan diet is better

¹¹ It is not reported whether at any stage in analysis the component topics such as ‘animal rights’ were separated out from other ‘environmental issues’.

¹² It is assumed that ‘participants’ refers here to ‘vegetarian’ participants rather than the whole sample, 83% of whom are not ‘vegetarian’ and whose attitudes should obviously be distinguished from vegetarians.

than a vegetarian one and if people like eating meat that's fine. *Our diet is just better for us, that's all.*" (Willetts; p. 118; emphasis added)

Willetts' case rests on emphasising similarities between vegetarians and meat-eaters and downplaying inter-group differences. This is despite her acknowledgement that "the categories of vegetarian and vegan covered a varied set of dietary practices" (p. 115) and her criticism of analyses which "apply a universal meaning to meat" (p. 114). Specifically, she is concerned to dispute the 'worldview perspective' (p. 112) which previous research is charged with assuming:¹³

Academic interest in vegetarianism, therefore, is based primarily on the assumption that its adherents have undergone an explicit process of reflection and have chosen to subscribe to an alternative ideology, one at odds with that of 'the dominant culture' (Twigg 1983: 21). (Willetts; p. 112)

[W]e need, first, to re-appraise what we mean by vegetarianism and, second, to deconstruct the model that positions meat-eating and vegetarianism as oppositional. (Willetts; p. 111)

But in denying a monosemic interpretation of vegetarianism in terms of an alternative, opposing ideology her own analysis itself fails to discriminate and presents vegetarianism in similar sweeping terms typified instead by those *least* ideologically committed and opposed. Her findings can be seen as based on a small sample and, perhaps, on a more lax categorisation procedure: Tellingly, Willetts reports without comment that 17% of her sample are vegetarian or vegan (see above): this is out of line with all other studies or surveys of the UK adult population, which usually put vegetarianism and veganism together at around 5-8% (see above, 'Survey data'). As Dwyer *et al.* and others have argued, self-defined vegetarians 'en bloc' are not a homogenous group but Willetts attempts to treat them as such by reifying self-definition (/self-categorisation) and treating them as an unproblematic group. In arguing for a reassessment of the model "that positions meat-eating and vegetarianism

¹³ She focuses on Twigg (1979, 1983), Adams (1990) and Fiddes (1991) but also cites Beardsworth & Keil, who see voluntary vegetarianism as "a result of a more or less explicit processes of reflection" and see converts as "individuals who have subjected more traditional foodways to critical scrutiny and made a deliberate decision to change their eating habits" (1992a, p. 253).

as oppositional” there is no recognition of the differences which do exist between vegetarians and meat-eaters, in diet, attitudes or in self-descriptions – some of her sample described themselves as ‘vegetarian’ while most did not and this in itself is interesting. Nor is there any attempt to address the questions of why some individuals are or become ‘vegetarian’ or why rates of vegetarianism have risen. This leaves a vacuum within vegetarian meanings and motivations.

Traditionally, definitions of ‘vegetarianism’ are based on actual diets and yet studies tend to rely on self-descriptions of being ‘vegetarian’. We have seen that there are problems with objective criteria and classifications of diets and with subjective self-categorisations, whatever the discrepancies between them. It is argued here that interpreting the variety of dietary practices requires attention to variety in understandings and meanings of vegetarianism. It is highly significant that Willetts does not look at, or at least does not report, the *motivations* of her 23 vegetarians and vegans, aiming instead to compare the ‘worldviews’ of the whole sample.¹⁴ In contrast, motivations are a common focus of other studies and may be used to both describe varieties of vegetarians and to understand and explain vegetarian practices.

Further, Willetts is inattentive not only to motivations but also to the rhetorical aspects of the respondents’ accounts – both self-descriptions and reports of attitudes held are taken at face value. Here too, in Beardsworth & Keil (1997) especially, we shall see that there is recognition not only of the complexity of respondents’ motivation accounts but of the justificatory aspects of accounts of motivation, though it will be argued that this can be taken much further and also applied to self-categorisations.

¹⁴ Motivations, surprisingly, are not mentioned as an explicit focus: “The interview format was designed to be flexible, allowing participants to discuss their concerns on a broad range of topics from shopping expenditure, food preparation and consumption, health and healthy eating, diet and body image, to vegetarianism and food production and processing.” (Willetts, p. 115)

IV. Motives, meanings, ideology and rhetoric

Beardsworth & Keil's (1992a) findings reaffirm the centrality of *ethical* considerations in the motivations of vegetarians once again – as found by the UK polls and by Amato & Partridge in the most recent of the US studies.¹⁵ Moral reasons were followed in frequency by *health*, *gustatory* and finally *ecological* factors.

'Gustatory' reasons are comparable to the categories used by other studies ('food-preferences' or 'distaste'), but 'spiritual' or 'metaphysical' reasons were not reported.

Like Amato & Partridge, Beardsworth & Keil report that respondents tended to give multiple reasons/motivations, and they further distinguish between an individual's *principal* motive and other, *subsidiary* motives. Once more concurring with Amato & Partridge, motivations were again found to change over time:

[m]otivations are not static entities, and may undergo significant changes as each individual's unique vegetarian career unfolds over time. Issues once regarded as important may slip down the individual's personal agenda.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 271)

As for their types of food-avoidances, Beardsworth & Keil temper their categories of motivation, with a stress on complexity, flux and biography ('each individual's unique vegetarian career'). Further, they note these "logically separate motivations may be combined and interlocked" (1992a, p. 271) and add that conflict between various motivations is also reported. Writing about factors in the rise of vegetarianism, Beardsworth & Keil develop this account of the complex, argumentative construction of motivation accounts:

Indeed, any attempt to weigh the relative contribution of any given factor is bound to be complicated by the possibility that these ideas may interact with each other in complex ways. *Evidence for these interactions at the personal level* is provided by the empirical studies discussed above, which show how

¹⁵ Ethical motivations were also found to predominate in another UK study by Beardsworth & Bryman (1999) which looked at a sample of students.

respondents' own accounts interweave the various motivations they describe, and often portray them as supporting and confirming each other.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 238; emphasis added)

The crucial issue of rhetoric is raised under a heading, 'Motives and rhetoric':

[I]t is not necessarily easy to distinguish between the considerations which may impel an individual to make a particular choice and the arguments that individual may employ retrospectively to justify that choice, or indeed, to encourage others to make that same choice. [...] [T]he themes discussed here refer both to motivations and to what Maurer (1995: 146-7) refers to as the 'rhetorical idioms' which can be employed in the advocacy of vegetarianism.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1997, p. 226; emphasis added)

This distinction between 'the considerations which may impel' and 'the arguments that individual may employ' might be couched in terms of 'causes' and 'reasons'. Crucially, Beardsworth & Keil not only see the themes of motivation accounts as merging causes with reasons, but also see accounts as arguments and as reflecting larger social debates and controversies. This can form the basis of a rationale for examining in more depth the rich and varied cultural meanings and associations of meat and vegetarianism rather than simply categorising motivations. Analytic attention may be shifted onto the cultural understandings or 'resources' available to speakers and the ways of actually talking and thinking about motivations.

Beardsworth & Keil (1997) report the following emergent themes, which they stress are "not offered as mutually exclusive" (1997, p. 266). A *moral theme* is identified, traceable back to ancient religious and philosophical thought, which advocates harmlessness towards all living creatures. It has since had various notable proponents throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries, e.g., Mandeville, Shelly, Tolstoy, Salt, Gandhi, and Schweitzer. It has been most rigorously articulated and popularised – whether on the basis of suffering, respect, speciesism or rights – by the many contemporary 'animal philosophers', such as Peter Singer (e.g., 1976), Margaret Midgley (e.g., 1983), Tom Regan (e.g., 1984), Richard Ryder, Keith Tester, Stephen Clark and Bernard Rollin. A *religious /spiritual theme* is

equally ancient and multi-faceted, including a rejection of carnal, animal and sexual appetites and an aspiration to purity in both spirit and body. The *food production theme* argues that meat production is “an unjustifiably extravagant use of natural resources” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 227) and has both ecological and moral implications in terms of environmental damage and world hunger. Beardsworth & Keil also identify a ‘*New Order*’ theme, which may be illustrated by vegetarianism’s historical associations with various alternative movements for social reform and progressive change that are critical of the conventional social order. According to the *aesthetic/gustatory theme*, meat may be characterised as an object of disgust, in appearance, taste and tactile properties. Meat may also be depicted in terms of bodily violence, death and decay, giving rise to moral revulsion as well as aesthetic/gustatory *dis-gust*. The ‘dead’ aspect of flesh foods can also be seen within the final theme of *health* where it is contrasted with the purity and life-energy of vegetable foods. The *health/physiological theme*, then, finally, includes *pro-vegetarian* and *anti-meat* aspects. Twigg writes that the inverted hierarchy in vegetarian ideology,

... presents vegetarian food not just negatively in terms of avoidance or abstinence from the undesirable, but in terms that stress its own positive and superior qualities. (1983, p. 28).

She notes this theme is stronger among vegans and that it also reverses the traditional value on cooking, celebrating instead the virtues of rawness: raw foods especially are “described in a warmly vitalistic language that stresses their special ‘living’ qualities” (p. 28). Raw vegetable foods may also be held up as our *natural* food and she notes the “Edenic or primitivist social myth that lies behind so much of vegetarianism’s utopianism” (1983, p. 29). In contrast somewhat with Twigg’s account and that of Dwyer *et al.*’s 1970s American study, Beardsworth & Keil’s empirical findings suggest that the *anti-meat* theme -stressing meat as health-threatening, pathogenic and/or contaminated- is stronger than this pro-vegetarian theme.

Maurer (1995) analyses the claims made in the vegetarian literature, concluding that,

Vegetarian discourse, as it filters through books and magazines, relies on two

key rhetorical idioms: the rhetorics of *entitlement* and *endangerment*.

(1995, p. 146; emphasis added)

As a matter of emphasis, the idiom of entitlement is based on moral arguments about *justice* and *discrimination*. In contrast, the rhetoric of endangerment stresses impartial *scientific* and *medical* rather than moral judgements and concerns the health-damaging effects of meat-eating. The rhetorics of entitlement and endangerment are clearly similar to the motivation categories 'moral' and 'health-related' (especially the anti-meat sub-theme). However, there seems to be little reason to reduce motivations and arguments to two broad themes alone. Also, as will be argued in greater depth later, this focus on two over-arching rhetorical idioms is a move away from focussing on the *details* of talk and actual accounting in context.

Ideology and analysis

Maurer (1995), Twigg (1983) and Fiddes (1991), in contrast to Willetts, all emphasise the ideological basis of vegetarianism, which can be seen as reflecting and disrupting the dominant cultural meanings of meat.

Vegetarianism presents us in this context with the relatively rare example in the West of an explicit food ideology (c.f. Wellin, 1953) and as such can offer us an entrée into the much more pervasive, though largely implicit, ideology of dominant meat culture. ([...] though it is itself complex and diverse).

(Twigg, 1983; p. 18)

Fiddes, like Twigg, is keen to stress that, though it is less acknowledged, there is an ideology behind meat consumption as well as vegetarianism, and he points to the involvement of *identity*:

It is not just that our food choices are sometimes influenced by a particular person or group: all our alimentary behaviour is. (Fiddes, 1991; p. 33)

Twigg also argues that academic study of vegetarianism is reluctant to recognise ideology in eating and especially meat-eating: "there is a tendency [among

anthropologists] to treat western society in a privileged, over rationalistic way. [...] Too often our analyses unthinkingly accept our own culture's valuation of the daily, the domestic and the organic." (p. 18).¹⁶ Similarly, Wicks points to "this blind spot in sociological analysis" whereby "the issue of what we eat – and therefore our relationship with other living creatures – has remained strangely *unproblematised* and therefore regarded as natural" (Wicks, 1999; p. 100; emphasis in orig.). Considering the notable neglect of the topic of vegetarianism by sociologists,¹⁷ she continues:

... a study of vegetarianism frequently leads to the breakdown in the fragile edifice of denial and mystification involved in eating animals. Perhaps for many social scientists the possibility that academic research will prompt fundamental personal (in this case dietary) change is an unwelcome and uncomfortable prospect and is best therefore avoided. (Wicks, 1999; p. 100)

That meat-eating academics may tend to avoid studying vegetarianism is plausible, and the identities and personal investments in meat-eating ideology and 'common-sense' are also detectable in the few academic accounts which are found. For instance, in a review of Germov & Williams' edited volume (1999), food historian Michael Symons is singularly and revealingly scathing of Wicks' chapter on vegetarianism:

... Another big opening, which Wicks does not admit, is the possibility that vegetarianism is, contrary to its usual self-presentation, *a case of alienation from the natural world*. As such, it is far from the moral stance so many practitioners project. [...] Again, *we anti-vegetarians* are dismayed that people do not know where meat comes from, but *we complain that vegetarianism is a classic case of such alienation - these people are so divorced from the metabolic universe that they refuse animals!* (Symons,¹⁸ emphasis added)

¹⁶ The topic of diet may be entirely disregarded as mundane: Spencer notes that "in sixty biographies of Leonardo da Vinci only two bothered to mention his vegetarianism, which was, after all, a central part of his beliefs" (2000, p. xiii). Caplan (1997) points to feminism in opening up the domestic sphere of food and cooking to academic attention.

¹⁷ Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) write, "there is comparatively little material from the social sciences focussed directly on the specific issue of vegetarianism" (p. 255).

¹⁸ Book review on website of Research Centre For The History Of Food And Drink at The University Of Adelaide, South Australia:

(<http://www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/CentreFoodDrink/Articles/ReviewSocFoodNutrit.html>)

There is some justification for his criticism of Wicks for giving “a straight-forward recital of various arguments for vegetarianism”, though this is not all she does in the chapter. But to construe a vegetarian diet as ‘alienated from the natural world’ merely reiterates common-sense notions of dominant meat culture, which presents animal slaughter and the place of meat in diet as ‘natural’. Symons treats as self-evident that ‘the metabolic universe’ includes *and should include* animals. But it is not ‘animals’ that are being ‘refused’ but *slaughtered and cooked* animals and the human practices involved,¹⁹ and his account seeks to mask the traditionally acknowledged cultural basis of food, appetite and cooking.²⁰ Unintentionally, Symons’ polemics foreground the importance of ideology and identity and their potential role in analysts’ as well as respondents’ accounts: “...*we* anti-vegetarians are dismayed that people do not know where meat comes from, but *we* complain...” (emphasis added). These rather crude attempts to enrol the reader with ‘we’ hinge on social identities and inter-group argumentation.

Even when not wed to the personal investments and identities of writers (and potential writers, as Wicks suggests), attempting to characterise ‘what vegetarianism is about’ is fundamentally controversial, ideological and argumentative. In analysis it is necessary to be wary of merely further propagating such argument, particularly according to common-sense notions.²¹ It is possible to make argument the *object* of

¹⁹ Symons’ use of ‘animals’ here can be unpacked using Adams’ (1999) account of ‘*The social construction of edible bodies and humans as predators*’, in which she unpicks the removal of human agency in the term ‘food animals’ or ‘meat’. Symons’ claims of ‘alienation from the natural world’, and that vegetarians ‘refuse animals’, is not new and is similar to the rhetoric with which Henry Salt took issue in *The Humanities of Diet* (1914):

Some years ago, in an article entitled, ‘Wanted, a New Meat’, the *Spectator* complained that [...] there must exist “...some neglected quadruped, which will furnish what we seek” [...] In the end the ruminants won the day, and the choice fell upon the Eland, which was called to the high function of supplying a new flesh-food for “humanised” man.

Salt continues,

...I have not been fired by the *Spectator*’s enthusiasm for the rescue of some “neglected quadruped”, nor have I any wish to see eviscerated Elands hanging a-row in our butchers’ shops.
(in Walters and Portmess, eds., 1999; p. 116).

²⁰ Germov & Williams (1999) write of “food as the nexus of culture and nature” and Fischler claims that “food is a bridge between nature and culture”.

²¹ Even Wicks’ (though it is not absolutely clear whether she is vegetarian herself) characterisation of vegetarianism relies on meat-eating arguments, framing vegetarianism (rather than meat-eating) as a problem to be explained:

I will examine the key issues that underlie *the decision of a growing number of people to forgo voluntarily a nourishing and pleasure-giving food*. I will then attempt to interpret these decisions within a framework of recent sociological theory. (Wicks, 1999; p. 99; emphasis added)

Especially given current nutritional advice against meat, the continuing appeal and practice of meat-eating might equally be seen as a problem and a puzzle demanding explanation. In the Western context

analysis rather than purely the goal. The place or legitimacy of a critical aspect to analysis is not being rejected,²² but a distinction can be made between, on the one hand, analytic accounts which simply participate in the controversies around vegetarianism and, on the other, a rhetorical analysis of those arguments and argumentation; i.e., between writing from *within* an identity and ideology and writing *about* identities and ideologies.

For example, Twigg's ideological analysis is interested in "the ways in which vegetarian perceptions of meat endorse, mirror and disrupt those found in dominant culture" (1983, p. 21). Like any other cultural phenomenon, she argues, there is great diversity within vegetarianism but it is also seen as a cultural unity both in terms of the continuity of the social history of the movement and the coherence of it as an ideology. She notes four traditional foci in arguments for vegetarianism: *health* and *animal welfare*, and, to a lesser extent, *economic/ecological* and *spiritual* arguments – but once again they are seen as being interconnected and mutually supportive. Importantly, Twigg also argues that:

It is one of the most characteristic of features of vegetarianism that it rarely occurs alone, but comes in conjunction with a complex of other beliefs, attitudes and parallel movements [...] what vegetarianism, as it were, 'goes with' is as important in an understanding of it as its more intrinsic features.²³

(Twigg, 1983, p. 20)

of diseases of affluence meat as 'nourishing' becomes increasingly meaningless and indeed increasingly difficult to maintain. Crucially, such 'factual' or 'impartial' framings of vegetarian practices are almost inevitably mortgaged to some ideological position or assumption.

²² Indeed ideological analysis may be a useful adjunct to critical perspectives on animal-based diets in the sense of becoming aware of the cultural forms and practices. But diet involves more than self-definition and both food production and consumption have concrete effects. And so, whether from within or without academia, critical accounts are increasingly needed as the unsustainable 'diets of affluence' of the West continue to spread, as Singer argues:

A diet heavy on animal products, catered for by intensive animal production, is a disaster for animals, the environment, and the health of those who eat it. The scale of the disaster will be multiplied many times over if the trend for other countries to copy Western diets and methods of production continues. It is already happening in the more successful economies of East Asia, and it seems bound to spread further as the sphere of prosperity widens. (Singer, 1998; p. 78)

²³ The notion of a 'family resemblance' (as used by Wittgenstein) of associations may be apt for the cluster of associated beliefs, attitudes, and movements; none are necessary or sufficient for vegetarianism but together they add considerably to the description and understanding of various aspects of vegetarianism. A similar image is given by Beardsworth & Keil: "a complex of inter-related beliefs, attitudes and nutritional practices" (1992a, p. 253).

Twigg's historical perspective on 'modern' vegetarianism illustrates the various popular manifestations or incarnations of vegetarianism through the various causes and movements with which it has been associated. Modern vegetarianism is contrasted with the vegetarianism of India and medieval times, which must be understood, it is argued, within very different structures of meaning – the caste system and the Manichaeian conceptions of the monastic orders, respectively. Billig (1988) also argues that "the issue of exploring ideological heritage is crucial to an ideological analysis of a pattern of beliefs" (p. 203).

Since the tentative emergence of modern vegetarianism in the late eighteenth century, it has been associated with: the Romantic movement; a later wider progressive milieu in Victorian times "embracing, among others, ethical socialism, Indian religion, anti-vaccination and anti-vivisection"; in the late 1920-30s with nature cures, the sunshine movement and pacifism; and finally with the counter-culture of the 1960-70s. Spencer's (2000) history also identifies a similar series of associations and ascendancies in the twentieth century, with chapter-titles such as 'The Rise of Humanism', 'Docks and Dandelions', and 'Sunlight and Sandals'. If the diversity of contemporary vegetarianism can be understood as a 'family resemblance', this multiplicity of meanings can itself be understood partly in terms of a family *tree* – its history, heritage and roots conferring residual associations with past movements and causes. This history also underlines how vegetarianism has been tied up with group-based ideologies, identities and conflicts.

Concluding their anthology of Western writings on the ethics of vegetarianism, Walters and Portmess (1999) argue that throughout history "the dialectic between ethical vegetarianism and anti-vegetarianism" points to the breadth of issues taken in, and to both specific contexts and enduring philosophical questions:

Debates over vegetarianism interestingly mirror concerns of their time. Is it not evident that in the short selection from Aristotle, questions of the moral justification of slavery, oppression by the victors in war and the subordination of women all echo in what appears at first to be a discourse on the rule of the rational principle and the relationship between animals and men?

(Walters and Portmess, 1999; p. 257)

The wider rhetorical context for thinking, talking and arguing about vegetarianism is also stressed by Fiddes, with particular reference to current debate:

These issues are suffused with layers of contemporary debate, which touch on much else besides the immediately apparent points at stake. [...] [W]hat is being discussed 'through' meat and other animal issues is essentially the cultural crisis of the late industrial era. (Fiddes, 1997; p. 259-260)

Similarly, Twigg argues:

[V]egetarianism uses food as a means to ponder and negotiate a series of major issues concerning the nature of human nature, the meaning and significance of a 'natural' way of life, the origins of illness and suffering, and human beings' moral place in the universe and among the beasts. In all of these the issue of meat is central. (1983, p. 29)

There is small hope then, as this section has argued, of taming and corralling accounts of vegetarianism into tidy motivational categories, and comparatively little to be gleaned from doing so. This history of vegetarianism also illustrates the importance of the context of argument and struggle – between ideologies and between the groups that advocate them. But this past also indicates and is itself a wealth of resources, meanings and arguments for contemporary debates. The concerns of the food reformers, the pacifists, the hippies and others, are not entirely forgotten – the old arguments are neither entirely confined to their time, fully resolved, nor entirely forgotten in contemporary debates. This history of these social movements highlights both continuity and change in the social context of public debate and also the variety of cultural understandings, associations and preoccupations which echo in debate today. This vegetarian heritage of controversies, arguments and ideological conflicts between groups also underlines social identity.

But conflict may be seen as even more fundamental to the cultural understandings of meat and vegetarianism. Conflict and contradiction is not confined to exchanges between the vegetarian and anti-vegetarian ideologies and proponents. Twigg continues:

But in developing its ideas, vegetarianism has not operated in isolation, but has drawn on themes already present in the dominant culture's attitude to meat.

(Twigg, 1983; p. 29)

Looking more closely at the meanings of meat, it is possible to see a number of tensions *within* common-sense understandings of meat which are reflected in and capitalized upon by its detractors. Both Twigg (1983) and Beardsworth & Keil (e.g., 1997) argue for deep-seated ambivalence within attitudes towards meat-consumption.

Ambivalence and argument

The symbolic meanings of meat are numerous and are, as Twigg argues, characterised by greater ambivalence than for any other food, arising out of "the ambivalences and complexities of our own attitudes towards animals, the animal and nature and the natural" (1983, p. 18). Beardsworth & Keil (1992a, 1997) develop this cultural and personal ambivalence in terms of *anxiety*, which is seen as crucial to understanding accounts of vegetarianism and for explaining vegetarianism.

Fischler argues that "[b]ecause we are omnivores, incorporation is an act laden with meaning" (1988; p. 277, in Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a). This focus on the physical act of 'incorporation' – whereby food items cross the threshold from outside into the body – makes especially salient the qualities, good and bad, which are attributed to particular substances/foodstuffs themselves. For as Beardsworth & Keil note, "a widespread feature of human culture is the idea that the absorption of a given food [...] can have the effect of transferring certain symbolic qualities of that food into the very being of the eater" (1997; p. 54).²⁴

More than any other food, perhaps, the ingestion and assimilation of another animal into one's own body is loaded with symbolic and psychological significance, both positive and negative. The links between food taboos and animals have already been mentioned, and in a psychological study of disgust, Angyal (1941) found that food aversions were always focussed on meat or animal products. Twigg also notes that

²⁴ Meat may be seen as being firmly – but not exclusively – in the category of '*sympathetic magic* foods' proposed by Jelliffe (1967).

Macbeth's repulsively potent witches' brew is almost entirely composed of animal, not vegetable, ingredients. She draws attention to the belief that the literal incorporation of animal flesh can imbue the eater with various qualities of *power* – “strength, aggression, passion and sexuality – all that culture has traditionally designated humankind's animal nature” (1983, p. 22). The symbolic significance of *blood* and the bloodiness of meat – particularly red meat – is central to these animal qualities. Blood is associated with life, and its vivid redness with the act of spilling blood, deeds of violence, death and the guilt of having blood on one's hands. Through remnants of the humoral system²⁵ blood is also linked with passion and with understandings of biological heritage and group character.

Crucially, Twigg contends, dominant culture “prizes these [animal] qualities but in a qualified way; enough but not too much [...] is the essence of its attitude to this power” (1983; p. 22). Though meat is the ultimate prestige food, there are certain limits and controls on meat-eating. Most obviously – and easily overlooked – we do not eat nor wish to eat human flesh. Also, at least in Britain, we do not eat carnivores²⁶ – Twigg suggests that the flesh of flesh-eaters, and that of uncastrated beasts, is considered too much of a good thing, *too strong*.²⁷ Meat-eaters too, then, engage in types of meat-avoidance. Secondly, meat is not eaten bloody and raw: “tearing at raw flesh with one's teeth is an image of horror, suitable to monsters and the semi-human. It is an image of the bestial [...] cooking sets us apart from the beasts” (1983; p. 25).

The positive qualities of meat are understood largely in the context of social identities, most notably gender. The animal qualities of power in meat can be seen predominantly in terms of masculinity and sexuality and the uneasy valuation of meat is most visible in relation to the restraints upon its consumption that are applied to or expected of certain groups. Meat is considered a quintessentially masculine food: it is

²⁵ “The four chief fluids of the body – blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile – thought to determine a person's physical and mental qualities” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary).

²⁶ A notable exception to this may be found in the eating of carnivorous fish (e.g., tuna or shark). However, Twigg emphasises the importance of *blood*: the flesh of these fish-eating fish is less bloody and they are also *cold-blooded*, and so therefore may not, for that reason, be seen as overly ‘strong’.

²⁷ It is also true that carnivores are not a very practical source of meat, being on a trophic level higher up the food chain and so being both fewer in number than herbivores and even more inefficient to eat in terms of the conversion of plant food into meat than are herbivores.

equated with muscle and with physical, animal strength and passion. Men, especially sportsmen or fighting men, are deemed to need meat. Twigg points to the customary pre-match steak – now discredited among sports nutritionists – and the pre-flight steak of the astronaut. Thus men who eat no meat are seen as,

... pale faced and slightly feeble and the condemnation of men is much heavier than of women [...] vegetarian men are thought to lack the ‘ruddy’ good health, or ‘red blooded virile’ approach of the meat eater. (Twigg, 1983; p. 24)

This masculine vigour and red-bloodedness also includes a strong sexual element: “Meat has long been associated with the stimulation of lust”, writes Twigg (p. 24), and she observes that sexuality, here, is always animal passion and carnal lust, never a more cerebral eroticism. Fiddes (1991) devotes a chapter to the sexual associations of meat, and points out the collision of masculine and feminine sexual identities in the myth of man as Hunter (which appears most blatantly in pornographic magazines for men such as the tellingly entitled *Rustler*).

The masculinity of meat eating is seen in the research, previously mentioned, which points to men’s greater entitlements to a ‘lion’s share’ of the meat (Pember Reeves, 1979; Ellis, 1983; Ross, 1994). Women, children, the old and the ill, Twigg notes, not only have lesser claims to meat but there has long been an element of positive disapproval of meat-eating by these groups, especially red meat. There was instead an emphasis on “the ‘delicate’ and ‘light’ dishes of chicken, fish and eggs that both mirrored the women’s own delicate condition and avoided the stimulation of those qualities of redbloodedness that seemed inappropriate to those fulfilling a nurturing role” (p. 24). Twigg, Fiddes (1991) and Maurer (1989) concur that vegetarian food is seen as ‘female food’. The heavy skew towards females in contemporary vegetarian populations almost certainly reflects and reinforces this thinking. The assumptions of waiters that a steak has been ordered by the man rather than the woman or child are commonly cited. The gender-related aspects of meat-eating are most vigorously pursued in Carol Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat: a feminist-vegetarian critical theory* (1990). She sees meat as a symbol of *male* dominance and draws a direct link between male oppression of women and of animals.

The desirability of meat, then, is both constrained by and wrapped up with human and gender identities. Other objections aside, Adams' arguments rest on a reification of traditionally 'masculine' *qualities* into men and a similar attribution of 'feminine' *principles* to women.²⁸ But neither the positive nor the negative meanings of meat are fully resolved by gender and an ambivalence remains for both men and women: *Gender identities are not without their own ambivalences and contradictions*, and women as well as men may value, and themselves aspire to having, traditionally 'masculine' qualities, whether or not they wish to claim them for women as a whole. Further, as Fiddes (1991) argues, the symbolic celebration of meat is also tied up with being 'human' and 'civilised' and our distinctiveness from and dominance over animals and nature as well as specifically masculine identities. The unease with the power of meat, seen acutely in relation to women, indicates and reflects a more pervasive and epicene ambivalence concerning what Beardsworth & Keil call 'the darker regions of meat symbolism' (1997, p. 213). The 'masculine power' of meat is not always seen positively, even for men:

²⁸ The values placed on meat may be in large part masculine values, but the equation of meat-eating with *patriarchal* rather than *human* dominance and the actions of men rather than Man (humans) ignores the role of women in constructing and valuing traditional masculine identities, both psychological and physical (for example, the use by women of terms for men such as 'beefy'/'beefcake' and the female role in affirming and supporting male physical ideals). But in making the inter-species issue of animal slaughter into a gender issue, there is also a danger that the primary (and mute) victims are backgrounded by a new, smaller and subtler set of victims and grievances, and that stronger arguments are obscured by weaker ones. Important as they are, a prioritisation of symbol and metaphor risks shrouding or eclipsing the actual everyday violent oppression of animals (10 billion per year in the US alone, Markus, 2001): In this sense, it could even be argued that such a feminist account is another example of human dominance over the animal, as (female) meat-eaters become the victims and the animals are excluded from a discussion by humans about humans.

Whether or not human meat-eating is driven by masculine values, the vast majority of both men and women eat meat and animals are the victims. However, insofar as such a feminist critique identifies masculine identities and attitudes which are tied to meat-consumption and undermines rather than entrenches these in a sex-war, it contributes to an erosion of the value placed on meat.

Lastly, identifying vegetarianism as female or specifically feminist in outlook may chime with the greater numbers of female vegetarians but does not acknowledge the predominance of prominent male advocates in the history of the vegetarian movement. Also, if meat production is seen in terms of human activities and individual lives, men, it may be claimed, are victims of the meat industry in a very direct way. Markus argues that the horrors of the abattoir affect workers as well as the animals: he points out that slaughterhouse workers have markedly higher rates of on-the-job injuries than any other job and are "either miserable and hate their jobs, or are somewhat demented and dangerous because they like what they are doing. In either event we lose because we have an alienated set of individuals who are certainly not at peace with society" (quote from George Eisman, in Markus 2001; p. 146). This theme may be discerned in the blues music of Howlin' Wolf's "Killin' Floor": "...probably derived from the slaughterhouses which offered African-Americans employment in cities like Chicago ("Hog Butcher of the World") and which appeared as early as 1931 in Skip James's Depression-themed "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues"..." (from Mark Humphrey, sleeve notes to *'Howlin' Wolf, His Best: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection*). From this can be gained an impression of the lived, biographical aspects to flesh diets in contrast to an account of symbolic meanings alone.

Meat can here stand not for maleness in an approved sense, but for what is seen as a false, macho stereotype of masculinity. Thus ‘strength’ and ‘power’ becomes ‘cruelty’ and ‘aggression’; masculine vigour and courage become violence and the forces of human destructiveness. (Twigg, 1983; p. 27)

The title of Feirstein’s (1982) humorous book on gender-stereotypes *Real Men Don’t Eat Quiche*, has become, or was, a cliché phrase. His popular satire reflects the currency of unreconstructed machismo but also critical attitudes towards it or at least a popular appetite for lampooning of it. Fiddes sees a similar unease over some of the symbolism of meat and argues that of the two themes used in marketing meat – ‘naturalness’ and ‘rivalry, violence, strength, moral fibre and mastery’ (1991; p. 86)– the second is less explicit. Ambivalence is discernable throughout his analyses of the symbolic meanings of meat; for example, in the anxieties over cannibalism when pets or other ‘grey animals’ are perceived as too close to being human. *Not only is there a dialectic between the dominant ideology of meat-eating culture and the more explicit vegetarian ideology but also there is ambivalence and tension within the dominant culture itself regarding flesh-eating.* Twigg argues that, vegetarianism can be seen as exploiting existing reservations about meat, as “employing, though in more emphatic terms, an established social language” (1983; p. 27). Vegetarianism “draws on and disrupts this traditional imagery of meat” tapping these contradictions and ambivalences within it as well as challenging it.

V. Explaining the rise of contemporary vegetarianism:

The management of food ambivalence and anxiety

As argued, to debate vegetarianism is to talk and argue about other, wider underlying cultural issues and values. Vegetarianism both reflects and influences these debates and attitudes. Some writers point to changes in these values and rising ambivalence to account for the rise of contemporary vegetarianism.

Twigg observes that in the past vegetarianism was discussed in terms of man’s ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ natures (human, spiritual and moral versus bodily and animal)

and that more recently there has been a rise in ‘tendermindedness towards animals’ (1983; p. 26). Explaining the rise of contemporary vegetarianism is one of Fiddes’ main concerns (1991, 1997), which he explains in terms of meat’s rapidly waning status as a healthy food together with a change in values regarding Man’s relationship to the natural world. He contends that there has been a “progressive widening of the ethical ‘net’” (1997; p. 252) and points to “unmistakable signs of renewed desire for integrity between personal beliefs and economic activity” (1997; p. 263) which are incompatible with the symbolic meanings of meat:

History shows that public values can and do change. [...] There is no self-evident reason that our consumption of the flesh of other animals should be immune from a similar process. Since ‘carnivoracity’ has long been a Natural Symbol by which we have expressed our society’s quest for dominance, the food’s diminishing status could well be symptomatic of the wane of outdated ideals. If so, the turbulently declining reputation of meat may be a harbinger of the evolution of new values. (1991; p. 233)

Beardsworth & Keil understand the growth of vegetarianism largely in terms of rising food ambivalence and anxiety. For Beardsworth & Keil too, “meat is arguably one of the most ambivalent of food items” (1997; p. 193) and they stress the contradictions and tensions within each of the vegetarian motives or themes they identify:

... there is one unifying theme which commands particular attention in attempting to explain the genesis of contemporary vegetarian beliefs and practices as represented in the transcript material generated in this study. That theme is the deep-seated ambivalence which is located within the very act of eating. (1992a; p. 284)

This ambivalence is presented as taking the form of nutritional oppositions, or paradoxes, each of which “is potentially a source of tension and anxiety” (1992a; p. 285). Though elsewhere Beardsworth stresses that other food paradoxes and anxieties exist (Beardsworth, 1995, p. 119-120) they discuss three, which are seen as giving rise to *gustatory*, *health* and *moral* motivations (corresponding to paradoxes 1, 2 and 3 respectively, in the figure below):

Positive and negative aspects of the three paradoxes

	Positive	Negative
1.	Food provides gustatory pleasure, satiety, etc.	Food can produce gustatory displeasure, dyspepsia, nausea, vomiting
2.	Food is required for vigour, energy and health	Food can introduce illness and disease
3.	Food is required for the continuation of life	Food entails the death of the organisms consumed

(From Beardsworth, 1995; adapted from Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a)

Broadly consonant with the analysis offered by Twigg and Fiddes, it is the third opposition and the *moral* anxiety it produces which they suggest is potentially the most severe for modern eaters. But they question Fiddes’ assertion that the waning appeal of red meat is an indication of a move away from doctrines of exploitation to an ideology of care, responsibility and ecological awareness, noting that “other forms of consumption which might have an equal or greater claim to symbolize the human domination of nature, continue to be embraced with undiminished enthusiasm” (1997; p. 217). Their account also accords greater significance to the health worries of consumers and they caution against overplaying the symbolic rather than nutritional values placed on meat, whilst astutely adding that nutrition and symbolic understandings are bound up together.

Beardsworth & Keil argue that there has been an *increase* in food ambivalence and diet-related anxiety (e.g., 1992b, 1997; Beardsworth, 1995). Both health and moral anxieties are seen as having intensified due to an erosion of traditional food ideologies and foodways:

Western societies have undergone a shift that has seen the replacement of relatively stable and reassuring food ideologies [...] with a set of circumstances characterized by a relatively secure food supply, open-ended choice resulting

from abundance, chronic uncertainties concerning health issues and burgeoning moral misgivings. (Beardsworth, 1995, p. 132)²⁹

The anxieties produced by these uncertainties are compounded by the erosion of traditional strategies for avoiding and coping with these anxieties. This is particularly clear in the case of moral qualms. Adams (1990) and Plous (1993b) describe the sorts of cultural, psychological and linguistic mechanisms that protect the consumer from recognising meat as the flesh of slaughtered animals. For example, Adams (1990) describes the 'structure of the absent referent', which removes both the animal origins and the human agency behind talk of 'meat'. Though such mechanisms and mystifications remain, Beardsworth & Keil point out that whereas in hunter-gatherer societies myth and ritual may be used to protect against guilt and anxiety about killing animals for food (see Serpell, 1986), in modern societies "secularisation has largely eroded the religious shielding surrounding slaughter" (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 286).

Parallel with or in response to the exposure to intensified anxieties and this 'erosion of traditional modes of anxiety management', has been a move towards increased *physical concealment* of the processing of animals. Beardsworth & Keil and Fiddes both note the 'civilising process' famously proposed by Norbert Elias (1978 [1938]) which suggests a lowering of the 'threshold of repugnance': an increasing squeamishness, shame and delicacy of sensibilities with regard to bodily functions. Elias also cites the decline of carving animals in front of diners. Mennell (1985) has extended these ideas from manners to the 'civilizing of the *appetite*', emphasising self-control, which has also been linked with contemporary vegetarianism (Jarman *et al.*, 1997).

Describing this erosion of traditional practices and ideologies, Beardsworth & Keil (1992b) and Beardsworth (1995) draw on the French sociologist of food Claude

²⁹ The change from authoritative discourses about health to anxiety in relation to meat is detectable in the research on vegetarianism already reviewed. In Dwyer *et al.* (1974) the authors are concerned by "the increased risk of dietary inadequacy" (p. 529) in vegetarians, whose "divergent dietary behaviours [...are...] associated with varying degrees of risk" (p. 533). With the plummeting status of meat as a safe and healthy food, it is the *public* rather than the commentators' own perception of 'risk' which has become the focus of writers' attention. Risk-perception has become an object of study in its own right, most notably in Beck's writing on the 'risk society' (1992).

Fischler, who has argued that modern food habits are characterised by ‘gastro-anomie’ (1980):

[T]he situation in which consumers find themselves when freed from the constraint and reassurance of the customary rules, norms, and meanings associated with food. (Beardsworth, 1995, p. 132)

Similarly, sociologist Alan Warde writes:

...a shift from gastronomy, knowledge of the rules of food, to gastroanomy, a condition bereft of rules. (Warde, 1997, p. 31)

The lack of clear criteria for food choices is seen as leading to uncertainty and anxiety. Warde has portrayed modern food habits as “a mire of personal uncertainty and discomfort” (p. 32), and both he and Fischler see modern society as tending to increase rather than regulate this anxiety. Beardsworth & Keil follow this broad picture but do not see such uncertainty as necessarily inevitable however, and they suggest two ways in which anxiety may be avoided, both of which are illustrated by vegetarianism.

Rather than a chronic uncertainty, they consider the possibility of “novel devices for handling conflict and uncertainty” (Beardsworth, 1995; p.133), or in Sallerberg’s (1991) terms, ‘strategies of confidence’ for establishing *trust* in food. Vegetarianism, then, “may be one of the more significant emergent cultural devices” (1997; p. 238) for dealing with both moral and health-related food anxieties and they conclude that “the adoption of vegetarianism [...] would seem to be at root an exercise in the management of anxiety” (1992a; p. 290). In support, they cite the ‘peace of mind’ many of their vegetarian respondents report to enjoy after adopting a vegetarian diet (1992a; p. 287).

Secondly, instead of a ‘dietetic cacophony’ (Fischler), Beardsworth & Keil (1992b) and Beardsworth (1995) suggest the emergence of “a new kind of coherence in the contemporary food system” (Beardsworth, 1995; p. 133): a phenomenon of ‘*menu-*

pluralism’ in which “a whole range of menu principles³⁰ can legitimately compete with each other” (Beardsworth, 1995; p. 133). According to this context of pluralism, individuals will be able to draw upon these alternative menus (*rational menus*, *hedonistic menus*, *expressive menus*, *moral menus* and *convenience menus*) to construct personalised diets:

Vegetarianism is increasingly likely to be seen as just one more diet and lifestyle choice from among the many options on offer and less likely to be constructed as a form of dietary deviance or non-conformity.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 239)

Indeed they argue that vegetarianism is in the process of being absorbed or incorporated into nutritional culture as the capitalist food market responds to ‘a significant new minority niche’, thus effectively lowering the ‘threshold of entry’ for new converts (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 239-40). They also point to their respondents’ reports of increased provision for and public tolerance of vegetarianism. The rise of vegetarianism, then, is understood as a *response* to rising food anxieties and as a dietary choice that is increasingly acceptable and accessible. However, the notions of ‘gastro-anomie’, anxiety-management and an emergent ‘menu-pluralism’ may be seen as of limited use to understanding vegetarianism. All may be heard as downplaying ideology, controversy and argument.

Uncertainty, anomie and anxiety

Descriptions of modern foodways in terms of anomie and anxiety share much with *accounts of contemporary consumption and identity*. Caplan points to Beck (1992) and the growth of individualism and the reflexive creation of individual biography, arguing that, “Identity now comes as much from ‘lifestyle’ as it does from the classic sociological concepts of gender, class and race/ethnicity” (Caplan, 1997; p. 15).

Warde (1997) draws a parallel between Fischler’s assertion of deregulation leading to anxiety and Bauman’s (1988) more general analysis of consumer freedom, choice, accountability in terms of self-identity, and consequent anxiety. Bourdieu (1984) also

³⁰ Beardsworth & Keil use the term *menu* “to refer to those sets of principles which guide the selection of aliments from the totality” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 287).

sees consumption behaviour as bound up with identity but, for him, the display of taste is “deeply socially embedded in affective class structures and is highly normatively regulated” (Warde, p. 10). This may be contrasted with the predicament of the modern or postmodern consumer in which,

[T]o the extent that individuals become disembedded from the protective shield of a habitus, and to the extent that the objective of consumption has become expression of self-identity, then selection indeed becomes a risky, unregulated and uncertain exercise of freedom. (Warde, 1997; p. 11)

Bourdieu’s account relies too heavily on *style* to be convincingly applied to vegetarianism. Likewise, too much emphasis on the anxiety of *uncertainty* again ignores specific nutritional and moral concerns. For Fischler, those minorities who do adopt distinct dietary regimes are seen as motivated by a need for order and guidance *tout court* rather than having particular objections to particular foods:

Other substitutes for traditional gastronomies arise from individuals particularly anxious to find and cling to valid criteria for food selection. Food fads, fad diets, food sectarianisms [...] may be better understood in the light of the aspiration for new individual dietary goals and norms.

(Fischler, 1980: 949-50; in Warde, 1997; p. 32)

But this account of the decline of meanings is itself masking meaning in vegetarianism. In stressing the breakdown in customary food practices and ideologies, these accounts of anomie, individualism and anxieties lead Caplan to write that, “[t]he actual current meaningfulness of food is being overlooked by professional food theorists” (Caplan, p. 17). She argues,

[S]uch conclusions may be premature; perhaps, as Barthes (1975) has suggested, we first need to look for patterns and where we do we will find meaning. [...] [I]t is unlikely that they do not exist, that people do not invest modern food with meaning, or that food has been totally divorced from social relationships.

(Caplan, 1997; p. 5)

For vegetarianism, the challenge to the hegemony of meat-eating ideology (moral, nutritional and otherwise) need not be framed in such negative terms as a ‘contemporary crisis’ and ‘chronic uncertainty’ which stress the dissolution and decay of meanings and rules: “a crisis of cultural patterns’ [...and...] a weakening of cultural constraints” (Warde, p. 30). The vegetarian prohibition of and disciplined abstinence from flesh foods hardly fits with this alleged “collapse of normative regulation” (Warde, p. 31).

This idea that consumers have a need for vegetarianism more than they have a sense that vegetarianism needs them jars with its common ideological and moral basis. A vegetarian diet does not perform a psychological function in filling an uncomfortable void in rules more than it reflects an active choice and at times difficult commitment. Fischler’s image of the consumer as an ‘anxious eater’, for whom imposing order is more important than the grounds for choosing lingers in Beardsworth & Keil’s account of vegetarianism as an emergent cultural ‘device’ for handling conflict and uncertainty and being ‘at root an exercise in the management of anxiety’ (and even more clearly in Sallerberg’s ‘strategies of confidence’). Though they have in mind particular anxieties rather than general uncertainty, the terms *device*, *anxiety-management*, and *strategy* depict motivation in terms of the satisfaction of personal, psychological and self-focussed concerns (even if not concerned exclusively with self-presentation), rather than the commonly given moral conviction or concern for *others* (food animals).³¹

In accounts of gastroanomy there seems to be little acknowledgement of the challenges to custom and little faith in the individual’s ability or desire to meaningfully negotiate consumer freedom for him/herself. The issues being touched on here essentially concern the relationship between the individual and the resources available to the individual for self-construction, what Caplan calls the Structure-Agency debate. Fischler and others’ accounts which stress the anomic and anxious character of modern foodways prioritise a need for structure over the powers of orientation, self-determination or *agency* of the individual. An alternative image of

³¹ There is an irony here, perhaps, in that vegetarianism and veganism is often expressed as an effort to actively extend the scope of moral concern but fitting this into a general account of ‘anxiety-management’ may recast this in personal and psychological terms. A specific other-focus becomes a non-specific and personal issue and the ideological becomes psychological.

contemporary vegetarian lifestyles is offered by Wicks (1999) who draws heavily on Giddens' notions of 'life politics' and the politics of 'life choices'.

It is possible to see the adoption of a vegetarian diet as a choice that is part of the life politics of late modernity. (Wicks, 1999; p. 111)

The new freedom of choice of consumers is characteristic of the modern or late-modern era but this is not merely a source for anxiety. Taking up Giddens' interest in *emancipatory politics*³² she argues that vegetarianism can be regarded as an attempt to extend the emancipatory politics of the late twentieth century beyond the human species:

What Giddens shows is that this attempt can be seen in a social and political context as part of a great social movement – in fact a 'remoralising' of social life. (Wicks, p. 111)

This has more in common, perhaps, with Fiddes in being thoroughly ideological but also thoroughly bound up with identity: "in the deepest sense, the decisions involved in life politics affect self-identity itself ([Giddens,] 1991, p. 21)" (Wicks, p. 111). This 'remoralising' of social life and lifestyle challenges the accounts of normative decline. The meanings of food, and meat especially, are intensified for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, by rhetorical contexts of controversy, personal investments and argumentative exchange. Meat is more charged with (contested) meanings than ever before. Rather than *anomie or alienation*, the life choice of vegetarianism can provide a source of meaning and purpose for the individual and a way of being politically and morally engaged (or *engagé*, to counter *anomie* with another French term).

Vegetarians not only show constrained and normative practices but also give reasons for their regime/life choice/self-identity beyond a need to follow rules. Though the shift away from meat is occurring along with other changes, *there are important differences between vegetarianism and other trends in food consumption, and a grand narrative of anomie is not apposite to the shift towards vegetarianism.*

³² I.e. a concern to reduce or eliminate *exploitation, inequality, and oppression* and to "release under-privileged groups from their unhappy condition, or to eliminate the relative differences between them" (Giddens, 1991; p. 211, in Wicks, 1999)

Crisis, coherence, or controversy?

The political, moral and personal investments in life choices suggest limitations to Beardsworth & Keil's notion of menu-pluralism too, which may be read as appearing to overstate resolution of the ambivalences and conflicts of diet. But also, with the emphasis in Beardsworth & Keil's menu-pluralism on the increasing diversity in and tolerance towards different food practices, too harmonious an image is perhaps being presented in which argument is all but absent. Instead of Fischler's 'cacophony', Beardsworth & Keil propose "a new kind of coherence" (Beardsworth, 1995; p. 133) in terms of 'legitimate competition' between menu principles in which vegetarianism is "likely to be seen as just one more diet and lifestyle choice from among the many options on offer" (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 239).³³ Although the increased acceptability in Britain of meat-free diets is undeniable, the view of vegetarianism as 'seen as just one more diet/lifestyle choice' may reflect the aspirations and discourse of niche marketing more than public opinion; few are so consistently neutral, or even tolerant, on the matter of meat-eating. What constitutes 'legitimacy' is a matter of and for argument; the moral motivation of most vegetarians, and anti-vegetarian polemics, suggest that few meat-eaters and vegetarians may agree on that save out of politeness.

Beardsworth acknowledges conflict and friction, advocacy and proselytising from 'pressure groups and entrenched vested interests':

Of course, this is not to say that menu pluralism implies complete individual autonomy and equality. Quite clearly, powerful pressure groups and entrenched vested interests may employ a whole range of strategies to advance their own causes and to persuade the public that their interpretations and priorities are valid and should be adopted. (Beardsworth, 1995; p. 134)

But Beardsworth & Keil's respondents also report social conflicts and such tensions challenge the coherence of menu-pluralism at the level of everyday social interaction. The implicit justification and criticism within accounting will be developed in the next chapter but this is a point worth making now to understand vegetarianism in a context of controversy and social argumentation. *There is a third option besides crisis*

³³ Also, "...the result of a legitimate, personal lifestyle choice" (Beardsworth, 1995; p. 134)

and cacophony or coherence which may be characterised by enduring controversy, tension and debate: in which, instead of norms being eroded, argumentative meanings and identities are *intensified*; in which cultural and individual ambivalences persist and differences may *appear* more comfortable than they are.

Characterising vegetarianism as a device for managing anxiety, then, may be seen as omitting an important aspect of food-related anxiety. The social aspects of eating mean that different diets are potentially sources of persistent *social* anxieties. Given the significance of vegetarianism in terms of ideology, morality and identity, and the reports from respondents of social problems, these can be expected to be of considerable consequence to vegetarians and meat-eaters, depending on the occasion. A fourth paradox or opposition, then, might be offered to complement the three nutritional paradoxes³⁴ outlined by Beardsworth & Keil: a *social opposition* whereby eating, through shared diet or commensality, can foster a sense of shared identity and belonging but can also divide and isolate. Fiddes writes, “We feed not only our appetite but also our need to belong” (1991, p. 34). This social opposition may perhaps be seen as an overarching one, potentially incorporating the other three as debates: social anxieties will reflect and be fuelled by these food controversies – the moral, health and gustatory oppositions.

Food-related anxiety, then, is not necessarily managed by becoming vegetarian. If this food practice is a ‘device’ for anxiety-management, the device itself requires management. Anxiety does not end with the adoption of a vegetarian diet, but rather may bring on a host of *new*, largely *social*, anxieties. More specifically, these social anxieties may be seen as anxieties of *identity*. The anxiety over accountability for choices to which Bauman points does not end with the adoption a diet but this is the *beginning* of the management of the social anxieties of *being* vegetarian or vegan. Though some anxieties (e.g., health and/or moral) are managed by the adoption of a vegetarian diet, the dilemmas of being vegetarian are managed by other, *discursive* ‘devices’, as will be developed in following chapters. Accounting is both a source of ambivalences, arguments and anxieties and also a resource for managing them. Further, discussion and argument with others after dietary change may either prompt

³⁴ Health, gustatory and moral (see earlier).

new health and moral anxieties or require these anxieties to be constantly revisited and managed.

The argumentative aspects of vegetarianism and the persistence of social dilemmas have also been overlooked to some degree by studies that have attempted to explain vegetarianism in terms of the process of individual conversion.

The 'process' of becoming vegetarian and vegan

In contrast to the explanations of the rise of vegetarianism in terms of cultural accounts of modern food habits, some studies have focussed on the individual and the process of conversion, asking *how* individuals become vegetarian.

Though not their exclusive concern, Beardsworth & Keil look at “the dynamics of the process of conversion” (1992a, p. 253). They distinguish two main types of ‘conversion career’ – *gradual* and *abrupt*. The transition to a vegetarian diet was found to occur most typically as a gradual process of progressive exclusion of meats down the hierarchy, beginning with red meat. Abrupt changes in eating patterns were often triggered by dramatic ‘*conversion experiences*’ through which ‘meat’ came to be seen as ‘flesh’, similar to the experiences reported by Amato & Partridge (1989). However, they conclude that, “the processes through which individuals are converted to vegetarianism, or indeed convert themselves, are clearly linked to the idiosyncrasies of personal biography” (1992a, p. 266). As already noted for diets and motivations, vegetarian careers are seen by Beardsworth & Keil as subject to ongoing changes. Consistent with the earlier US studies, they stress the importance of social relations to vegetarian experiences and conversions, and they report that many respondents are apparently influenced directly through their primary relationships with friends or family (1992a, p. 268).

An unpublished qualitative study by Maurer (1989), *Becoming a Vegetarian: learning a food practice and philosophy*, had as one of its main foci “the process an individual undergoes as he or she adopts a vegetarian diet” (p. iii). From qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 25 vegetarians, Maurer concludes that conversion is ‘an inherently social process’ (p. 89). She suggests that ‘vegetarians in a vacuum’ are

rare, and that “extending vegetarianism seems also to rely on the conveyance of information through social interaction” (p. 69). The majority of her respondents also reported some degree of social conflict and she points to the two-pronged nature of learning to be vegetarian:

The social process was characterized both by learning a new behavior (vegetarianism) and learning to deal with the new responses to the behavior.

(1989; p. 48)

In addition, Maurer describes “a series of *processual elements* towards becoming a vegetarian” (p. iii; emphasis added):

These elements are defined generally enough as to describe the experience of virtually every vegetarian in the study for each element. These elements basically occur chronologically [...] (1989; p. 48)

This approach of modelling a process of conversion common to most vegetarians is also pursued by two other studies. Another unpublished qualitative study by Jabs again used in-depth interviews with nineteen self-proclaimed vegetarians and developed “a model of the process of adoption and maintenance of a vegetarian diet” (Jabs, 1997; p. i). Numerous features of the conversion process are offered, and information and social interaction are again stressed. The second study, McDonald (2000), is the only research to focus exclusively on vegans. It aimed to address “a lack of information about how people become vegan” and it too “identified a psychological process of how people learn about and adopt veganism” (p. 1). Once again, the emphasis is on psychological modelling and on learning.

Consistent with this work and her earlier study, Maurer continues a social learning account of becoming vegetarian in a later analysis of the vegetarian literature (Maurer, 1995):

How does a person become convinced that a social condition warrants a change in his or her lifestyle? Although research suggests that most people learn to change their diets through social interaction with already committed vegetarians

(Beardsworth & Keil 1992a: 268; Lustgarden 1993; Maurer 1989), *vegetarians seem to learn their “reasons” directly and indirectly through books and magazines produced by claimsmakers within the vegetarian movement. [...] In other words, vegetarians learn a “vocabulary of motives” (Mills, 1940) that they can then apply to their own experience.*

(Maurer, 1995; p. 144; emphasis added)

Although Maurer’s focus is on arguments and rhetorics, this goes only as far as identifying a set of stock justifications for vegetarianism:

There is at least some correspondence between the reasons vegetarians give for their choices and the prevalent arguments in the vegetarian literature. These vocabularies of motives become a reified set of claims that indicate what the “meat” problem is “about”. (p. 145)

The more or less explicit focus of most of the above studies of becoming vegetarian/vegan is on the adoption and maintenance of a vegetarian or vegan *diet*. Becoming vegetarian or vegan constitutes the adoption of a new *identity* as well as a new diet, and, as Maurer begins to specifically address, this involves account-giving and rhetorical resources. To illustrate the rhetoric of vegetarian motives Maurer points to “[a] popular bumper sticker [which] reads ‘Meat is Dead’” (1995, p. 154), and considers it in terms of the rhetorics of entitlement and endangerment (respectively, the violation of animals’ rights not to be killed, and the threat to the consumer’s own life). But clearer identity-related aspects are not considered. For example, the bumper sticker proudly flags the driver’s vegetarian identity which is presented in a particular way. A further meaning is also obvious: ‘meat is dead’ claims a cultural shift (and therefore consensus) away from meat: meat is passé, it has passed away, it is an ex-foodstuff. The meanings of vegetarianism and meat-eating are clearly being argumentative constructed – vegetarian identity can be heard here as proud, increasingly popular, modern, in tune with the times, ...whilst meat-eating is put on the defensive and its associations with vigour and vitality (and its popularity) are challenged by the term ‘dead’.

What needs to be added to Maurer’s account of learning a ‘rhetoric of motives’ is a

recognition of *the differences between 'claimsmaking' in the vegetarian literature and the accounting practices of vegetarian individuals*. Unlike books, vegetarians have to manage a personal identity in various ways and in various social contexts. Taking on and having a vegetarian identity involves more than learning a reified set of claims with which to justify a vegetarian diet or appear motivated. Appearing justified and motivated are just two aspects of vegetarian accounting. An account solely of vegetarian rhetorics of *motive* neglects the complexity of claiming, denying and managing contradictory aspects of identities and how rhetorical resources are used in social context. The vegetarian accounting practices necessary for managing vegetarian identities must be learned as well as rhetorics of motive.

This chapter has emphasised the central importance of cultural and individual ambivalence surrounding vegetarian identities. The preceding section argued that if adopting a vegetarian diet is a device for managing anxiety, then anxiety management does not end with the new diet. Beardsworth & Keil note the “somewhat precarious moral position of vegetarians who continue to consume animal products” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 283). Not only are moral, health and gustatory motivations each fraught with paradoxes that are not fully resolved (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a) but, significantly, there is conflict *between* these motivations or themes; e.g., gustatory or moral versus health concerns. Becoming vegetarian also raises a fresh set of anxieties surrounding the management of the new vegetarian *identity*. These demand management by discursive rather than purely dietary means and are persistent dilemmas, not only of *becoming*, but also of *being* vegetarian/vegan. These and other conflicts or tensions may be cast in terms of *dilemmas of identity* that are managed in particular contexts and largely through accounting.

With a view to investigating these dilemmas of vegetarian identities more closely, the present study will examine the meanings and rhetorical resources available to vegetarians and how they are used in account-giving. The following chapter will discuss further the issues of becoming and being vegetarian with reference to social psychological theories of identity and identity-change, and will argue for a discursive and rhetorical analysis.

3

The social psychology of ‘identity’ and identity-change: From ‘the psychological group’ to self- narrative’

- I. Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory
 ‘The psychological group’
- II. The turn to discourse and rhetoric
- III. Norm-conformity, self-stereotyping and ambivalence
- IV. Identity as social practice and form of life
- V. Time, commitment and persons
 Repopulating social psychology
- VI. Self-narrative and personal documents
 Diary-interview methods

In Chapter 2 it was seen that food and eating may be understood in terms of cultural meanings and social identities. The notion of ‘identity’ is prominent within current social scientific writing and will be central to this study of becoming vegetarian or vegan. Sociologist Richard Jenkins, writes that, “...‘identity’ has become one of the unifying frameworks of intellectual debate in the 1990s. Everybody, it seems, has something to say about it” (Jenkins, 1996; p. 7). Moreover, ‘identity’ is also a ‘stock in trade’ of journalists, politicians and the advertising industry. Jenkins argues that the intellectual talk and everyday common sense share “a tendency to take for granted what identity is – or indeed that it is” (p. 8). Further, in his examination of

nationalism, Michael Billig also notes that, "... 'identity' has become the watchword of the times" (Shotter, 1993; p. 188, in Billig, 1995; p. 60) but, he warns: "The watchword, however, should be watched, for frequently it explains less than it appears to [...]. There seems to be something psychological about an 'identity', but theories of psychology are often unable to explain what this psychological element is" (p. 60). 'Identity', he argues, does not refer to a particular psychological state nor does sharing an identity mean that members are identical in feelings or appearance. This chapter will critically examine social psychological accounts of 'identity' and their explanatory claims.

Specifically, Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1982) and its subsequent development under Self-categorisation Theory (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Hogg and McGarty, 1990; Turner 1984, 1985, Turner *et al.*, 1987) are discussed drawing on discursive psychology and Michael Billig's rhetorical social psychology. It will be argued that 'identity' needs to be seen as a discursive and rhetorical matter: as "a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and community (Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Shotter and Gergen, 1989)" (in Billig, 1995; p. 60). *Universal psychological theories of identity are rejected and it is argued that the study of identity must engage with the socio-historical details and dilemmatic social complexities of particular identities and the situated use of language.* A view of language as social practice means that 'identities' understood as ways of talking must also be understood more broadly as rooted in 'forms of life'. Identity is seen in terms of discourse but neither is narrowly conceived as 'just talk'.

The criticisms of non-discursive social psychological accounts of 'identity' echo many of the criticisms made of studies of vegetarianism in Chapter 2, notably: *the particularities or distinct features of vegetarian identities; controversy and argument; and cultural and personal ambivalence.* However, like the work on vegetarianism reviewed in Chapter 2, *both cognitive psychological and discursive approaches to identity are themselves also criticised for largely neglecting persons, biographies and personal investments in identities over time, and thereby stymieing the study of identity-change.* These arguments present the case for studying vegetarian and vegan identities through the activity of respondents' situated accounting practices but they also argue for a 'repopulated' social psychology (Billig, 1992, 1994) of identity and a

biographical perspective using personal documents such as diaries. It is also argued that the dilemmas and ambivalences of vegetarian and vegan identities will be more acutely visible in periods of transformation/transition and so the focus will be on identity change and accounts of *becoming* vegetarian and vegan.

I. Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory

Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1982) has been described as, "the most creative and important theory of social identity to be produced in recent years" (Billig, 1995; p. 65). It has inspired a large body of research on the self-concept as membership of salient social categories (see Abrams and Hogg, eds., 1990). Social Identity Theory (hereafter 'SIT') can be seen as a criticism of Leon Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison and, specifically, as a response to the reduction of all social behaviour to comparison between individuals:

This inter-individual emphasis neglects an important contributing aspect of an individual's self-definition: the fact that he is a member of numerous social groups and that this membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself. (Tajfel, 1981; p. 254)

And so, "[a]n individual's self-definition in a social context can be restated in terms of the notion of social identity" (Tajfel, 1981; p. 254), where, 'social identity', is defined as follows:

Social identity will be understood as that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. (Tajfel, 1981; p. 255; emphasis in original)

And where, "the term 'group' denotes a cognitive entity that is meaningful to the individual at a particular point of time" (Tajfel, 1981; p. 254).

A number of key aspects of SIT may be emphasised. For SIT, social identification is a matter of *category-membership* and includes an important *subjective sense of value and of belonging*. SIT also hypothesises *a universal psychological need for positive self-esteem* that motivates social categorisation, social comparison and intergroup behaviour. One of the most important insights of SIT is that self-esteem (or positive self-concept) gained through social identification is a function of the distinctiveness and value of the group *relative to other groups*. And so the self-enhancing quality or effect of identification with a group (the 'ingroup') involves conflict with or criticism of other groups ('outgroups'):

No group lives alone – all groups in society live in the midst of other groups. In other words, the 'positive aspects of social identity' and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action *only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparisons with, other groups*. (Tajfel, 1981; p. 256; emphasis added)

Social identities are both socially divisive and comparative: an ingroup or 'us' entails an outgroup or 'them'. Further, ingroup members are motivated to make comparisons with outgroups in ways which favour the ingroup, and to maintain a "positively valued distinctiveness from other groups" (Tajfel, 1972; p. 3; in Hogg and Abrams, 1990; p. 29).¹ Moreover, the elevation of one entails the relative disparagement of the other. This simple yet profound observation is shared by and crucially informs rhetorical analyses (e.g., Billig, 1991, 1992, 1996a) which examine how positive social identity is achieved through justification and criticism in the details of talk, as discussed later in this chapter. Subsequent work in the social identity tradition under the banner of 'Self-categorisation theory' has also tried to describe how social identity is achieved, but instead of looking at detail and talk has sought universal psychological processes. A discursive-rhetorical perspective within social psychology will support a raft of criticisms against this cognitive approach to social identity. It will be argued that the details and contents of particular identities/categories and their use in accounting practices in context are essential to the study of 'identity'.

¹ In contrast, *intra-group* comparison and perception will tend to see members of the same group as relatively homogeneous and relevant differences are minimized.

'The psychological group'

Beyond a motivation for self-enhancement, Tajfel's SIT is primarily concerned with the *consequences* of social identification in terms of inter-group behaviour such as group discrimination. However, Self-categorisation theory ('SCT') as pursued by Turner and colleagues (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Hogg and McGarty, 1990; Turner 1984, 1985, Turner *et al.*, 1987), has approached the issue of groups, and identification with them, in terms of *cognitive processes*. Hogg and McGarty argue that,

[...] it became increasingly clear that to talk of social identification, [...] simply begged the question *by what process people come to conceptualise themselves in terms of social categories*. (Hogg and McGarty, 1990; p. 11; emphasis added)

Though it developed out of SIT, SCT is the more general theory and "is focussed on the explanation not of a specific kind of group behaviour but of *how individuals are able to act as a group at all*" (Turner *et al.*, 1987; p. 42; emphasis added). Hogg and Abrams describe this process of group-identification as occurring in three stages:

[F]irst, people *categorize and define themselves as members* of a distinct social category or assign themselves a social identity; second, they *form or learn the stereotypic norms* of that category; and third, they *assign these norms to themselves and thus their behaviour becomes more normative* as their category membership becomes salient. (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; p.172; emphasis added)

Though Tajfel's SIT sees groups or categories as 'cognitive entities' and proposes that individuals are always motivated to differentiate their group positively from others, SCT has taken much further these cognitive and universal aspects.

As Billig (1996b) argues, Tajfel accepts that his definition of 'social identity' ("that *part of an individual's self-concept*"; emphasis in orig.), is a limited one:

There is no doubt that the image or concept that an individual has of himself or herself is infinitely more complex, both in its contents and its derivations, than

'social identity' as defined and circumscribed here. (Tajfel, 1981; p. 255)

The limitation is intentional and 'social identity' is offered as a 'shorthand term' (Tajfel, 1981; p. 255) aiming to avoid "endless and often sterile discussions as to what 'is' identity" (1981; p. 255) and to facilitate discussion about intergroup behaviour.² Tajfel made it clear that he viewed social psychological explanation as inherently and necessarily limited and believed that only "a *modest* contribution can be made to [...] the unravelling of a tangled web of issues" (Tajfel, 1981; p. 7, emphasis in original; in Billig, 1996b; p. 339). This acknowledges the importance of the socio-historical particularities of social psychological phenomena, including "the power of deeply entrenched cultural myths" (Tajfel, 1982; p. 709).

Whereas Tajfel hoped for 'moments of insight', provisional and situated in nature, Turner writes, "it is important to produce [...] a unifying, general theory of the group" (Turner *et al.*, 1987; p. 43). It is SCT's hope that a cognitive approach can provide a "more integrated and complete analysis of the social psychological functioning of individuals in society" (Hogg and Abrams, 1987; p. 217-218, in Hogg and Abrams, 1988). SCT aims, then, to uncover, "the basic cognitive process underlying the psychological group [...] a unifying, general theory of the group" (Turner, 1987; p. 43). This indicates important differences in the conceptions of identity and ways of studying it. The general aims of this universalist approach, and the three-stage process specifically, will be criticised.

SCT has sometimes defended its ambitious claims by limiting itself to only the '*social psychological*' aspects of social identity:

...groups are social phenomena that require social analysis (with distinct contributions from many sciences from biology to history). The self categorization theory is intended only as a contribution to understanding the social psychological basis of group behaviour. (Turner, 1987; p. 67)

² A similarly pragmatic attitude towards the term 'identity' is expressed by Strauss in *Mirrors and Masks*: "...in fact I made no attempt to even define the term, preferring its use only as a means of opening up discussion which would pertain to the social psychology/social organization issue" (Strauss, 1977; p. 4).

But the claim is still made that there is a cognitive process which underlies or applies to all groups, and which allows us to understand all group identifications through these common features rather than through the content and detail of particular identities. Warranting a universalist psychological theory of 'the group' with claims of academic specialisation is attacked by Billig (1996b) as poor scholarship and as immodestly claiming to *explain* whilst being unaware of its own limitations.

Billig elsewhere argues against such formal cognitive theorising and draws on ancient rhetorical traditions, citing Quintilian's Principle of Uncertainty: "This principle states that if people alter their reactions and expressions to cope with the particularities of the situation, then there cannot be fully worked out psychological laws" (1996a; p. 284). This suggests that social identity is essentially a socio-cultural matter, which, as Geertz has argued, is inescapably interpretative:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. (Geertz, [1983] 1994; p. 214)

But details, differences and limitations are swept away by SCT under a 'rhetoric of realism' (Bazerman, 1987; Soyland, 1988; in Billig, 1996b).

In Gergen's (1973) seminal paper, *Social Psychology as History*, he argues for the integration of pure and applied psychology and a move away from the goal of general causal laws. Instead, social psychology is historical and subject to cultural change, and so he urges a move towards inter-disciplinarity and suggests 'sensitization' in place of prediction:

Psychological theory can play an exceedingly important role as a sensitizing device. [...] It can provide conceptual and methodological tools with which more discerning judgements can be made. (Gergen, 1973; p. 317)

A concentration on psychology alone provides a distorted understanding of our present condition. (Gergen, 1973; p. 319)

Also at stake here is the nature of social psychology and the social psychological. Elsewhere Billig writes, "Psychology should always be more than psychology" (Billig, 1999a; p. 253). Claiming to focus on purely 'social psychological' aspects, then, offers a restricted and misleading understanding not only of identity but also of social psychology and of language:

[T]he social psychological study of individuals should lead outwards to a historical and ideological study of socially shared beliefs. (Billig, 1996b; p. 343)

The ambition for a universal, causal, predictive theory is married to the ostensibly modest claim of studying only the 'social psychological basis of group behaviour', a claim which stakes-off 'psychology' or 'social psychology' as an autonomous area for investigation. The mind is portrayed as divisible and is characterised by the mechanistic or information-processing metaphors emblematic of cognitive psychology. SCT accounts thereby separate 'social psychology' from other disciplines and approaches, including the study of discourse. In demarcating social identity as distinct from discourse, SCT cuts identity off from the means of studying it. A 'turn to discourse' is supported by, and in turn supports, a thoroughgoing re-conceptualisation of the nature of identity, language and thinking. Not only is attention to language and ideology necessary to apprehend the content and meanings of categories, but also the activity of categorising, and therefore identifying, can be seen as fundamentally a linguistic act:

...such an analysis means studying the particularities of discourse in ways which social identity theorists have been reluctant to acknowledge.

[...] *Social distinctions, comparisons and categorisations are constituted within, and accomplished by, acts of language.* (Billig, 1996b; p. 349; emphasis added)

When the focus shifts to the linguistic activity of categorising, SCT's terminology can be seen to illustrate the point. The diversity of groups and identities is reified into a singular noun phrase: 'the psychological group'. With this category groups are grouped together, social categories categorised together. Categories are claimed to operate independent of or beyond language use but this claim itself rests upon, and is

couched in, a linguistic act of categorisation. Crucially, categorisations are open to argument and this one is no exception.

II. The turn to discourse and rhetoric

Groups, according to the SIT and SCT approaches, are not objective, 'out-there' fixed sets of particular individuals but, rather, a concept in the heads of those who have in common a similar perception of social reality. Hence, groups, social categories and social identities are meaningful concepts at a specific time, place or situation. Thus social categorisation, identification, and subsequent social comparison are done flexibly and in context. Typically, however, it has been argued, work on social identity "...usually involves the attribution of particular, often stereotypical, social identities to research participants by the researcher" (Antaki, Condor and Levine, 1996; p. 475). Even in more naturalistic situations, theorists generally either *assume* particular social identities are operating or *infer* these from observed behaviour purportedly indicative of social identification. Whilst acknowledging the flexible and contextually contingent nature of these identities, social identity theorists view "social identity as essentially a matter of *perceptuo-cognitive 'reality'*" (Antaki *et al.*, 1996; p. 475; emphasis added). The salient social identity can be both individual and cognitive and also shared with others because it is somehow commonly perceived within, or *given* by, the situation.

A perceptual approach to social categorization has been roundly criticised by proponents of language-based studies of social categories (e.g., Billig, 1985; 1996a; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1991; Antaki, Condor and Levine, 1996). Antaki, Condor and Levine (after Edwards, 1991, 1994) contrast this 'mental state' notion of social identity with identity as a feature of how people describe themselves: "What happens if one treats social identity as a flexible resource in conversational interaction?" (1996; p. 473). This notion of identity as a resource used for self-description in everyday interactions is a familiar one in ethnomethodology. Such an approach – which has entered social psychology via discourse analysis (e.g., Potter and Wetherell, 1987), conversational analysis and discursive psychology (e.g.

Edwards and Potter, 1992) – is not interested in the cognitive aspects at the heart of traditional SIT and SCT. In contrast, discourse-analytic and discursive approaches eschew all theorising about mental representation or 'mental furniture' in favour of studies of actual account-giving.³ Talk is seen as action-oriented and performative, and so social identities are not just 'described' by accounts but are actively constituted and accomplished through acts of language. In essence, '*categories are for talking*' (Edwards, 1991), and the practical, diverse business of talk means that identity categories will be used strategically to accomplish a variety of discursive ends. This approach to identity has a clearer methodology, grounded in talk, than the perceptuo-cognitive theories and replaces assumption on the part of the researcher with an openness to letting the participants decide the agenda (Antaki *et al.*, 1996).

Turner's claim that the salience/perception of self *falls on a continuum* – from perception of self as a unique person to 'self as an ingroup category' (1987; p. 49) – can be seen as being incompatible with action-oriented, performative aspects of language use. The claim that merely by being in a situation we position our self on a scale is very different to looking at how self is constructed through invoking, claiming, denying or implying categories. Seen from this perspective, extrapolation from the discourse produced by participants in one situation to cognitive entities and processes is highly problematic given the context-sensitive and performative character of language.

It is significant that this abstraction from observable language use complements the account of the 'self-concept' as "the hypothetical cognitive structure, which cannot be observed directly" (Turner, 1987; p. 44). This is contrasted with, "the 'self-image', the perceptual output, i.e., the subjective experience of self produced by the functioning of some part of that structure" (p. 44). The operation of the invisible but inferred self-concept is therefore used to explain, causally, the various 'self-images' and their

³ This issue is similar to difficulties with the standard psycholinguistic approach to word meanings as mentally represented and typically seen as lexicalised in some degree of abstraction from actual use in context. For the mental representation of knowledge in lexicons or other cognitive entities (such as groups and social categories) there is a difficult distinction to be made between *what* content is represented cognitively ('declarative knowledge') and how this is mobilised or flexibly applied in specific contexts ('how'-type, procedural knowledge). Coventry, Carmichael and Garrod (1994), for example, argue against the abstraction of word meanings from use by demonstrating the importance of world knowledge in spatial preposition use. Seen in discursive terms, social categories/identities and word meanings may both be understood through the later-Wittgensteinian notion of *meaning as use*.

manifestations. The subjective experience of self is reduced to a mere appendage, an epi-phenomenon of the more interesting level of cognitive structure at which the explanatory account takes place. Content is dispatched along with subjective experience. This account can also be seen as working to legitimise and privilege the (SCT) analyst's categories over participant-based ones and to deny the need for a genuinely person-centred grounding. In contrast, Billig argues that, "we should attribute actions to people rather than to hypothetical structures" (1999a; p. 44).⁴ What can be observed (not, for the moment, problematising observation and analysis) is language use, but SCT consistently pays only lip-service to content, context and interaction without paying the necessary attention to talk.

According to social identity theory, categorisation serves the function of *simplifying*:

[s]ocial categorizations serve the need to reduce the complexity of the social environment. (Tajfel & Forgas, 1981; p. 135)

But in self-categorisation theory cognitive simplicity eclipses socially meaningful understandings:

...the appropriate level of abstraction [is] (the one that maximizes cognitive simplicity, stability and consistency) (Turner, 1987; p. 50)

Though a need exists for interpretation and some categorisation of social life,⁵ the idea that categorisations are *motivated, directed or driven by* perceptual or cognitive

⁴ Attributing actions to cognitive processes rather than persons in the accounts of SCT can be seen as having a further implication. Turner favourably compares SCT with earlier, instinctual or irrational accounts of group functioning and crowd behaviour (e.g. Le Bon), which are held up as having 'derogatory connotations' (Turner, 1987; p. 67). There is some irony in this bit of positive theoretical comparison: Turner sees no conflict or contradiction in the claim that humane, pro-social relations are made possible by a cognitive mechanism:

[SCT] sees in-group identification as an adaptive social-cognitive process that makes pro-social relations [...] possible. (1987; p. 67)

[...] the psychological group is precisely the *adaptive mechanism* that frees human beings from the restrictions of and allows them to be more than just individual persons. (1987; p. 67; emphasis added)

The backgrounding of content, experience, freedom, volition and responsibility in favour of abstract general cognitive mechanisms or processes could itself be seen as a de-humanized portrait of social interaction and the person.

⁵ The need to reduce complexity of the environment and impose interpretations on it is also a concern of cognitive approaches that stress 'cognitive economics' and see the brain as a 'cognitive miser'.

demands disregards the rhetorically orientated and socially performative nature of categorisations and identifications and the consequent diversity in aims and effects. An account of categorisation as simplification itself over-simplifies and represents categorisation as a matter of cognitive functioning rather than a social, linguistic activity involving others.⁶ The neutral-sounding term 'appropriateness' also backgrounds the view of categorisation as a rhetorical activity in which categories have *argumentative* meanings (Billig, 1996a).

Rhetorical social psychology, as developed by Michael Billig (e.g., Billig, 1985, 1996a [1987], 1992, 1995), shares with discursive psychology the view that:

As discourse theorists have stressed, utterances are rarely, if ever, simple expressions of individual belief, but, in making an utterance, speakers (or writers) are engaged in complex social and rhetorical activity (Billig, [1987/1996a]; Edwards and Potter, 1992, 1993; Parker, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993) (Billig, 1996b; p. 349)

As with simplification, the 'salience' (Turner *et al.*, 1987) and 'switching on' (Hutnik, 1991) of identities according to *the perceived situation* does not address the social and rhetorical aspects of contexts and categorisations. Billig draws upon Ullah's (1985) study of second-generation Irish adolescents living in Britain who find themselves 'sticking up for the side of the other', so illustrating:

...the extent to which the feelings of personal identity can be bound up with criticisms and justifications. [...] It is not that the desire to justify or criticise stems from an inner feeling called an 'identity', but, in a real sense, the sense of one's identity can emerge within a context of argumentation.

(Billig, 1996a; p. 277)

Stimulus-generalisation response in behaviourism has a similar concern with the impossibility of treating every social situation/object as either unique or as indistinguishable from others.

⁶ People may sometimes be concerned to use *more* elaborate, erudite, or 'expert' categories; for example, to explicitly place individuals in them and/or to appear more informed/astute/up-to-date than other, more 'simple-minded' commentators. Indeed, whole idiomatic vocabularies of categorization may serve to both categorise and construct out-groups in particular ways *and* to maintain these groups through public differences in vernacular used, (as with local dialects). The question can also be asked, 'simple *for who?*'. Preferences for ways of categorizing need to be linked to group-memberships, ways of talking and being in the world.

Rhetorical social psychology's focus on the argumentative and contradictory nature of social life and thinking fleshes out the idea of identities as shared resources and joint social activity. Identities are shared cultural resources but are also *negotiated* and *contested* through interaction with others in context. Therefore identifications must be understood in the situated detail of utterances and attention paid to rhetorical context. Reviving antiquarian thought, Billig brings to social psychology Protagoras's maxim, which "asserted that in every question there were two sides to the argument exactly opposite to one another" (Diogenes Laertius, III; in Billig, 1996a; p. 71). A Protagorean response is applied to one-sided social psychological theories of identity. For both dramaturgical models and rule-following models of human life, Billig points to the way argumentative aspects of social life (and indeed within the theatre and games from which the metaphors were taken) are unheard. Disputing Harré's claim that, "it can hardly be denied that we are rule-following, self-monitoring agents" (Harré & Secord, 1972; p. 142; in Billig, 1996a; p. 50), Billig argues that this tells only part of the story:

...the equally convincing statement can be made that, 'it can hardly be denied that we are rule-breaking agents'. Or rule-bending agents. Or rule-disputing agents. Or rule-creating agents [...] what it does not probe is the controversial nature of rules. (Billig, 1996a; p. 50)

Social psychological theory must recognise the two-sidedness of social thinking. Argumentativeness is what is missing from Harré's argument. And so Billig employs Protagoras's maxim to both criticise one-sided social psychological theory and also to emphasise the two-sidedness and argumentativeness which characterises human thinking and which theory should reflect. Almost by name as well as by nature, Self *Categorisation* theory can be seen to be one-sided: Billig (1985, 1996a) points to the one-sided privileging of the process of categorisation and the neglect of 'particularisation' – the making of exceptions and exclusions from categories/groups or explanations in terms of them.⁷ Protagoras's maxim suggests that "claim and

⁷ The recognition that group-memberships/identities are denied as well as claimed may also be discerned in Gergen's observation that, "In western culture there seems to be heavy value placed on uniqueness or individuality" (1973; p. 314). He goes on to argue that psychological theory is commonly seen as 'dehumanizing', and so "investments in freedom may thus potentiate behaviour designed to invalidate the theory". Partly for this reason, members of various groups "have all reacted

counter-claim can be made indefinitely" (Billig, 1996a; p. 123) and so argument and unresolved ambivalence are persistent features of identities without 'closure'. The argumentative and contradictory aspects of identity are again passed over by SCT's account of identification as norm-conformity and self-stereotyping.

III. Norm-conformity and dilemmas of identity

The three steps to group-identification outlined above – self-categorisation, learning norms, and self-ascription of norms – are described as a process of "Conformity through Referent Informational Influence"⁸ (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; p. 172). Within SCT, social groups or categories are entirely characterised in terms of their *norms*, and group-identification is seen in terms of *conformity* with these stereotypic group norms:

From the social identity perspective *the contours of social categories or groups are furnished precisely by their respective norms*, [...] thus group behaviour is synonymous with normative behaviour. Psychological group belongingness is inextricably linked with stereotypical social uniformities in behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, and so on, and thus with expression of or conformity to ingroup norms. (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; p. 171-2; emphasis added)

And further, "conformity is increased by identity salience" (p. 175). To identify is to conform. A number of criticisms will be made of this account of taking on an identity as a cognitive process of self-stereotyping and norm-conformity.

Reicher, Hopkins and Condor (1997) take issue with SCT for linking category contents with a trait conception of stereotypes. Norms, according to Hogg and Abrams, "serve to describe and prescribe those *attributes* which characterise one

bitterly to explanations of their behaviour [in terms of group identities]. Thus we may strive to invalidate theories that ensnare us in their impersonal way" (p. 314). This can also be applied to everyday, lay-psychological theories of behaviour in terms of social identities (e.g. gender) and may highlight the acts of 'particularising' which deny them or their applicability to the person in question.

⁸ "Referent Informational Influence" typifies the sort of social psychological writing of which Billig (1996b) is critical and whose rhetoric of explanation is marked by 'the tyranny of the noun phrase'.

group and differentiate it from other groups" (1988; p. 171-2; emphasis added). Reicher *et al.* wish to replace a trait conception of stereotypes with a functional approach that sees stereotypes as "constructed and deployed discursively and in argument" (1997; p. 116). They argue that stereotypes and category contents are not the firm, consensual criteria by which 'the contours of social categories or groups are furnished precisely', as Hogg & Abrams claim above, but are instead more variable: "[I]f traits are divorced from the context of explanation in which they are used, they become ambiguous or even meaningless" (1997; p. 98).

All identities [...], and all aspects of identity [...] are marked by diversity. If social identities define who we are and what we are to do, then we are always at least potentially caught in the cross-fire of different constructions – literally divided against ourselves. (Reicher *et al.*, 1997; p. 116)

As Billig *et al.* argue, information-processing theories in social psychology,

...tend to view thinking as what we do unthinkingly. In this way they tend to demean thinking and overlook the dilemmatic, or deliberative, aspects (Billig, 1985; Edwards and Middleton, 1986, 1987). (Billig *et al.*, 1988; p. 20)

Common sense is not 'neatly systematised' and so deliberation and arguing is unavoidable. The SCT account of identification as norm-conformity has a similar disregard for the affinity for, and inevitability of, deliberation and thinking.

Not only are there a multitude of possible identities and underlying ideological beliefs, but conflict and tensions are present *within* ideologies, identities and norms. Identity categories attach to 'wider ideological beliefs' and these ideologies contain their own contradictory strands (Billig, 1995; p. 68). As rhetorical social psychology has argued, everyday thinking is fundamentally two-sided and dilemmatic (e.g., Billig *et al.*, 1988; Billig, 1992, 1996a). In *Ideological Dilemmas: a social psychology of everyday thinking*, Billig *et al.* stress the shared 'common-places' and antithetical elements of common sense. Bacon describes these contradictory maxims and counter-maxims within common sense as containing "the *seeds*, not flowers of arguments" (Bacon, 1858; p. 492; emphasis in orig., in Billig *et al.*, 1988).

Thinking is seen as fundamentally linguistic, as inner speech. Mead, Vygotsky and Bakhtin all view thinking, mental life and self-understanding as internalised social debate and inner dialogue. They share with Wittgenstein the view that thinking is inseparable from language.⁹ Moreover, contradiction and argument – particularly justification and criticism – may also be seen as fundamental to thinking, so that, “[t]he contradictory themes of common-sense provide more than the seeds for arguments: they also provide the seeds for thought itself.” (Billig *et al.*, 1988; p. 17). Indeed thinking in this sense is “possible only if the individual possesses the dilemmatic aspects of social belief” (Billig *et al.*, 1988; p. 17). So theses dissonant themes of common sense give rise to inner ambivalence and thinking as well as social dilemmas and social argument.

These dilemmas of everyday thought and talk also characterise identities.¹⁰ Rather than conformity, there are dilemmas of ideology and identity. Billig’s (1992) rhetorical analysis of attitudes to the Royal Family reveals how ‘identity turns on a series of tensions or dilemmas’. Far from being characterised by norm-conformity, identities are neither monolithic entities, nor monologues.

Billig’s (1982) discussion of ideology and social psychology draws on Smith and on Merton & Barber to place ambivalence in social context. In their essay, *Sociological Ambivalence*, Merton and Barber (1963/1976) argue convincingly for ambivalence as being built into social roles. They give the example of a doctor needing to be human and approachable as well as professional if he is to be seen as a good doctor. Adam Smith (1892 [1759]) also argued for the importance of *temperance* rather than simple conformity to role expectations: for example the elderly are better liked when their behaviour retains a little youthfulness.¹¹ “The role incorporates within itself its own negative” (Billig, 1982; p. 176). This directly contradicts the SCT account of identification as a process of unalloyed self-stereotyping and conformity. Also,

⁹ Billig makes the point that: “In discussions, exchanges are often too quick and too discursively complex, to be considered as secondary, as if they are the mere reflection of prior inner thoughts. Instead the utterances can be treated as the thinking itself.” (Billig, 2000)

¹⁰ The idea that social thinking is involved with social identities may seem obvious but SCT tends heavily to portray identification and identities as the products of information processing rather than as the activity of individuals. Condor (1990) argues that SCT underplays the idea of people as thoughtful, reflexive and creative actors.

¹¹ Different groups and identities may value temperance to varying degrees and construct it in different ways, which, furthermore, may also be disputed.

although Gergen (1973), is concerned primarily with 'psychological reactance' (after Brehm, 1966) with respect to psychological theory, a more general point may be made: he observes that "those persons unflattered by the research might overcompensate in order to dispel the injurious stereotype" (p. 311). So specific stereotypes and stereotyping in general may be resisted and appearing stereotypic may be actively avoided.

Goffman's notion of 'role distance' again suggests that the way individuals perform a role or identity is more complex, contradictory and subtle than self-stereotyping: "Sullenness, muttering, irony, joking and sarcasm may all allow one to show that something of oneself lies outside the constraints of the moment and outside the role within whose jurisdiction the moment falls" (1961; p. 114, in Billig, 1996a; p. 287). Similarly, Wynne is also critical of actor-network theory for its tendency to:

...overinterpret the extent to which ostensibly fully enrolled actors align their identity with the enrolling framework. [...] In other words, ANT overlooks and conceals the ambivalence that an actor may tacitly hold toward a network with which she apparently completely identifies. (Wynne, 1995; p. 383)

Billig draws attention to the way in which communities or groupings may be distinguished by styles of accounting, or 'explanatory style' (1988a), and 'by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 1983; p.16, in Billig, 1995; p. 68).

Widdecombe (1993) analyses the autobiographical talk of two 'goths' as they account for how they came to adopt their unconventional appearance. She argues that the accounts are 'solutions to a problem of authenticity' and, "are designed to address potential and negative inferences that change is motivated by a desire to conform to a particular image, or merely copy others, and is hence insincere" (p. 108). Thus the accounts are claims of goth identities but are *denials of conformity*. There is a style of explanation as well as a style (of dress, music etc.) adopted. One could say that that there is a group norm against *mere* conformity, but the issues of authenticity¹² and of

¹² The problem and portrayal of authenticity indicated by Widdecombe has an echo in accounts of consumer identity as involving a process or experience of '*recognition*' rather than adoption. Judith Williamson (1978), in her analysis of advertising and identity, argues that there is an '*already-ness*' to the 'aestheticisation' of the consumer (the way in which the buyer takes on the qualities, 'auras and effects' of the product). The consumer does not become 'cool'/'no-nonsense' (or whatever) *after*

identifying without being seen to conform again indicate more complex dilemmatic *rhetorical* processes which the SCT account misses. As Billig argues above (see preceding section), we are not only rule-*following* agents: there may be argumentation over what the norms of the group are or should be; whether someone is following them properly; and whether an exception may be made, etc.

SCT's attempt to define social categories/identities in terms of supposedly consensual group norms does not begin to recognise the complexity of identity categories as they are actually constructed and used in talk. A 'tidying up' of both the contents and the actual activity of identifying is required for SCT's more abstract account of identification as a formal, universal inner process. Identities cannot be adequately set out as abstract, inert sets of norms but are fundamentally rhetorical and can be better characterised as unavoidably dilemmatic. These persistent dilemmas of identity lead to a consideration of the social practices from which they arise and through which they are managed. Argumentation is an on-going social *activity*: the contrary themes of common sense, it was argued, provide only 'the *seeds*, not *flowers*, of arguments'.

IV. Identity as social practice and 'form of life'

As the previous section has endeavoured to show, identification is not easily set out in terms of the definitive contents of identities but is better seen as contradictory rather than monologic and formal; as a socially interactive activity rather than an inner psychological entity or cognitive process – in brief, as a rhetorical social practice. SCT can be further seen to overlook the way identifications are embedded in these social practices. The SCT account of conformity fails to recognise the social and rhetorical upshots of identities that stem from the fact that norms imply counter-norms and the outgroups/Others who hold to them:

An identification [...] implies a drawing away from those who might hold counter-attitudes. (Billig, 1996a; p. 265)

buying the product. Rather s/he '*recognises*' him/herself in the style/image of the commercial (and thereby the product). It is not assumed, however, that authenticity is a universal concern, and will itself be subject to argumentative debate.

To conform to in-group norms is also to reject and implicitly criticise the norms of the out-group. And so, as identities are constructed and claimed in talk, social tensions and conflicts need to be managed. Thus identification once more involves contradictory concerns and entails much more than conformity. The above tension may be stressed with reference to an account of vegetarian identity seen in Chapter 2. Willetts argues that,

...we need, first, to re-appraise what we mean by vegetarianism and, second, to deconstruct the model that positions meat-eating and vegetarianism as oppositional. (Willetts, 1997; p. 111)

As discussed already, vegetarianism and meat-eating *are* oppositional in the sense that social identities differentiate and divide. This account ignores the rhetorical nature of identifications, dissociations and difference and their implicitly critical aspects. The significance of Tajfel's insight, that "[n]o group lives alone – all groups in society live in the midst of other groups", can only be grasped when identification is seen as a social activity.

This social process of negotiation may be emphasised by further contrast with Willetts' account of vegetarianism. She concludes,

Vegetarianism then, is not a food practice that is rigorously defined, but is a fluid and permeable category embracing a wide range of food practices. *It is also an identity that one can dip in and out of.*

(Willetts, 1997; p. 117; emphasis added)

But identities are negotiated and managed in interaction with others; they need to be performed, 'accomplished' or, in the language of conversational analysis, 'brought off' in practice. The degree to which vegetarianism is rigorously defined, or is fluid and permeable and can be 'dipped in and out of', is a matter for argument and no small measure of controversy. Equally, sustaining a vegetarian identity is also subject to argument. Having an identity is not, as SCT suggests, an individual inner process nor, as Willetts would have it, an uncontested and incontrovertible personal matter.

Social identity theory's neglect of identity as constituted in social practice is addressed by Condor (1996), who notes the disjuncture between social categories and their operation and uptake by individuals. She argues that because of his dislike of individualistic reductionist accounts of large-scale inter-group phenomena, Tajfel ignored small-group behaviour and denied that wide-scale macro-social or group processes are an aggregation of micro-social processes. Given his conception of groups as shared concepts, this appears difficult to maintain. Tajfel nevertheless argues for a qualitative distinction between inter-personal and inter-group behaviour, as does Brown:

[T]he direct extrapolation of theories about inter-personal behaviour to group contexts is inherently fraught with difficulties and thus [...] alternative theories, relating specifically to group behaviour, are necessary. (Brown, 1988; p. 8)

Groups appear to be disembodied from the lives of individuals. But as Condor argues, "large-scale systems of social relations do not exist (and persist) independently of their reproduction by human subjects in the course of their daily lives" (Condor, 1996, p. 291). Instead of forming two separatist psychologies of the 'macro-social' and 'micro-social', with the result of impoverishing them both, theorists of social identity ought to allow the macro-social into the micro-social and vice-versa. Such a holistic 'resocialisation' of the psychology of the individual can be seen in Billig's rhetorical social psychology, whereby cultural and ideological resources both permit and constrain sense-making between individuals in context. Wittgensteinian and Bakhtinian conceptions of language and thinking as an essentially social practice/*praxis* underpin a radically different theorizing of the personal-social dialectic, and, therefore, of social categorization. The close association between thinking and social argumentation has already been outlined above. Through the social practices of argument we learn not only the dilemmas and common places but also the argumentative tools for managing dilemmas - especially the skills of negating, criticising and justifying (Billig, 1999a). Rhetorical exchange also provides the concrete contexts and activities within which identities are constituted and managed in an on-going fashion.

In his discussion of national identity, Billig (1995) argues that social identity theory neglects the ways identities become '*enhabited*' and are maintained. Self-categorisation theory claims that in different contexts different identities become 'salient' (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Hutnik (1991) has described self-categorisation as operating to 'switch' identities on and off. Yet Turner *et al.* also want to say that the particular self-definition remains as a 'latent identity' (1987; p. 57). Billig notes the unresolved gap:

Social identity theory has little to say about what happens to the identity in between such [salient] situations. [...] There is much more to be said about [identity] and its maintenance [...] The apparently latent identity is maintained within the daily life [...] The 'salient situation' does not suddenly occur, as if out of nothing, for it is part of a wider rhythm of banal life [...] What this means is that [...] *identity is more than an inner psychological state or self-definition: it is a form of life, which is daily lived...* (Billig, 1995; p. 69; emphasis added)

The broad term 'form of life' encompasses much, including cultural and ideological practices within which identities make sense and are maintained. It suggests a much broader conception of identity as observable in concrete public activities. Identity as a social practice or 'form of life, which is daily lived' also highlights social relationships. A broader, more social account of identity can also be seen in Gergen's writing on identity as relationship (Gergen, 1994; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). This work, too, stresses the joint social activity through which identity is lived (constructed, negotiated, maintained) and by which it is 'interknitted' with the identities of others:

[A] fundamental aspect of social life is the networks of reciprocating identities. Because one's identity can be maintained for only so long as others play their proper supporting role, and because one is required in turn to play supporting roles in their constructions ... (Gergen, 1994; p. 209)

Similar ideas of identity as more diffuse and distributed through a social network of relationships and as fundamentally embedded in and constituted through social interaction are also found in the writings of G. H. Mead and Symbolic Interactionism.

According to this earlier work, every role involves interaction with other roles, which reinforce or question each other (though argument is not sufficiently emphasised).

The notion of 'form of life', concrete social activity, and Gergen's narrative approach to the self, it will be argued, also raise issues of *stability* of identity and the *individuality* of the lives through which they are instantiated – issues which some discursive approaches have difficulty accommodating.

V. Time, commitment and persons

Willetts' description of being able to 'dip in and out of' an identity has a decidedly, perhaps consciously, postmodern tone of freedom and fluidity. This, it was argued, ignores the social negotiation of identity and the constraints imposed on the individual. This misrepresents not only identity but the individual too. Billig (1995) is critical of postmodern accounts of national identity whose portrayal of a postmodern psyche rests on a psychology abstracted from actual individuals. Such accounts suggest that postmodern culture –in which depth, truth and belief are replaced by surface and pastiche– is mirrored psychologically in new forms of identity often linked to patterns of consumption and characterised by playful irony and waning affect and attachments.

No particular identity is to be accorded any special psychic investment, in the way that the patriot invested the homeland with a depth of emotional feeling.

Any such investment would disrupt the ever-changing carnival of pastiche.

(Billig, 1995; p. 136)

This chapter has already argued against generalising about all identities and has stressed the need to study particulars (Billig, 1996a, 1996b). The postmodern thesis, though descriptive of some aspects of contemporary culture, is too sweeping: "Not all identities should be considered equivalent and interchangeable" (Billig, 1995; p. 138). Vegetarianism involves patterns of consumption but, as was argued in Chapter 2, it differs in crucial ways from other food consumption practices. It should not be

considered as freely comparable, and routinely interchanged, with all other identities. Concurring once more with Billig, to overemphasise the personality of pastiche (a “depthless psyche, bobbing along on the postmodern tide”, Billig, 1995; p. 137) is to deny another ‘hotter’ psychology of attachment, belief, and commitment.¹³

The issue of personal investment and commitment to identities over time, which such arguments against ‘postmodern identity’ raise, may be seen to be sidelined more widely within social scientific work on identity. Social identity theory’s perceptuo-cognitive view of monolithic and monologic identities has been criticised above from the perspective of identity as a situated, discursive social accomplishment. However, despite their substantial differences, both SIT/SCT and discursive approaches may be criticised for over emphasising identifications as flexible and situation-specific, whether they are socially perceived or socially achieved. It will be argued that a neglect of individual investments in identities raises difficulties concerning durability and change in identity, speakers’ motivations, and the position of the person within social psychology.

In an essay entitled, *Social Identity and Time*, Condor (1996) is critical of Tajfel and Turner’s approaches to category salience for paying lip-service to social groups as on-going process whilst reverting to reified constructions which bracket the historical, diachronic dimensions of social life. She argues that ‘synchronic snapshots’ imply, “a Marivaudian being [...] a pastless, futureless man, born anew every instant.” (Barthelme, quoted by Lasch, 1979, in Condor, 1996), and calls for greater attention to the diachronic and relational ‘trajectories of human activity over macrotime’. Gergen (1973) has previously made a similar charge against social psychology, which, he argues, would be enhanced by the ‘sensitivities of the historian’:

Most social psychological research focuses on minute segments of ongoing process. We have concentrated very little on the function of these segments within their historical context. (Gergen, 1973; p. 319)

¹³ It might also be argued that as well as ignoring attachment and commitment in contemporary identities the postmodern thesis ignores elements of irony, play, pastiche and reflexivity which existed prior to or outside of ‘postmodern societies’. Richard Jenkins is sceptical of such a newly emerged postmodern psyche: “It is nothing new to be self-conscious about social identity – what it means to be a human, what it means to be a particular kind of human, what it means to be a person, whether people are what they appear to be – to be uncertain about it, or to assert its importance” (1996; p. 10).

Typically, discursive psychology is interested in variability and function, and the issue of the durability of identity beyond the limits of the local interaction is rarely addressed by discourse analysts. Rather than treating talk as a mere (and perhaps unreliable) 'sign' of identity and 'things going on under the surface' (Antaki *et al.*, 1996), discursive psychology has emphasized the functionality of self-construction within local interaction. However, it can be argued that such a functional analysis of the situated and tactical deployment of identities nevertheless makes implicit assumptions about the motivations of speakers in their strategic use of categories (Bowers, 1988; Madhill & Doherty, 1994; Michael, 1996).

Discursive psychology accounts for consistency and continuity of identity by, "the sedimentation of discursive practices over time" (Potter & Wetherell, 1992; p. 789, in Condor, 1996) and a tri-fold process of, "invoking [...] negotiating [...] and accumulating a record of having those identities" (Antaki *et al.*, 1996; p. 488). However, it is not clear how discursive positionings are 'held together' in order for there to be continuity of identity (Madill & Doherty, 1994). Particularly so if 'stake' and 'interest' are only constructed and attended to by speakers within and for the situation at hand, rather than being motivational and durable in the same way social identity theory postulates a psychological need for self-esteem (in which specifics are left open).

Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analytic approach, for example, has been criticised as overly functional by Bowers (1988) who suggests that the notion of function can be recast in cognitive terms such as individual goals. 'Function' is also connected to the ideas of 'accomplishment' and the 'endings' of interactions, which raise further problems: When is an identity successfully accomplished and when does an interaction end?

[...] (Who has not left a conversation thinking about what she or he would have liked to have said or will say when she or he next encounters his or her interlocutor(s)?) What if the encounter continues later on; or if the conversation is resumed by the original speaker with some more or less innocent party?

(Michael, 1996; p. 24)

These are not analytic givens and they only attain an arbitrary closure in the analysis through “an implicit parcelling of time (and space) by the analyst” (Michael, 1996; p. 25):

Assumptions are made about the speakers' reading of the interaction which is grounded in their responses, yet their responses can only be understood by a particular reading of the interactive situation. There is sort of bootstrapping – a hermeneutic. (1996; p. 25)

To talk about language use is inevitably to talk about language *users* and there is a rhetorical effect to these analytic stories. Functional analysis of bits of talk emphasises strategy and agency without an explicitly formulated motivated subject (Henriques *et al.*, 1984). This suggests both insincerity and social determinism in the language user, argue Madill & Doherty (1994). Rather, they contend, uptake and positioning within an array of alternatives are connected to, “personal history and ‘investment’ or emotional commitment in particular subjectivities” (Madill & Doherty, 1994; p. 267). The importance of personal commitment(s) is rarely acknowledged within discursive approaches. Reicher & Potter (1985) note that, “individual commitment to ideological systems affects social behaviour” (p. 187), and, whilst stressing the uncertainties and latitudes within advocacy, Billig describes attitudes as “guidelines, or *commitments* to advocacy” (1996a; p. 284; emphasis added).

Repopulating social psychology

The refusal to speak of commitments, or portray speakers as individuals, in analytic accounts is pursued by Billig (1992, 1994) who laments the depersonalised and dehumanised writing of social psychology and the social sciences:

[T]he journal texts of psychology tend to be devoid of individual characters: they are ‘depopulated texts’ (Billig 1992). When people appear in this psychology, they are stripped of what Foucault [1979; p. 191] called the ‘ordinary individuality – the everyday individuality of everybody’

(Billig, 1994; p. 309-310)

This includes approaches which statistically aggregate subjects, those which neglect actual utterances, and also “conversation analysts who deal with utterances only to dismiss the conversationalists as indistinguishable ‘members’” (Billig, 1994; p. 312). The ‘pastless, futureless man’ seen above is also faceless and often nameless (see also Billig, 1999c, for a discussion of the textual identification of speakers or naming practices in CA that portray speakers as interchangeable and disattend to differences). But “there is a limit to what can be said about thoughts, feelings or other forms of mental activity if they are presented as belonging to no one in particular” (Billig, 1994; p. 323). Not only are analytic accounts ‘disembodied abstractions’ and therefore ‘unreal’, but also subjects are not depicted as ‘real’ people but as interchangeable, dehumanised and as what Craib calls ‘normotic personalities’: “...people who have no subjective or inner experience” (Craib, 1998; p. 9). He argues, “both macro and micro social theory glossed and hid the experience of the actor” (1998; p. 85).

Recent writings in social anthropology (e.g. Rapport, 1992; Cohen, 1996) have also confronted this dialectic of the social and the individual and stressed ordinary individuality and biographical diversity:

I find the interaction pervaded by [...] the tension between common forms and diverse meanings, between individual lives and cultural relations.

(Rapport, 1992; p. 203)

And,

[T]o understand the maintenance of cultural relations is to appreciate the specificity of the individual meanings that live through them: without individuals with diverse biographies to extend, there would be no relationships, and without common behavioural forms in which these could be lived and made flesh, no individual biographies. (Rapport, 1992; p. 203)

The point is not that individual/biographical aspects or background to the interactional situation are essential to analysis but that a different analysis may be done when these elements are included. There is also a more personal story to be told by the analyst and by the individual. To ‘repopulate’ social psychological writing, Billig argues for the increased use of the neglected methods of the case study. These “must retain typically untypical features” (1994; p. 324) and serve to present people to the reader

rather than use individuals to illustrate theory. As he stresses, this would not be a case of *introducing* rhetoric into psychological writing, for rhetoric is always routinely present.

The importance of biographical aspects to identity is again raised by Billig's observation that in theoretical accounts there is frequently no sense of self-categorisation as *re*-categorisation – that identification involves a *dis*identification with *earlier* categories implicitly opposed to the newly adopted category. As Billig argues in a discussion of attitude change:

[T]he identification of the self with the prevailing situation would be accompanied by a distancing from the earlier identifications of the self.

(Billig, 1996a; p. 265)

There is an un-doing or re-writing of identities as well as claiming new ones, and so self-categorisation can be seen as involving a process of *narrating change*.

Diachronic, relational, personal and biographical aspects of identity and of identity change are found within narrative approaches to self and identity, and these will be briefly considered.

VI. Self-narrative and personal documents

Narrative psychology (e.g., Bruner, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981; Murray, 1995; Rosenwald & Ochberg eds. 1992; Sarbin ed., 1986) is part of the broad 'discursive turn' in the social and human sciences and the social constructionist study of how people make meanings. Narrative psychology is a development of narratology (the study of stories and literary genres) and with it literary theory becomes a psychological theory of the storied nature of human experience and conduct.

Whether it is a psychologically universal disposition or a deeply embedded cultural form, "experience is 'language'd', and the language of experience is narratory" (Sarbin, 1986; p. xiv). Sarbin proposes "the universality of the story as a guide to

living and as a vehicle for understanding the conduct of others” (p. x). Gergen & Gergen argue “people frequently live out sequences of activities with a sense of storyhood” (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; p. 224) and so “life becomes dramatically saturated” (p. 255). Moreover, Van Langenhove & Harré propose that “Once a story is told and retold, it begins to live a life of its own” (1993; p. 97).

The classic studies of narrative delineated the types, structures, plots, and components of written and oral stories. Northrop Frye (1957) identifies four varieties of narrative form or four master narratives: *comedy*, *romance*, *tragedy* and *satire*.¹⁴ Gergen (1994) suggests the rudimentary forms of *stability*, *progressive*, and *regressive narratives*, and adds more complex variants: *the tragedy*, *the comedy-romance*, *the happily-ever-after-myth*, and *the heroic saga*.

From the point of view of discursive psychology, Edwards (1997) warns that a narrative approach, “risks treating discourse as a kind of storied ‘sense-making’, an author’s or speaker’s best efforts at self-exploration” (1997; p. 270) and is critical of a “glosses and quotes” approach to analysis:

[A] recurrent theme in narrative theory, [...] is the interpersonal functions of story-telling. Despite that theme, interactional orientations tend to be underplayed *in actual analyses* of narratives, by virtue of the focus on structural story schemas, data from interviews and written literature, and in the location of narrative studies within the theoretical domains of self, identity, and personal growth. (Edwards, 1997; p. 279; emphasis in orig.)

But, as the italicising above allows, this need not always be chronic:

The more discourse-oriented studies emphasize the active nature of narratives in ‘constructing’ rather than expressing identity (Harré, 1983; Shotter and Gergen, 1989), while also promoting a much more rhetorical and interaction-managing

¹⁴ Frye saw these four narrative forms as based in our experience of nature and as corresponding to the four seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter inspiring the expressive/dramatic forms of comedy, romance, tragedy and satire respectively).

treatment of discourse as something produced in, and for, its occasions
(Edwards and Potter, 1992) (Edwards, 1997; p. 271)

Narrative approaches do not necessarily entail treating identity, as McAdams (1985) does, as a single, coherent, crystallised and stable life-story. Gergen, for example, stresses 'narrative multiplicity', relationship, and negotiation in self-narrative: "narrative constructions are essentially linguistic tools with important social functions" (Gergen, 1994; p. 204) and identity is not "an achievement of the mind, but rather, of relationship" (p. 205). Self-narratives are seen as reciprocal, interdependent and as an ongoing process of "interminable negotiation":

Narration may appear to be monologic, but its success in establishing identity will inevitably rely on dialogue. (Gergen, 1994; p. 207)

Linde's definition of 'life-story' also shows sensitivity to interactional issues:

[A] temporally discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaking, as well as specific addressees, and to reflect changes in the speaker's long-term situation, values, understanding, and (consequently) discursive practices. (Linde, 1993; p. 51)¹⁵

The issue of flexibility to interactional concerns is part of a larger permanent tension with stability. Although Van Langenhove & Harré's distinction between 'personal identity' and 'social identity/ies' is not necessarily useful, the tension they identify is a key one:

One of the most central problems in the psychology of personhood is how continuous personal identity relates to discontinuous social diversity [...] somehow psychological theory of the self must encompass both stability and

¹⁵ Linde sees coherence as a *textual* matter and as *socially* demanded. As Walkover (1992) points out in her discussion of cultural ambivalence to parenting, norms for coherence are *selective* – some inconsistencies are tolerated whilst others are not. Also, as the preceding discussion of Sociological Ambivalence argues, there are norms for inconsistency and contradiction too; one can be seen as being *too* coherent and so consistency is also a dilemmatic concern.

uniqueness and variability and multiplicity.

(Van Langenhove & Harré, 1993; p.82)

As discussed above, there is the potential for losing a sense of the individuality and personal history of speakers/writers in approaches that are highly focussed on local interactional concerns. A diachronic and biographical perspective is further developed by Gergen & Gergen's discussion of micro-narratives 'nested' within macro-narratives (see also Mandler, 1984) and the suggestion that '*in vivo* scenarios' are needed.

Three themes have emerged from this chapter's discussion of the study of identity: *relational and interactional* aspects; *time* or the 'diachronic trajectories over macro-time'; and thirdly, *individual, personal or biographical* perspectives. A broadly narrative approach to identity or the self seems to be potentially able to accommodate these multiple aspects and the tensions between them, for example, between stability and variability in identity. These aspects are especially important for a study of identity *change*, which presupposes some notion of durability, motivation or commitment. In addition, an element of moral evaluation and deliberation within self-narratives chimes with the predominantly moral motivations for becoming vegetarian, seen in Chapter 2: Gergen points specifically to the links between the 'trajectory' of identity and a sense of moral evaluation and commitment:

[S]elf-narratives [...] serve to unite the past with the present and to signify future trajectories (Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, 1979). It is their significance for the future that is of special interest here, because it sets the stage for moral evaluation. [...] In MacIntyre's (1981) terms, in matters of moral deliberation, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (p. 201)

(Gergen, 1994; p. 207)

Finally, unlike conversation analysis, narrative approaches do not confine their interest to conversation and naturally occurring talk-in-interaction, but are open to analysis of all autobiographical texts, including interview and written discourse materials. This thesis will focus on identity change and will use both interviews and

diaries to garner participants' accounts of self. The analysis of these texts will include attention to the discursive-rhetorical details and interactional variability as well as issues of personal history, stability and commitment over time.

Diary-interview methods

Allport's (1942) wide-ranging discussion of 'the personal document in psychological science' recommends the use of diaries but also calls for better use of them. He promotes the value of their subjective perspectives and of supplementing nomothetic with idiographic understandings. And he warns against merely using diaries to illustrate an author's theory. The limited literature on diaries within social psychology and sociology since Allport can be summarised as similarly tentative and predominated by discussions and exhortations to study diaries rather than actual analysis of them.

Zimmerman & Wieder's (1977) diary-interview method is ultimately described as an inferior stand-in for participant observation. Wiener & Rosenwald (1993) and Stanley (1994) provide interesting discussions, both giving a sense of the complexity and potential difficulty diary materials pose for the analyst and emphasising self-conscious, reflexive aspects to writing. Liz Stanley defends diaries against some feminist analyses which charge them as being 'naively referential', epistemologically problematic, and 'closing off contrary argument'. She argues, "narrative is highly complex and its referential claims frequently exist to repair what is actually an awareness of ontological complexity and fragmentation" (p. 133). Her position, then, that "overwhelmingly the diary is concerned with these 'puzzles' about ontological and epistemological complexities, [and] confusions" (p. 142), suggests that the diary can provide valuable material for analysing ambivalence.

Significantly, this ambivalence can be seen within the context of social debate. Though critical of narrative analyses of written material, Edwards writes:

[A]s Kenneth Gergen remarks, self-narratives, even written ones, should be understood as 'forms of social accounting or public discourse' (1994: 188)

(Edwards, 1997; p. 270)

It follows that such written self-narratives may be approached as rhetorical, dialogic and socially situated. As seen above, Billig has argued that social thinking has its basis in public debates. Private ambivalences may be seen as grounded in cultural ambivalences and as played out in inner deliberation and debate.

Contrasting written self-narratives with conversation can provide another perspective on variability in accounting and need not be of less interest than talk-in-interaction. Conversation, given precedence by conversation analysis, as argued, has its own potential problems of interpretation and may also be dominated by self-presentational issues, such as politeness, which result in less reflexivity in comparison with diaries or with sympathetic (or simply less personally interested/involved) interviewing. As Billig (1997) has argued, discursive psychology has tended to concentrate on "the presences rather than absences" in conversation and he points to avoidances and the 'unsaid' as a topic of interest. Diaries may be defended as representing a *different* rhetorical context rather than being taken as claiming a null-context.¹⁶ Some studies of diaries have emphasised the sort of definitive self-understandings and neglect of rhetorical discursive details of which Edwards is critical, e.g., Smith (1991, 1994), but this is not an inevitable consequence of personal documents.

It is hoped that the kinds of specific dilemmas of identity and ideology discussed by Billig *et al.* (1988) may emerge from a detailed analysis of diary material from vegetarians and vegans. The diaries to be used will be from new vegetarians and vegans and those in the process of changing their diet and identity. The lived, relational and interdependent aspects of identity construction suggest that

¹⁶ An illustration may be given from a vegetarian biography; Colin Spencer writes:

There was a private and a public Shaw in the matter of vegetarianism as in everything else. The private Shaw wrote: "I am a vegetarian purely on humanitarian and mystical grounds; and I have never killed a flea or a mouse vindictively or without remorse". But because he felt that most people were vulgar, he made G.B.S. into the most 'unsympathetic' of vegetarians: "He has no objection to the slaughter of animals as such," Shaw's printed card on vegetarian diet reads. "He knows that if we do not kill animals they will kill us. Squirrels, foxes, rabbits, tigers, cobras, locusts, white ants, rats, mosquitoes, fleas and deer must be continually slain even to extermination by vegetarians as ruthlessly as by meat-eaters. But he urges humane killing and does not enjoy it as a sport". (Spencer, 2000; p. 263-4)

Though the distinction of 'public' and 'private' is not a simple one, these are potentially interesting differences, and may be taken as revealing something of the received stereotypes of vegetarians and a rhetorical response within this argumentative context. The *more* public account (the private and personal nature of personal journals of public figures is debatable) also indicates Shaw's *individual commitment* to an eccentric and humorous persona.

documenting periods of identity transition will be particularly interesting from the point of view of ambivalence and accounting, as the participants 'renege' on or threaten the networks of interdependent and precariously situated identities.

The diaries will furnish longitudinal data, thus permitting a diachronic perspective in analysis. Moreover, case study approaches - recommended by Billig in order to repopulate social psychological writing - will be employed. In contrast to the theoretical discussions and recommendations of diaries, the thesis will be based on actual analysis of diary material and no tightly theorised perspective on diaries or identity is supposed. In general, Billig's (1988a) praise of scholarship over methodology is shared.¹⁷ Analysis will focus on the rhetorical and dilemmatic aspects of vegetarian and vegan identities and changing and rewriting identity. Finally, Billig suggests that one of the advantages of analyses populated with 'real people' will be a more pleasurable experience for the reader: it is hoped that analyses will present respondents as both human¹⁸ and interesting.

¹⁷ Allport's term, 'methodolatry', also conveys a concern to use any method *intelligently* including departure from the method and recognising its limits and weaknesses.

¹⁸ 'Human' is intended here as a bulwark or criticism against abstract, impersonal, and therefore dehumanised, approaches discussed above. 'Human', used as an adjective, might also have the effect of claiming and celebrating certain qualities as distinguishing humans from what Michael (1996) calls 'natural non-humans', i.e. animals rather than machines (the latter being the proper metaphor for causal, mechanistic images of Man). Consciousness, complexity and individuality may be attributed to some degree to other higher mammals at least, though no easy term springs to mind which points up their degree of mental complexity or uniqueness as 'human' does for us. It is interesting that the most impersonal term and (arguably) the broadest social category, 'human', also connotes uniqueness, but uniqueness is not a uniquely human quality. From this point of view, the adjective 'human', used here, is a rather lazy and anthropocentric shorthand for this bundle of qualities epitomised by, but not wholly confined to, humans.

4

Data collection procedure: diaries and interviews

- I. Participant recruitment
- II. Summary of participants
- III. Data collection procedure
- IV. Summary of material collected
- V. Organisation and presentation of material
- VI. Transcription notation

The preceding chapter outlined the intention to study diary and interview accounts of individuals embarking on vegetarianism or veganism. This chapter will lay out the process of data collection, analysis, and some of their associated issues and difficulties prior to the analytic chapters that follow. Hopefully it will also give an impression of the complexity and the experience, for both researcher and participant, as well as the procedure of data collection.

I. Participant recruitment

A multiple approach to recruitment was prompted by the highly specific nature of the target population. Finding subjects willing to keep a diary and be interviewed over a period of months was potentially problematic. Potential participants were further restricted by the study's focus on the *transition* to vegetarianism or veganism:

Vegetarians and even vegans would be relatively easy to find in numbers but those just embarking on the diet/lifestyle, or still in transition, would be considerably less common. A wide but also focussed search was required and so a battery of different media was used.

Participants were recruited via a number of avenues – local, national and international. Locally, posters were put up around the university campus and public spaces around Loughborough (health food shops, public libraries, etc). Adverts were also placed in local papers and in the university staff newsletter. Nationally, crucial publicity was gained through the Vegetarian Society and Vegan Society: details of the proposed study and a request for volunteers appeared in the general news sections of their respective magazines (*The Vegetarian* and *The Vegan*). Although these publications are largely subscribed to by full members of the societies who already follow the society's dietary recommendations (rather than non-vegetarian/vegan associate members and supporters) it was hoped that they would reach the target group(s) either directly or through word-of-mouth. In addition, the Vegetarian Society's cooperation further extended to putting details on their website (www.Vegsoc.org) and enclosing fliers about the study with their 'Starter Packs' sent out nationally to enquirers wanting information on becoming vegetarian. Finally, participants were also sought via two e-mail discussion groups: one international, called '*VegList*'; and one serving students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), called '*vsg@MIT*'. A request was posted to the list similar to the adverts used elsewhere. In all cases, word-of-mouth was explicitly encouraged to both widen and target the coverage. In all cases the following appeal was made for volunteers:

[...] People of potential interest to the study are those who are ...

- a) ... *in the process of becoming, or who have recently become,* vegetarian or vegan;
- b) ... *struggling or lapsed* vegetarians/vegans;¹
- c) ... *thinking about, intending to or aspiring to be* vegetarian/vegan.

The aim of this Research Council funded study is to understand becoming vegetarian (or vegan) *as it is happening* and requires participants to keep a

¹ The Information Officer for Vegetarian Society felt that the terms 'struggling' and 'lapsed' were negative and may discourage people from becoming vegetarian and so this second category did not appear in the publicity with which they were connected.

diary, and/or be interviewed periodically, about their behaviour, thoughts and feelings to do with their recent, attempted or intended change in diet.

(See also Appendix 1: *Advert used for participant recruitment*)

Recruitment strategies are assessed below with a discussion of the data collected.

II. Summary of participants

Approximately 70 enquiries were received in response to the recruitment strategies outlined above. A number of these enquirers were established vegetarians and vegans who were not the focus of this study. In general, the more recently the individual had become vegetarian/vegan the more potential value they had for the study (fortunately, these also tended to be the most prepared to keep diaries). From these enquiries, 23 individuals went on to participate in the study.

The participants' characteristics will be further detailed and discussed in the first analytic chapter to follow (Chapter 5), but a few comments should be made here. The 23 diarists were made up of 19 women and 4 men. Their ages ranged from 18-60 years. No formal profiling of participants' level of education, income or employment was done but the general impression was of diversity. Although the study was based in the East Midlands and attempts were specifically made to recruit participants locally as well as nationally, the diarists were scattered across the UK and beyond. Of the 23, 17 were British (though one of these was living in Holland for most of the period of his participation) and 6 were nationals of other countries: 3 from the USA, and 1 each from Canada, Ireland and Malaysia (the only non-native English speaker). Only the American and Canadian participants plus one British participant were resident outside of the UK. The seven 'core' diarist-interviewees (see below, *Summary of material collected*) were comprised of 5 females and 2 males, aged between late-20s and early-50s. One male was included in the three major 'case studies' (see below). The three main case studies were all British and covered a range of age, educational, geographical and employment characteristics.

No claims are made for the representativeness of the participants in terms of larger vegetarian and vegan populations in the UK. The fact that the participants volunteered for diary-keeping and interviews on becoming vegetarian may suggest that less motivated, optimistic or confident potential vegetarians and vegans may have been absent from the 'sample'. Recruitment through the Vegetarian and Vegan Societies may have tended to exclude 'loners' (Dwyer *et al.*, 1974). However, generalisability is not a prime concern for the study (though this factor is perhaps no more problematic than the exclusively student samples which are common in much of social psychology).

A few conclusions may be made regarding participant recruitment strategies. The most successful avenues for recruitment were (in descending order of success): The Vegetarian Society magazine and starter packs; The Vegan Society magazine; *VegList* e-mail discussion group; local university staff magazine; other (local paper ads, word-of-mouth, etc.). The societies not only produced the bulk of enquiries but were also the source for most of those who went on to be the most prolific diarists and most committed interviewees. The value of cooperation/assistance from such 'official' or recognised societies and publications is therefore underlined. The use of the internet and of e-mail discussion groups to reach and recruit highly targeted and committed individuals gains limited support: approximately 9 people responded to the *VegList* posting, one of whom (Paul) went on to be a main case study. Overall, the use of a battery of recruitment techniques is strongly recommended for similarly select target populations.

III. Data collection procedure

After initial contact had been made with the researcher by e-mail, phone or post, further information was sent to the prospective participant together with, if requested, a notebook for recording diary entries in. Participants were encouraged to start keeping a diary immediately and were given some guidelines. The agenda was to be set as much as possible by the participants' own interests and concerns. These guidelines were general and intended to encourage, prompt and facilitate rather than

trammel or restrict the diarists' writing (for copy of full guidelines see Appendix 2: *Information and guidelines for diarists*). Diarists adhered to or used them to varying degrees.

[...] You should write as much or as little as you want, in whatever format. The diary is supposed to reflect your state(s) of mind rather than require a minimum to be written each day/week. You can write it whenever, wherever and however often you want (but generally the more regularly the better). Your diary-entries could include the following:

1. *Your motivations, sense of commitment(s), and decision-making;*
2. *The difference between public and private versions of your vegetarianism/veganism, i.e. between what you say to others and what you think;*
3. *Situations which made you think/talk about your diet/meat-eating (e.g. conversations, eating out, TV);*
4. *Reactions of friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances; how it affects relationships;*
5. *How a stable/consistent position is reached, e.g. vis-à-vis dairy and leather products;*
6. *What is supportive/positive and what is undermining/negative about the changes;*
7. *Your sense of identity: e.g. as changing; as "Vegetarian" or "Vegan"; as same/different to others, as varying with situation/ people you are with/ moods;*
8. *Which sources of information you use/trust;*
9. *The degree of success/lapsing in keeping to your intentions;*
10. *The experience of keeping the diary and if it affects the way you're thinking;*
11. *Anything else you are thinking about/feeling connected to changing your diet.*

(From Appendix 2: *Information and guidelines for diarists*)

Participants were assured that anonymity would be maintained and that they were free to drop out at any point.

At around the same time that each participant was encouraged to start keeping a diary the first interview was scheduled. For a variety of reasons all interviewing was done by telephone and arranged in advance for a time convenient to the participant, usually in the early evening. From a practical point of view, phone interviewing allowed reliable recording without interference from background sounds.² As the interviewees

² Recordings were taken with the aid of a small piece of electrical equipment (junction box and input jack) which allowed the Dictaphone to be plugged directly into the phone line between the handset and the phone, thus getting a better recording than if using the external microphone.

were scattered across the country (and in one case abroad) the considerable time and expense of travelling was avoided. For the participants themselves, talking on the phone at home in the evenings was more convenient and relaxed, and less time-consuming and potentially socially stressful, than face-to-face meetings would have been. These aspects of phone interviewing were especially important inasmuch as they contributed to sustained participation.

The interviews themselves began by asking the interviewee's permission to record the interview. They were semi-structured and open-ended and covered a set of topics very similar to the list of suggested topics for diary-keeping (see above). Other foci and avenues of inquiry emerged as interviewing went on, some specific to that participant and some more general. The open-ended nature of the interviewing was made clear to the interviewee at the outset and s/he was told that they could continue for however long they wished or had time for. Interviews lasted between 20-90 minutes with 45 minutes being typical. The interviews were informal and conversational and their duration and course varied across different individuals and interviews, largely as a result of the differences in participant involvement and interests, interviewer-interviewee rapport, specific circumstances and time constraints.

The participant was asked to continue the diary and send it to the researcher after a period of between one and two months, with a view to doing a second interview at that time. Diarists kept their journals either on paper or, in some cases, as a computer file, or both, and sent them either by mail or e-mail. When sending by post, the participant was encouraged when possible to send a photocopy of the diary in case the original was lost, or to send it via recorded delivery (books of stamps were sent to cover postage costs). Upon receipt of the diary (with or without further prompting) a second interview was conducted. Whereas the first interviews were usually dominated by a retrospective of the participant's dietary history and decision to change, subsequent interviews also incorporated discussion of their diary material received so far. A key feature was the mutually supportive nature of the interviews and diaries: *the interviews often motivated and stimulated diary-keeping and the diary facilitated questions and discussion in interviews.*

Diary-keeping and interviewing continued in tandem in this manner, with further interviews being dependent upon the individual's continued interest and commitment, and taking place shortly after receipt of an instalment of their diary. Rather than receiving all the diaries at the end of the month, the arrival of diaries was staggered in order to allow the researcher time to read them and interview the sender promptly. Intervals between interviews became longer as participation continued.

A longitudinal case-study approach to the individuals' accounts was taken which made sustained participation over time important to the study. The process of recruitment and data collection also had to allow for an unknown drop-out rate. Due to the prolonged, committed and personal nature of the involvement sought, *the process of recruitment can be seen as merging into a process of nurturing, facilitating or 'managing' participants*. The process of interviewing and soliciting diary-material from a participant was sustained for as long as possible and/or as was considered profitable but ultimately depended upon the individual's own continuing interest in writing and talking about their new diet/dietary change and related matters. Individuals varied widely in the enthusiasm, diligence and productivity of their diary-keeping, and also in the amount of material produced in interviews. Some participants, then, were 'better' diarists than they were interviewees, and some vice versa. In some cases diary-keeping ceased but the individual was happy to continue with the interviews. For others, the diary was maintained to record new or ongoing thoughts but s/he had little to add in interviews. Due to the case-study aspect, the data (or discourse material) collected must be seen largely on an individual basis in terms the collection of case materials.

IV. Summary of material collected

- A total of 328 *pages of transcribed diary material* (A4; size 12 type; double line-spaced) were received from 23 individuals.
- A total of 31 *interviews* (15 of the 23 diarists were interviewed between 1-4 times).

These interviews were conducted over a period of 15 months (May 1999 to August 2000) with the collected diaries covering a slightly longer period. For a summary of the material collected, see Appendix 3: *Summary of material collected shown by individual participant*.

Crucially however, the level of involvement within these 23 diarists and 15 diarist-interviewees ranged over a spectrum of commitment and fruitfulness. The diary material submitted varied across individuals from between 2 and 77 pages. The 7 most prolific and analytically interesting of the 23 diarists (the ‘core participants’) accounted for over 236 of the total 328 pages of diary material collected and for 19 of the total of 31 interviews.

In addition, the ‘top three’ participants further stand out and form the basis for a more case-study approach for three diarist-interviewees (Nicola, Paul and Cathy). These three participants alone account for 156 pages of diaries and 10 interviews. As an indication of the degree of commitment and interest of the participants’ and its value to the study, Nicola’s involvement lasted about 1 year and 3 months (March 1999 to July 2000) during which time she submitted 44 pages of diary and gave 4 interviews. Paul’s participation covered 1 year and 4 months, during which period 45 pages of transcribed diary material and 3 interviews were collected. In both cases the diary began before the first interview and continued for a few months after the last interview. The material can, then, be seen as a ‘pyramid’: a few participants at the top from whom a lot of material was collected over a long period; from these few fanned out many more participants of decreasing involvement. Analysis paralleled this pattern in the discourse material gathered, incorporating an overview of many participants and a more intensive analysis of a few cases.

V. Organisation and presentation of material

Instalments of diaries, which usually arrived handwritten, were all typed into a standard form (double line-spaced). This process of retyping the diaries aimed to retain as much as possible the original formatting and style with a minimum of

redaction and did not ‘tidy up’ the document (e.g., retaining case, punctuation, spelling, and crossings out, etc.). Interviews, in contrast, were not routinely transcribed (only those of the three main case studies, Paul, Nicola and Cathy). Transcription of these interviews did not try to capture such details as the length of pauses, overlapping between speakers etc. Case materials (tapes, transcriptions, diaries and analyses) were organised by individual participant and labelled using his/her first name (or, in two cases, first name and first letter of surname). Notes for analysis taken during interviews were elaborated with repeated listening, and extracts of interest transcribed as needed.

Transcription notation

For interview transcripts:

... Pause in speech

Italics indicates word(s) noticeably stressed by speaker

[unclear] Unclear word/fragment on tape

Punctuation (. , ? , ! , – , “ ” , etc) used as heard in the talk

For interview and diary transcripts:

Underlined text highlighted by analyst

[...] Fragment of extract omitted by analyst

{ } Additional description by analyst, e.g. {*laughing*}

5

Dietary transitions, motivations and conversions

- I. Participants' characteristics
- II. Dietary types and transitions: Studying new and aspiring 'vegetarians' & 'vegans'
- III. Participants' accounts of motivations for becoming vegetarian & vegan
 - Health motivations
 - Moral motivations
 - Factory farming motivations
 - Motivation categories in accounts
- IV. Participants' accounts of conversions
 - Conversion experiences
 - Notable calendar dates
 - Character change and self-development
 - Rhetoric and autobiography in becoming vegetarian & vegan

This chapter looks at the participants' accounts of how and why they changed their diet. The aim of this first analytic chapter is to explore some shared features and contrasts within reports of motivations and conversions from all participants (or 'diarist-interviewees') and to relate these emergent themes to previous work on vegetarianism. The small number of participants severely constrains the possibility of exploring possible interactions or correlations within the data - for example, gender differences or comparisons between vegetarians and vegans. Some earlier findings are supported, others disputed, and some new themes within vegetarianism and dietary change are offered.

The limitations and problems with such broad, content analytic approaches are also demonstrated and discussed. It is argued that the particular, argumentative and autobiographical aspects of accounts of becoming vegetarian or vegan demand a more detailed discursive-rhetorical analysis of accounting. In contrast to seeing accounts as descriptive reports, practices of account-giving are seen as a socially complex activity. As such, this chapter sets up Chapters 6, 7 & 8, which explore participants’ accounts and accounting practices in more biographical and rhetorical detail.

I. Participants’ characteristics

Table 1: *Participants’ characteristics*

	Number of participants (Total 23)
Sex	
Male	4
Female	19
Age	
Under 25	5
25-35	10
35+	8
Nationality	
British	17
Other	6

(See Appendix 4, Table 1, for data for individual participants)

Sex: Diary and interview material was gathered from 23 participants, comprising 19 females and 4 males. Significantly higher rates of vegetarianism among women have been consistently reported by two of the major recent studies of UK populations. A 1997 survey of 1,479 adults aged 15 and over found 8 per cent of women and 5 per

cent of men defined themselves as vegetarian (NOP poll for *Seven Seas* and The Vegetarian Society, May 1997). A similar pattern was found in a survey of 1004 adults in 1998, which reported 10 per cent of women but only 4 per cent of men agreed with the statement, “I am a vegetarian and eat no meat at all” (NOP poll for *Dalepak* and The Vegetarian Society May 1998). The dearth of male participants is indicative of the preponderance of females among UK vegetarians seen in survey results but the disparity is even greater. Possibly, the self-selection of participants for a diary study may bias the sample even further towards females. The very small number of male participants also hampers a comparative analysis of gender.

Age: The two polls cited above showed very similar age distributions of vegetarianism in the adult population, with rates of vegetarianism in the 1998 NOP survey as follows: 12% among 15-24 yr olds; 9% of 25-34 yr olds; 7% of 35-44 yr olds; and 4% of 45+ yr olds. The ages of the participants here ranged from 19 years up to several in the 50-60 age-bracket. Most (15 out of 23) were under thirty-five years of age and 43 per cent of all participants (10/23) fell within the ages 25-35 years. This is a similar pattern to that found in surveys: Beardsworth & Keil report, “a marked clustering in the categories 26-30 years [...] and 31-35 years” (1992a). It seems unlikely that the recruitment techniques would favour a particular age-group to account for this skewed distribution.

Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) also noted three other characteristics in their response group besides age distribution: an even balance between sexes; a high level of educational attainment; and a predominance of households without dependent children. As seen above, a comparable balance of males and females was not found, but a similar pattern of households without dependents was found (only 6/23 with dependents) and high educational attainment (approx. 14/23: though no explicit criteria were used, several participants were postgraduate students and relatively few had no higher education).

Nationality: 17/23 of the participants were British and resident in the UK. Three were from the USA, and one each from Canada, Ireland and Malaysia. Of these non-British, *three participants were residing in their home countries* (Lisa and Tina in the USA, and Elizabeth in Canada). Obviously, this is potentially important for analysis

of the data from these subjects given differing attitudes and diets between countries (although these participants were not interviewed and are not prominent within the corpus of data). The Malay participant (Shannen) was not a native English-speaker, though her standard of English was good.

The detailed discussion of accounts in Chapters 6, 7 & 8 focuses on material from the seven most involved participants, all of whom were British (Nicola, Paul, Cathy, Greg, Tamra, Paula, Clare). There is an even greater focus on the accounts of three participants (Nicola, Paul and Cathy). Even within these three, both sexes and a range of ages are represented (at beginning of participation in study: Nicola, 31 yrs; Paul, 28 yrs; Cathy 42 yrs). All had partners but Nicola was the only one who had a dependent child. She was also the only one to live with her partner all the time: Cathy's work meant she lived away from her husband during the week and Paul was living alone.

II. Dietary types and transitions: Studying new and aspiring 'vegetarians' & 'vegans'

Chapter 2 reviewed previous studies of vegetarianism and discussed problems with categorising participants on the basis of a typology of vegetarianism. It also took issue with Willetts' uncritical acceptance and appropriation of self-definitions as clear criteria for membership of these categories. Chapters 2 and 3 argued that self-categorisation/definition/description in accounts may be made an object of study in itself rather than being treated as a mere window onto participants' diets or seen as straight-forward indicators of group-membership. Chapter 3 also suggested that studying the period of change or *transition* to a vegetarian or vegan diet may be especially interesting from the point of view of conflicts and ambivalences.

The points in Chapter 2 concerning the 'typing' of vegetarians are not an argument against all discriminations between diets or within Vegetarianism (in the broadest sense and including veganism). Differentiations can certainly be made within the wide spectrum (or, less linearly, 'area', or 'space') covered by vegetarianism. There is clearly a potentially interesting discrimination to be made between the diet and

lifestyle of a fish-eating ‘pesco-vegetarian’ and that of a strict vegan or a Jain monk. Further, people do habitually, and pointedly, make comparisons of individuals and differentiate between different times in an individual’s dietary career.

However, particularly with a small sample of 23, the analytic utility, interest and insight gained from classifying participants are doubtful when compared to more detailed perspectives. Applying a typology to this small sample would require a degree of dogmatism in criteria that would not be compensated for by the trends that might emerge from a larger sample. In fairness to other authors, both Beardsworth & Keil (1992a, 1997) and Maurer (1989) stress the absence of any ‘ideal types’. Beardsworth & Keil –who in their 1992a study deal with a sample three times larger than that used here– also stress that membership of categories is not fixed.

Instead, the participants were categorised according to the much simpler typology of ‘vegetarians’ and ‘vegans’. This simpler distinction has the common usage of the labels ‘vegetarian’ and ‘vegan’ to recommend it. Their lack of precision is a positive feature in that it does not pre-empt the data and analysis to follow. Also, finer categories require more refined measurements and clearer criteria. The positivist notion of *accuracy*, which such taxonomies invoke, can be contrasted with language-based, rhetorical perspectives on accounts of diet and identity. Thus categories and their usage become the *objects* of analysis rather than being imposed onto the material. This study is, then, interested in *accounts* of ‘vegetarianism’ and ‘veganism’; and more specifically, in accounts of *becoming* ‘vegetarian’ or ‘vegan’. The issue of types and stereotypes of vegetarians will be discussed further in later analytic chapters.

As stated in the adverts through which the participants were recruited (see Chapter 4), the criteria for participation in the study were that participants should be, “new, intending or aspiring vegetarians or vegans”. This constitutes a significant difference from previous studies, which have not focussed on the period of transition to vegetarianism and veganism. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a), Maurer (1989), Willetts (1997) and Wicks (1999) all recruit vegetarians and vegans (or identify them within their sample) on the basis of their *present, established* diet (whether following participants’ self-ascribed labels or using a taxonomy of their own). Although Maurer

(1995), Jabs (1997) and McDonald (2000) are interested in the process of becoming or converting, none recruited individuals as they are embarking on a new diet, or during particular periods of sustained effort at changing their diet. In contrast, the participants in the present study were classified simply on the basis of their *stated new, or aimed for, diet*: either ‘vegetarian’ or ‘vegan’ (see Table 2, below). All participants who replied to the advert for ‘new, intending or aspiring vegetarians or vegans’, could describe themselves as either having recently started or on the point of attempting either a vegetarian or vegan diet. Using participants’ *stated dietary goals* therefore combines self-description with dietary transition and resolves the issue of the participants’ type of diet (which the notion of transition presupposes). A participant classified here as ‘*new vegetarian*’, or simply ‘*vegetarian*’, therefore indicates a recent convert or an individual *becoming* vegetarian. They might not describe themselves as a vegetarian yet and in other studies might be placed into a ‘non-vegetarian’ category. Most, however, would not describe themselves as meat-eaters either. The difficulties with self-definitions as a basis for definitive classification are underlined by these periods of transition.

A note on the selection criteria of ‘new’ vegetarians/vegans may be added. The difficulties and practicalities of finding and recruiting participants who were just beginning their new diet meant in practice including those who had recently converted or attempted conversion. For example, Shannen’s diary begins:

March Vegetarian Diary. Date: 22/3/00

I have become a vegetarian since 1st January 2000.

(Shannen, diary; p. 1)

So Shannen began trying to follow a vegetarian diet/lifestyle nearly three months before beginning her diary. In Greg’s case, he began his diary on the 29th January having told his family on the 1st January. This means that diaries sometimes begin with a summary of the new diet so far, and so are also retrospectives at first, though to a much lesser degree than in other studies. By comparison, even the newest of Willetts’ vegetarians had converted over two years before (“They had ‘converted’ to their particular dietary regime between two and eighteen years ago”, Willetts, 1997; p.

115). The vegans in McDonald's (2000) study had also been vegan for at least one year. In contrast, some participants' here began their diaries and interviews at the very onset of their new diet. For example, the first entry in Tina's diary begins:

Tried to stick to a totally vegan diet today. I feel like it is important for me to attempt this now. This month is my 1 yr. Vegetarian anniversary, yeah!

(Tina, diary; p. 1)

The time between beginning the new diet and starting the diary, therefore, varied across participants, and so too does the period covered and the amount of material produced.

As Table 2 shows below, the nine 'new vegan' (or simply, 'vegan') participants can be further subdivided into two groups depending on whether their previous diet was vegetarian (6/23) or meat-eating (3/23). Significantly at this stage, the stated immediate aims of the three participants who were moving from meat-eating to veganism were not in terms of first becoming vegetarian (although in Nicola's case she already ate no dairy products and so by cutting out flesh foods she would be largely vegan without having to then also give up dairy).

Participants moving into vegetarianism from a 'meat-eating' diet were not sub-classified (e.g., according to whether they had eaten red, white or fish meat).

Following the above discussion, this is a simplification which at least conforms to the terms most commonly available and used, i.e. 'vegetarian' rather than 'pesco-vegetarian'. Also, this can be seen as just one of many possible areas of dispute over definitions (or 'enactments') of being 'vegetarian', which, as argued, it is not the intention to 'settle' here. Differentiating types of flesh-food diets was not considered worthwhile with such a small sample. In practice, among the 17 meat-eaters moving to either vegetarianism or veganism, only one (Tamra) began her participation as a fish-eating vegetarian. She is classed as a meat-eater moving to vegetarianism as she saw herself as not yet fully vegetarian. This is despite the fact that some aspiring vegetarians and vegans were still eating fish at the end of the study and used the labels vegetarian and vegan. No participants gave fish-eating vegetarianism as their stated

goal at the outset, though this may reflect aspects of participant recruitment. Therefore there is a single group of ‘new vegetarians’ who are judged as moving from a ‘meat-eating’/non-vegetarian diet to vegetarianism. The twenty-three participants were therefore broken-down according to their stated dietary transitions as shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Dietary transitions aimed for by participants

Dietary transition aimed for:		Total	Male	Female
<i>From</i>	<i>to</i>	(N = 23)	(n = 4)	(n = 19)
Meat-eating	vegetarian	14	2	12
Meat-eating	vegan	3	1	2
Vegetarian	vegan	6	1	5

(See Appendix 4, Table 2, for data for individual participants)

From Table 2 it can be seen that the participants are made up of slightly more new/aspiring *vegetarians* (14/23) than new/aspiring *vegans* (9/23). Also, among those aiming to become vegan, it is more common to have already excluded meat at a previous stage than to aim to give up meat and dairy at once –only two of the nine individuals going vegan were eating both meat and dairy at the outset (the third ‘*meat-eating-to-vegan*’ participant, Nicola, had already given up dairy before giving up flesh foods). Julii had also given up dairy to a large extent before giving up meat and could be considered difficult to categorise, but her self-description of ‘lapsed pseudo-vegetarian’, and her dietary inconsistency, are grounds for putting her in the ‘*meat-eating-to-vegetarian*’ group.

III. Participants' accounts of motivations for becoming vegetarian & vegan

Reviewing work on diet and vegetarianism, Chapter 2 was critical of accounts of vegetarianism which sidelined the importance of motivation or sought to explain it in terms of a broad 'gastro-anomie'. It is to the central issue of participants' accounts of their motivations for becoming vegetarian or vegan that we now turn. The following offers some features of an overview of vegetarian and vegan motivations in general but also indicates the limits to content-analytic and quantitative approaches and the complexities of motivation reports seen as instances of accounting.

As noted already in this chapter, previous studies have focussed on established vegetarians and vegans. This earlier work has investigated motivations for *being* a self-defined vegetarian and vegan, or has looked at retrospective accounts of past conversions whilst also stressing changes in motivation over time. This may be contrasted with the reports given here of motivations for *embarking upon* vegetarianism or veganism gathered at the time. Despite this difference, comparisons will nevertheless be made between this and other studies.

Previous studies have also used similar, though not identical, categories of motivation. Dwyer *et al.* (1974) ranked motivations as follows: *Health* concerns were the most commonly given motivation; *ethical* and *spiritual* motivations followed; with *ecological* motivations ranked equal with *gustatory/aesthetic* preferences. In a study of 209 US vegetarians, Amato & Partridge (1989) classified motivations as *moral*, *health*, *distaste*, *ecological*, and *spiritual*. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) identified *moral*, *health*, *gustatory*, and *ecological* motivations.

Further, in Amato & Partridge's study, 43% of participants were classed as giving a single motivation and 57% as having multiple motivations. In the Beardsworth & Keil study only 13% (or 10/76) gave multiple motivations:

In the great majority of instances, respondents had no hesitation in identifying their primary motivation in ways which could be classified quite readily under these headings. [...] Only 10 respondents weighted two or more motivations equally. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 269)

For the majority of respondents the pattern was similar: a principal motive could be identified ([...] most often a moral one) and then subsidiary motives could be cited, motives which usually complemented or reinforced the dominant one.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 271-2)

This difference between the two studies is less surprising in view of the different criteria used: Beardsworth & Keil see multiple motivations as equally weighted whilst Amato & Partridge do not. Very few participants in the present study claimed only one motivation but seven participants stood out as reporting more single-mindedness than the rest (7/23, or 30 per cent): Cathy, Elizabeth, Greg, Lisa, and Richard all give moral reasons as by far the most important for all foods avoided; Julii and Alyson T give health reasons as their main motivation. This leaves 17/23, or 69%, who gave more than one reason, though they may cite one as more important (this, therefore, does not use the same classification criteria as Beardsworth & Keil where multiple motivations were equally weighted).

It will be argued that the distinctions between single & multiple, and between primary & subsidiary motivations are potentially problematic because motivations may be seen to vary according to particular foods and products, and still further if they are understood as complex *accounts*. These recurrent issues are highlighted here as they inform the analysis of all the accounts of motivation but are illustrated below with accounts of concerns about health, morality, and factory farming. The major themes within accounts of motivations for becoming vegetarian or vegan are shown in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Reported motivations for becoming vegetarian & vegan

Reported motivations:	Total (N = 23)	Meat-eating to vegetarian (n = 14)	Meat-eating to vegan (n = 3)	Vegetarian to vegan (n = 6)
Health motivation	3	1	2	0
Specific health problem	4	2	1	1
Moral/ethical motivation	17	11	2	4
Factory farming motivation	11	6	3	2
Ecological motivation	2	1	0	1
Gustatory motivation	2	2	0	0
Revulsion	13	8	3	2

(See Appendix 4, Table 3, for data for individual participants)

i) Health motivations

Amato & Partridge found health to motivate 38% of vegetarians. Beardsworth & Keil's 1992a study found that 17 per cent (13/76) cited health reasons as their primary motivation. In the present study, only 3/23 participants (13%) emphasised health concerns as a primary incentive, but a total of 14/23 (61%) gave some weight to it. The findings, then, are close to Beardsworth & Keil's figure of 17% of primary motivations but also reflect an even wider concern with health than that suggested by Amato & Partridge's findings.

These findings indicate that, perhaps with health motivation especially, there is motivation *to some degree* for most participants rather than it being a main motive. This question of degree of motivation bears upon the points discussed above concerning the difficulty of separating, counting and ranking motivations across respondents and making categorical analytic judgements which aspire to measuring a fixed inner state.

An emergent sub-factor of health motivations was suggested by respondents who reported the hope that their change in diet would alleviate a *specific health problem*. For example, two of the nine vegan participants (2/9 or 22 per cent) gave irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) as the major reason for giving up dairy foods (Alison R and Nicola). Also, two of the new vegetarians (Jane and Karen) reported other health complaints that they hoped would improve (persistent heartburn in one case, and in the other an unspecified “chronic condition”). This again involves the discriminations between particular types of foods discussed above as well as the issue of individual contexts and biographies already introduced. Specific health problems featured in 4/23 (or 17 per cent) of participants’ accounts of motivations. This does not include hopes of weight-loss, which were also cited by 4 participants. Aging was a further aspect of health that was specifically mentioned by two participants as increasing the need to eat healthily *now* (the participants concerned were 25 years and 40 years of age). Accounts of aging clearly highlight once more biographical aspects to health and dietary change.

Beardsworth & Keil distinguish a number of sub-themes from their study of respondents’ accounts of ‘nutritional beliefs’ (rather than explicit motivations for changing diets):

As might reasonably be anticipated given the diversity of forms of vegetarianism and motivations present [...], attitudes towards food, and patterns of nutritional belief or knowledge, varied enormously between respondents. [...] However, from this diversity, three clear and coherent themes did emerge, [...] the *anti-meat theme*, the *pro-meat theme*, and the *pro-vegetarian theme*.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 272; emphasis in original)

The anti-meat theme, “may involve a view of meat as nutritionally over-rated, unhygienic and potentially hazardous” (1992a; p. 273). The pro-meat theme was found to be ‘a less emphatic, more rarely expressed theme’ (1992a; p. 274). And the pro-vegetarian theme “extols the virtues of a vegetarian diet for its own sake, rather than arguing for vegetarianism on the basis of a rejection of meat” (1992a; p. 275). Beardsworth & Keil note the prevalence of the anti-meat theme over the pro-vegetarian theme in accounts:

Interestingly, those respondents who placed considerable emphasis on health issues tended to assert the harmful nature of meat rather than extol the virtues of vegetarian staples. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 271)

Two main points relevant to the issues above will be made about analysing participants' accounts of nutritional beliefs. Firstly, instead of seeing accounts as simply reporting nutritional *beliefs*, they may be seen as argumentative and rhetorical constructions within particular argumentative contexts. So, for example, the apparent strength of the anti-meat theme relative to the pro-vegetarian theme may be understood as reflecting a context in which there is popular concern about factory farming upon which vegetarians can capitalise. To extol the virtues of vegetable foods instead of disparaging meat would be to squander a rhetorical opportunity. The context and discourse of food scares, also, can be easily and profitably used to argue with others or for self-persuasion.

Beardsworth & Keil see reports of disgust and revulsion as a strong element in the anti-meat theme and argue that it is partly a gustatory/aesthetic issue, partly nutritional/health, and partly moral, depending on the individual (1992a; p. 273). This illustrates the second point to be made about these accounts of health and nutrition. Connected with rhetorical functions and effects, accounts are not just accounts of *nutrition* but draw in other matters, issues or 'themes'. Moral, gustatory and health motivations converge in the often ambiguous accounts of revulsion. Revulsion is also associated with moral concerns. Reports of revulsion form part of the anti-meat sub-theme and so add to the preponderance of anti-meat accounts. But they also point to problems with seeing revulsion as a purely *nutritional* theme/issue. Further, most accounts of revulsion appear as descriptions of a growing revulsion and changing tastes, indicating its involvement in the narration of identity change as a process of inner transformation, as discussed later in this chapter.

Revulsion is also found in relation to dairy foods as well as meat, though never, here, in relation to non-animal foods (in keeping with previous studies, e.g., Angyal, 1941; Twigg, 1983). Dairy foods are the usual watershed between vegetarianism and veganism and so attitudes towards dairy in their own right should not be overlooked. Thus another theme of 'anti-*dairy*' attitudes could be added. Though most noticeable

in accounts by three new vegan participants whose IBS had prompted them to give up dairy products (Alison R, Julii and Nicola), an *anti-dairy* theme was also found in accounts from new vegetarians. The anti-dairy theme was seen in vegetarians' accounts in the form of anxiety about eating *too much* cheese etc., indicating that accounts of nutrition are not simply pro or anti but incorporate notions of quantity, temperance or moderation and so, once more, context. The revulsion for cheese is also heard as emerging unexpectedly: in both extracts below, "actually..." marks the unusualness as well as the strength of the feeling:

Cooked Jesse cheese on toast, she hasn't had this for ages. You know, when it came out the oven and I was cutting it up, it actually [...] smelt like shit, [...] Anyway, back to the plot, this cheese on toast smelt like poo I couldn't believe it, yuk. Anyway, Jesse really enjoyed it. It looked disgusting all greasy, yuk!

(Nicola, diary; p. 32; underscoring added)

I had always hated milk and could not drink it on its own so didn't miss that. Eggs I couldn't eat unless they were disguised and never liked boiled, scrambled, poached eggs etc. Cheese was the main thing I liked that wasn't vegan, but, after a while I actually couldn't stand the smell of the cheese stall in the market.

(Alyson T, diary; p. 4; underscoring added)

Additional sub-themes might be added as the scope for 'particularisation' (Billig, 1985, 1996a) is pursued further. The common discrimination between fish, white and red meat on a hierarchy of health value might suggest separate sub-divisions for each type of meat. Differentiations within 'meat' and 'vegetarian' –such as those above between *fish and white meat* versus *red meat*, and between *ovo-lacto-vegetarian* and *vegan*– are fundamental to thinking about nutritional issues. The actual usage of these themes will depend upon the argumentative and biographical context of the conversation as well as the larger cultural climate.

The importance of biographical, personal and individual perspectives on nutrition and health emerges from the accounts of health problems and food intolerances but can

also be seen in, for example, Julii's particular needs as a pregnant woman, and in Paul's account of his individual nutritional requirements:

Worries: [...] have always wondered if my protein needs are higher than normal. I know this is a classic newbie question but, since there are no clear guidelines, I'm still in the dark. Previous attempts at a vegan diet seem to be accompanied by a bad cold after about a week.

(Paul, diary; p. 2; underscoring added)

The *uncertainty* over nutritional issues reported here is seen in other accounts. A vagueness or lack of clear guidelines on nutritional matters may be marshalled into accounts to explain lapses, as will be explored in Chapter 7. Many accounts of health concerns arise in connection with lapsing, again emphasising the rhetorical business of justifying and excusing rather than descriptions of nutritional 'attitudes' or 'beliefs'.

The argumentative meanings of accounts within rhetorical contexts can also help to illuminate the subject of ambivalence and contradiction in reported nutritional beliefs. Beardsworth & Keil found that, "[a] small proportion of those interviewed retained an ambivalent view of meat, in some senses repulsed by it, yet at the same time experiencing cravings for it" (1992a; p. 275). It is interesting that the three participants who displayed pronounced ambivalence and contradiction in their accounts of nutritional beliefs are also the participants who are (or report being) the least successful in keeping to their target diet (Clare, Julii, and Paul). Though only one of them gives health as a primary motivation it appears in accounts as a considerable concern and all described craving in terms of a *bodily need*. Their contradictions were all between pro and anti-meat beliefs, and also pro and anti-fish in Julii's case. This does not necessarily mean that ambivalence in health beliefs *caused* a lack of success with the new diet. We have only accounts, and accounts of conflicting beliefs can be seen as *explanations* given for lapsing, rather than causes for it.

ii) Moral motivations

Moral considerations were found to be the single most commonly given motive by both Amato & Partridge and Beardsworth & Keil (1992a), who reported 67% and 56% of their samples respectively. For the participants of the present study, moral concerns were cited as motivating 17 out of the 23 participants (74%), so this was again the most commonly given motivation with a proportion comparable to that found in the studies cited above. While Willetts (1997) plays down differences between the attitudes of vegetarians and meat-eaters on moral matters, moral concern for animals is consistently the most popularly reported motivation for becoming vegetarian and vegan in the UK, and so it is worthwhile to look more closely at the participants' accounts of concern for animals.

Only one participant was or had been clearly active in Animal Rights campaigning: Cathy was doing volunteer work at a local animal shelter and was corresponding with a jailed Animal Rights activist. She talked about going on demonstrations (against the now closed Hillgrove Farm suppliers of laboratory animals) as being an 'outlet' for her beliefs. Paul reports reading various vegan Animal Rights groups' websites and once during the course of his participation he describes sticking up campaign posters (from *VeganOutreach.com*) around his university. Richard reports having met his girlfriend through his local *Greenpeace* group. Dawn is an active volunteer for the RSPCA. Interestingly, Cathy, Richard and Paul (but not Dawn) were all vegan or aiming to become vegan.

Differentiation and variation in moral concern is illustrated below in the singling-out of rabbit and venison.

I'd never been a huge fan of red meat and the idea of eating rabbit or venison conjures up Bambi & Bugs! Even now. (Tamra, diary; p. 1-2)

Her concern is depicted as general and longstanding but certain animals are emphasised. In this case cute animals are singled out. Venison and rabbit are less common meats (in the UK) and the fact that they may be associated with sympathetic,

cute animals (and cartoon characters) rather than the usual, anonymous and characterless livestock (cows, pigs or chickens) makes them more easily portrayed as morally exceptional and problematic. The names Bambi & Bugs do not depict two nameless and faceless types of animals (deer and rabbits) but rather two *individuals* or personalities known to everyone. The mere mention of ‘Bambi & Bugs’ is itself enough to conjure them up visually in the hearer’s mind and so ‘animate’ her account. ‘[C]onjures up’ suggests that she can’t escape these associations and “[...] Bambi & Bugs! Even now” implies a longstanding familiarity and influence, perhaps since childhood, thereby adding to a denial of control over associations, feelings, reactions and thinking. This issue is taken up in later chapters which discuss the management of accountability by appeals to involuntary unconscious processes (see esp. Chapters 7 and 8).

Also, Jenny says that prior to giving up meat she had been, “increasingly seeing meat as thinking of the little animals {laughing}” (Jenny, interview 1). There is a self-consciousness in both extracts about describing moral motivations in terms of finding animals *cute*. They would be criticised by some participants as ‘sentimental’ vegetarians (see below). Bambi and Bugs are useful resources in this respect as they are well known and cute but fictional, over-the-top and comic characters – and so help to ward off potential criticism for earnest over-sentimentality. If she sounds sentimental the account inoculates against criticism by presenting her as not serious and/or as aware of the ridiculousness of her involuntary associations (note also the accompanying exclamation mark).

A selective concern for ostriches was the basis for abstaining from all animal flesh in Elizabeth’s diary. A potential difficulty with expressing selective concern for certain animals only is suggested by the way in which her concern is reported as quickly extended beyond ostriches:

I vowed that I would never eat ostrich, but that didn’t seem to satisfy me. I look on all animals as equal beings, with souls and rights deserving of life and freedom. For this reason I couldn’t justify eating chicken or cow or pig – it would

be no different from consuming an ostrich. So from that day on, I stopped consuming animals altogether. (Elizabeth, diary; p. 1)

Here she is more explicit in managing potential inconsistency or selectiveness:

I don't like to act as though ostriches are better than other animals; like I said before, I stopped eating ALL animals because I think of them equally. However, I guess because I have a deeper admiration for ostriches, I wasn't able to handle seeing them on a menu. I suppose too that it's less common to see that sort of thing, not that it makes it any better. (Elizabeth, diary; p. 3; underscoring added)

Elizabeth's particular fondness for ostriches and her wider concern for all animals are presented as mutually supportive rather than contradictory. Selectiveness, and potential inconsistency and/or sentimentality, are again denied in accounts that describe caring for all animals equally. For example:

I love animals and cannot bear pain or suffering in any living thing.

(Alyson T, diary; p. 3)

I had never been comfortable with the idea of eating animals as I care for them deeply and indiscriminately. (Cathy, diary; p. 2)

More commonly, however, the notion of a moral *hierarchy* of animals was expressed.¹ Twigg (1983) has suggested the idea that vegetarians follow an 'inverted hierarchy' of foods whereby meat is most devalued and vegetarians eat mainly 'down the hierarchy'. This again suggests the variation of motivations across different foods/products (and in the justification of the limits to food-avoidances). But crucially, and the last two extracts notwithstanding, the notion of hierarchy is a rhetorical and *dilemmatic* one in accounting. This dilemmatic aspect to moral

¹ Although in some respects intuitively obvious, Plous (1993a and 1993b) also points to "the existence of a hierarchy of privilege" based on perceived similarity with humans. This and similar empirical and experimental research (e.g. Paul and Serpell, 1993) tend to concentrate on differences (in ratings of similarity and concern) between *farm* animals, *wild* animals and *companion* animals, or between various wild animals, rather than differences within animals commonly eaten (i.e., farm animals but also, for instance, deer, fish, rabbit etc.)

accounts is also missing from the idiom of ‘entitlement’ in Maurer’s (1995) analysis of vegetarian rhetorics of motive.

8 out of 23 participants gave clear accounts of ranking animals morally. The only disagreement Greg reports with his wife over food is prompted by her ordering veal at a restaurant. The lesser moral status of fish is also suggested in Tamra’s accounts of wanting to give up fish because she feels like she is ‘playing at being vegetarian’ (interview 1), rather than because she feels guilty about eating fish. Also, in Clare’s account below, morality is presented as dependent upon physiology (specifically, the central nervous system) – about which there remains some uncertainty:

Still not sure about his “shellfish don’t have a CNS” theory but the doubt suits me at times. Sometimes the temptation (and the circumstances) conspire and win, especially since I’m so unsure over the whole thing. (Clare, diary; p. 7)

As with health-related beliefs, the accounts of moral concern for animals occur as part of accounting practices and the explanatory and justificatory functions of accounts of motivation cannot be removed to reveal the ‘pure motivations’. As Billig (1996a) has argued, argument and justification are not ‘appended to’ attitudes but are integral to them. In this extract Clare is explaining a lapse and managing responsibility. A moral position is depicted as plagued by doubt and assailed by temptation and circumstance. Her boyfriend’s role as corruptor is heard in the direct speech of, ‘his “shellfish don’t have a CNS” theory’. The fact that Clare ascribes the ‘theory’ to her boyfriend and expresses having doubts also allows her to retain some distance between her and meat-eaters. The issue of hierarchy in moral motivations, then, can be seen as tied up with the management of identity and accountability in complex ways.

The idea of a moral hierarchy was widely attended to in an ambivalent manner in accounts, suggesting that it is a common dilemmatic issue. The extract below from Paul’s diary (reporting a conversation with his girlfriend) strongly hints at a hierarchy but also manages identity in terms of consistency, sentimentality and moralising:

Said quite plainly that I do not want to eat animals which seem to me to deserve life. This, it transpired, was most of them. I think this helped a lot, as I was able to say that I found most animals to be pretty cool or cute. I don't think she had considered the possibility that I just find hens too cute to eat. So, once this was out in the open it seemed to make things a bit clearer. I mean, she now knows that eating some foods just makes me sad. (For the record, this includes all poultry, pork, sheep, and lamb. I feel quite neutral about small fish.)

(Paul, diary; p. 30; underscoring added)

Paul describes morally significant animals as 'cute' but cuteness is applied broadly rather than only to obviously/traditionally cute animals. The description of animals as 'pretty cool or cute' avoids strongly moralistic language and 'it transpired' is a passive construction of how Paul evaluates the animals and arrives at consistency. This non-moralising is mixed with a stress on moral judgements or concerns as a matter of personal view point and feeling (pathos rather than logos): "which seem to me to deserve life [...] I found most animals to be [...] I just find [...] just makes me sad [...] I feel quite neutral [...]". The avoidance of moral imperatives and being seen to be 'preaching' may be a reason for personalising the moral accounts. But whilst criticism of others is backgrounded, the speaker's moral character is still heard.

This extract describes an earlier conversation and is an account of the importance and difficulty of talking about and giving an account of being vegan: "Said quite plainly [...] I think this helped a lot, as I was able to say [...] So, once this was out in the open it seemed to make things a bit clearer [...]". Paul's relationship with his girlfriend and the potential problems of communicating with her are heard in the extract above. Social and relational aspects will be brought out in Chapters 6 and 7 but can be seen here as further factors in giving accounts of motivations, especially moral ones.

There are also signs of managing another dilemmatic issue surrounding moral motivations which, rather than involving *personal* relationships, draws in issues of groups and stereotypes - for example, between caring genuinely about animals, and caring about animals *too much*. The denial below suggests concern over being seen according to a vegan stereotype of an animal-mad misanthrope:

In case you should think me someone who cares for animals above people, I would like to say that this is not the case. [...] (Cathy, diary; p. 28-9)

This prolepsis, or countering of potential criticism and the denial of negative stereotypical assumptions, is seen in other accounts of attitudes towards animals. These show particularly clearly a social identity perspective in the rhetorical construction of motivation accounts. Four participants (or 17%) actively *distanced* themselves from ethical concerns about the welfare or rights of animals. For example:

At the same time I was (am) fed up with the politics of “the movement”. Most of the newsgroups & websites are dominated by animal rights folk. I actually feel passionately about the fate of whole species, - but the fate of single cows really strikes me as banal. The scale of moral crime that occurs when you destroy a whole species makes the morality of eating a pig look trivial. And the issues *are* related –a lot of energy gets wasted on animal rights causes. When’s the last time a hunger striker in protest against rainforest destruction managed to dominate the national press. If those people *really* cared about animals ... [...]

(Julii, diary; p. 5; emphasis in original; underscoring added)

The above excerpt from Julii’s diary demonstrates the rhetorical orientation of motivation accounts towards counter-positions and the groups associated with them. What is ‘moral’ can also be seen to be flexibly and argumentatively constructed. Here, advocacy of Animal Rights becomes immoral, conflicting with the genuinely moral issues of conservation (“And the issues *are* related–”). This moral claim is heightened by the fact that she feels “passionately” about species conservation, and that they “dominate” the newsgroups. Julii re-categorises certain types of ‘ethical’ or ‘moral’ concern for animals as “politics”, and links these views with specific out-groups (‘those people’, ‘animal rights folk’ and, elsewhere, ‘the anti-meat brigade’). “If those people *really* cared about animals...”, further suggests that their motives are selfish and political rather than selfless and moral.

She specifically attends to the way motivations may be inferred by others: i.e. that her diet is understood argumentatively and in terms of social identities and that it may be

misread. She reports being motivated to *not* become vegetarian by the common ascription to vegetarians of ideological commitments. The diary continues:

Well, you can see why I don't want to be lumped in with them. And perhaps why it's put me off being V. It's a personal choice. I don't want to be part of somebody's political statement. (Julii, diary; p. 5; underscoring added)

There is a clear sense of the meaning of vegetarianism as contested and as understood in terms of ideologies and social identities. Her purportedly 'personal choice' (not to mention her ecological concerns) is ideological in the sense of taking up a position on these issues, in opposition to "them". A potentially negative identity is being avoided as some participants distance themselves in a number of ways from other, more 'pro-animal' vegetarians and vegans (particularly Animal Rights supporters). Alison R and Julii explicitly say that they are anti-Animal Rights. Alison R, Julii and Marja stress that they do not 'sentimentalise' animals and are critical of this tendency in others. The out-groups are plainly invoked in these accounts: for Marja (vegan) it is 'vegetarians' who are sentimental; for Julii, 'the anti-meat brigade'; whilst Alison R mentions hunt saboteurs and Animal Rights supporters.

The complaints of Julii and others about being ascribed the ideology or politics of 'the movement' can be contrasted with another participant's account of the reputation of vegetarians and vegans and its upshot for motivation. Cathy, however, talks of the reputation of vegans in terms of responsibility, care and duty rather than as an unwanted burden.

I'm reading as much as I can find on vegan nutrition. I need to be sure that I don't become malnourished through ignorance because people would then think that a vegan diet is unhealthy through my example. I feel it incumbent upon me to prove that the converse is true. Common sense tells me that in all probability nobody else is taking the slightest notice, but I can't take the chance.
(Cathy, diary; p. 6; underscoring added)

Veganism is again understood in terms of social identities. In Julii's case vegans as a

‘movement’ are the out-group but for Cathy they are the in-group with which she identifies and whose reputation she reports being motivated to promote. Both Cathy and those who distance themselves from Animal Rights vegans all demonstrate the way accounts of motivation, and accounting practices generally, are informed by social argumentation and social identities. *The accounts of motivations implicitly or explicitly position the speaker relative to other stances and are criticisms of other attitudes, groups and social identities.* The construction of motivation commonly depends upon these rhetorical contrasts with other behaviours, positions and groups. Even Julii’s claim of making a “personal choice” is an attempt to position herself vis-à-vis social groups/identities. Categories are for talking (Edwards, 1991) and though the talk is of motivations, social identities are fundamentally involved too.

The differing claims to the moral high-ground, above, demonstrate how the analytic category of ‘Moral motivations’ may mask the variation in content of these accounts which each have *clearer or more concrete rhetorical targets* informed by social identities. An alternative, distinct set of moral accounts was seen in which participants advocated ‘*respect*’ for animals and criticised the specific target of intensive factory farming for treating animals without the respect they are due.

iii) Concern about factory farming

Only two participants (Jane and Marja) gave concerns about factory farming practices as their *primary* motivation for changing their diet. But in total 11/23 (49%) mentioned it, usually of joint importance with moral or health issues.

‘I think it’s the needless exploitation of other creatures. And I think modern farming conditions take away respect for animals, and that’s what I don’t like about it’. (Female, Type 4) (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 269)

This extract from Beardsworth & Keil’s reported data shows a moral concern with modern farming practices rather than an objection to the idea of killing animals for food *per se*. The participants’ accounts suggest that within ‘moral motives’ a familiar delineation can be made between objecting to animal husbandry and slaughter *in principle* (sometimes associated with Animal Rights) and, on the other hand, wishing

to accord them due *respect*, though not objecting to raising and slaughtering *per se* (which is associated with animal *welfare* and objections to modern farming methods). The distinction is important as it points on the one hand to problems with the modern meat industry rather than meat *tout court* and, on the other hand, to a much more radical Animal Rights philosophy with far wider implications. In practice, however, this is often more ambiguous. The need to deal with food production as it currently is, rather than some ideal of farming practices, may blur the distinction between ‘in principle’ and ‘in practice’ positions, and the importance of the rhetorical context for account-giving and action is underlined. For example:

I would, at this time, say my motivation is mostly around modern farming methods. There is a purely profit motive in farming today which appears to overlook the needs of the animals. They are not treated with respect. I suppose I have no real difficulty in the idea of eating animal meat but the animal should have been given care and respect. Something to which all living creatures are entitled in my view. (Jane, diary; p. 1; underscoring added)

Here, Jane sees factory farming as raising the key issue of treating animals with respect and contrasts it with profit. It is this that is unacceptable rather than killing in itself. However, “I suppose”, and, “no real difficulty” moderate or show a difficulty with expressing a lack of concern over killing. Clare also sounds undecided about whether she would eat ‘ethically farmed’ meat – partly because she would have to justify and account for it to ‘meaties’ who are heard as critical:

I think I would eat some meat if it was ethically farmed - and I would love to keep my eggs, milk & cheese - soya stuff really sucks. This, however, would be very complicated to explain to a meatie who would be looking for a chink in my armour so that they could justify their lazy thinking. (Yuk - that sounds kinda militant!) (Clare, diary; p. 9; underscoring added)

The extract points to an argumentative context of possible criticism and accountability. She rebuts potential criticism by disparaging ‘meaties’ as hostile and wanting to justify their “lazy thinking”. Here, “a meatie” and “(Yuk [...] kinda

militant!)” again invoke groups and inter-group conflict, but Clare distances herself from both ‘meaties’ and ‘militant’ vegetarians. The bracketing of “(Yuk - that sounds kinda militant!)” suggests a reflexive commentary on her preceding remark but her earlier comments are not retracted. This is an illustration of the sort of ambivalence and ‘awareness of ontological complexity’ and ‘anti-referential currents’ which Stanley (1994) sees within diary material (see discussion in Chapter 8).

The arguments against factory farming put into context and make more concrete the moral concerns. Indeed, as was noted for the health scares of the anti-meat theme, intensive farming represents a weak spot for attacks on meat-eating. Whilst factory farming presents a more specific and concrete target, the criticism may be implicitly incurred by meat *generally* and meat-eating *in principle*. Through the ambiguity of the accounts, a distinction between killing in principle and in practice, or between ‘respect’ and ‘sentiment’, is not made and the choice foregrounded is that between factory farming or vegetarianism rather than improved farming practices. On the subject of the transporting and killing of animals, Dawn says:

I couldn’t deal with being responsible for that. (Dawn, interview 1)

The real turning point came when I saw the Brightlingsea events on TV - all those beautiful big eyes staring out of the horrible crates. We were shipping innocent animals off to be slaughtered and eaten – no, I don’t care how “yummy” veal is!!
(Tamra, diary; p. 1-2; underscoring added)

Also, “–no, I don’t care how “yummy” veal is!!”, suggests an imagined interlocutor or Other whose justifications for eating veal (here serving to represent meat generally) are heard as vacuous and who eats veal out of sheer indulgence. The arguments of others are used as a rhetorical resource; and though here only *imagined*, the importance of argumentative context and the dialogic nature of accounting in general are indicated.

Anxiety over intensive farming methods is a more concrete, specific and contextualised concern and so, for some purposes, may be a more useful classification of motivation in the context of present farming practices and related controversies.

Objections to and anxieties about modern factory farming methods can be seen as taking in *moral*, *ecological*, and *health* themes, and as illustrating the problems with trying to put accounts into distinct categories of motivations. Across the accounts which deal with factory farming, varying emphasis is given to moral, health and ecological anxieties and these themes both meet and conflict here. One reason for the convergence of these themes in the context of farming practices is that what is 'healthy' and what is 'right' draw upon ideas of what is 'natural', and Nature/'the natural' may be seen as a common-place of what is 'healthy' and 'right'.

Motivation categories in accounts

The complexity of motivations in accounts may be further illustrated and summarised. Gustatory motivation, for example, does not apply to non-edible animal products, but leather, wool, make-up and household products etc. are all discussed in accounts of becoming vegetarian and vegan. Once again, it may be stressed that vegetarianism and veganism are not exclusively *dietary* matters. Beardsworth & Keil note that, even within strictly dietary motivations, one of their interviewees reports a conflict between his primary moral motives and health concerns, *but only for fish and white meat in particular*:

'I mean, I still believe that probably a mainly vegetarian diet with fish and white meat is probably the healthier diet than a pure vegetarian diet ... But on ethical grounds, I decided I wanted to be consistent.' (Male, Type 3)

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 272)

Thus, reported motivations are dependent upon, or interact with, the numerous different food and non-food products derived from animals (and, it should be noted, will also involve comparison with available vegetarian/vegan alternatives). The variation or interaction of motivation with particular products can also be seen in Nicola's reports of excluding dairy foods for reasons of health and excluding meat at a later date for ethical reasons.

The idea of a moral *hierarchy* can again mean that motivation varies with the particular type and source (and method of production) of the product. For instance,

even self-defined meat-eaters may avoid veal, or *pâté de foie gras*, because they are seen as more morally objectionable than other meats (see also specific mention of veal in accounts of Greg and Tamra, above). This idea can apply to health concerns too, with greasy fast food and red meat being avoided *more* than fish and white meat, according to a food hierarchy based on health.

Obviously, people have preferences and dislikes for particular foods and this makes gustatory motivation, also, more complex, variable and specific. Alyson T, for example, reports never having liked eggs and going off the taste of red meat and fish but not white meat, and so could be said to have different gustatory motivation for avoiding these various foods. Discriminations and preferences for certain kinds of meats but not others come to the fore in Julii's accounts of a gustatory 'adventure'.

So, bacon-nibbling was the start. Boyfriend is pleased to see me eat lots at any time, so only encouraged me. Now, in some ways, it's kind of an adventure. I can taste all kinds of meat-bearing things & see what I like or don't. And truth is, I don't like most of it! Lean turkey, cured meats & the free-range bacon John buys are okay. But cow is awful! So fatty! Even a few bites leave my tongue coated in grease! Blech! (Julii, diary; p. 6; underscoring added)

A distinction between primary/principal and subsidiary motivations was, in practice, found to be difficult to apply clearly and consistently to the accounts.² The analysis of accounts of motivation which aims to establish single & multiple, or primary & subsidiary motivations, rests on the idea of a definitive report of the motivations of the respondent. In their book, Beardsworth & Keil (1997) emphasise rhetorical aspects to described motivations, though this is in connection with generalised categories of motive and similarly broad 'rhetorical idioms' (Maurer, 1995) rather than the details of particular given accounts (see Chapter 2 and 3 for discussion). Though Beardsworth & Keil recognise the complexity of motivation accounts and the rhetorical aspects of motives, this complexity can be further emphasised by adopting a more discursive-rhetorical approach to the analysis of accounts. A rhetorical perspective stresses the argumentative meanings of accounts of motivation and their

² As noted earlier, greater focus on the rhetorical details of talk of fewer respondents represents an alternative to, rather than a direct criticism of, larger-scale studies with a greater quantitative element.

variation in context. This is not the same as saying that the participants' inner motivations vacillate, but instead attention is drawn to the practices of accounting and the directed nature of justification and criticism. It is not the intention here to assume or promote variation in accounts to the exclusion of consistency in self-narrative, but the fundamentally argumentative nature of accounts of motivation may be contrasted with a perspective that aims at definitively ranking motives.³ Whether they are seen as inner states or durable commitments to advocacy, typically the *details* of the accounts are backgrounded and may, alternatively, be explored through a greater focus on discursive practices.

Further difficulties with content-frequency approaches arise when the discursive study of accounts challenges 'traditional' analytic categories of motivations. The way multiple motivations are combined is recognized by Beardsworth & Keil: "[L]ogically separable motivations may in practice be combined and interlocked" (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 271). They also note idiosyncrasy in definitions of vegetarianism. It can be further stressed that across different accounts the 'same' type of motivation may be constructed differently and categories may blur. As the last extract above suggests, participants' accounts may blur the issues of gustatory preferences with distaste/disgust/revulsion for meat ("...Blech!") and health concerns ("lean turkey [...] so fatty! [...] coated in grease!"). This is especially clear in accounts of revulsion and factory farming, for example, but is also apparent in the way 'morality' is constructed and contested. Taking this further, motivations are also fused with other elements in accounts. For example, the construction of motivation is tied up with the social, rhetorical business of giving accounts to others. Whilst types of motivations are not rejected, attention is called to the way these categories are constructed by both the analyst and the participants/speakers/account-givers. Content-frequency analyses of motivation categories in reports conflict with a view of account-giving as complex constructions which combine, discriminate and vary, and which favour closer analysis.

A final theme may be brought out from the corpus of motivation accounts that again illustrates the way motivations are mixed and are put 'in motion' by being linked to

³ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of consistency versus variation in accounting.

both inner and outer change: *Revulsion* for meat or dairy foods features in the accounts of 13 of the 23 participants and may be seen as the most common account of gustatory motivation. However, as illustrated and discussed under health motivations, accounts of revulsion invariably combine gustatory, health and moral motivations. It may be argued that reporting gustatory distaste adds a kind of sensory vindication to a moral judgement - a gut reaction that, again, may implicitly appeal to a sense of a natural and healthy aversion. At the same time, the new vegetarian can be heard as having the moral credentials of a vegetarian on an almost bodily level; they not only act and speak like a vegetarian but also *see* and physically *feel* as a vegetarian does/should.

Also already mentioned is that these accounts typically report revulsion as *emerging or developing after the food is given up*. This is an example of the way accounts of being motivated are typically ‘storied’— narrated as events linked over time and related to personal life events and life-narratives. Numerous elements of biographical details have been noted in the accounts above; for example in the specific health problems reported. This storied nature of the accounts of motivations for becoming vegetarian/vegan can be seen in the previous extract from Tamra, above. Moral concerns are heard as having a biographical ‘momentum’ in Tamra’s description of “the real turning point”: the moral account is tied up with an account of past events, future intentions and personal change and conversion. Accounts of a developing sense of disgust will be discussed again in subsequent chapters (see Chapters 6 & 8), but for now they illustrate particularly clearly the co-narration of motivation and change. This combination of motivation and change (and also revulsion) are also seen throughout accounts of conversions, especially reports of ‘conversion experiences’.

IV. Participants’ accounts of conversions

Following the discussion above, the division between motivations and conversions is ultimately a hazy one. Both explicit statements of motivation and other explanations of becoming vegetarian or vegan in terms of changes associated with the new diet construct change over time. Some themes, such as revulsion, were given as a

motivation for giving up meat (typically) and were also described as emerging and/or increasing in response to the new diet. That said, an attempt to separate motivations for changing diet from descriptions of the transition itself will be made. Three themes stood out from an examination of participants' descriptions and explanations of their dietary conversion and its timing: 'Conversion experiences' have been remarked by previous studies but two new themes are also suggested. These three themes, and the number of participants who reported them, are shown in Table 4, below.

Table 4: Participants' accounts of conversions

Account of conversion:	Total (N = 23)	Meat-eating to vegetarian (n = 14)	Meat-eating to vegan (n = 3)	Vegetarian to vegan (n = 6)
'Conversion experience'	11	5	2	4
Notable calendar dates & Special occasions	9	5	3	1
Character change & Personal development	5	4	1	0

(See Appendix 4, Table 4, for data for individual participants)

i) 'Conversion experiences'

Amato and Partridge (1989) discuss dramatic or distressing experiences in the conversion process (p. 74-6). Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) also mention such 'conversion experiences', which, they observe, "were commonly associated with distress or disgust" (p. 267) and which they link to sudden or *abrupt conversions*. They suggest that these conversion experiences often bring about an abrupt shift in perception whereby 'meat' becomes '*flesh*' (p. 267). Although they acknowledge that

the processes of conversion are “clearly linked to the idiosyncrasies of personal biography”, they found that:

...a number of significant underlying features could be detected in respondents' descriptions, features which made it possible to distinguish two main types of conversion 'career'. The first type appears to involve a relatively gradual process of change, [...] the second type of conversion [...] was clearly a much more abrupt one, and frequently triggered by a 'conversion experience'...

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 266-7)

Similar to previous studies, 48% of participants (11/23) described some event or experience as the turning point for their decision. These reported conversion experiences are given below. Though the participants gave a range of experiences and locations, the large majority were connected with a *moral* motive, echoing Beardsworth & Keil's description. Nine of the eleven conversion experiences reported were concerned with animals (82%), with 5 of these involving direct contact (22% of all participants). The shift to seeing *meat as 'flesh'* is apparent in the five accounts that involve direct contact with living animals:

- ❖ Elizabeth's visit to an ostrich farm (the effect of the visit was compounded by the personal factor of ostriches being her favourite animal).
- ❖ Julii seeing a “magnificent” blue marlin caught by fishermen on holiday, which put her off eating all fish.
- ❖ Michael's close encounter with a pig entering an abattoir.
- ❖ Nicola watching the lambing at a local farm on Mother's Day.
- ❖ Richard seeing pig-carcasses being carried into a butcher's. (Here the animal is dead but still whole and not yet butchered, and so the perception of meat as 'flesh' still is promoted).

For another two participants the experience came via television images of animals:

- ❖ Alyson T watching TV-news coverage of the incineration of BSE-infected cattle.
- ❖ Tamra seeing news reports of the Brightlingsea live export demonstrations.

Yet other conversion stories that did not describe direct contact with animals can still be heard as promoting reflection on attitudes towards animals:

- ❖ Greg's experience of parenthood (specifically, the hypocrisy in how animals are presented to his young daughter at mealtime and at story-time).
- ❖ Cathy's correspondence with an Animal Rights prisoner and her subsequent reading about the dairy industry.
- ❖ Paula's conversation with a vegan at a party.

Only two such conversion-experiences did not clearly involve either direct contact with or reflection on animals:

- Alison R attending an Anthony Robbins self-development workshop.
- (Tamra also cited a second experience in addition to the television footage: a holiday in St Lucia with new vegetarian friends.)

6/11 or 55% of the above reported conversion experiences (Alyson T, Julii, Michael, Richard, Nicola and Tamra) typify the distress, disgust and the shift from 'meat' to 'flesh' found in Beardsworth & Keil's conversion experiences. For example, Michael writes:

My job means that I occasionally deliver to abattoirs/bacon factories and when leaving one day I drew level with an animal transporter, my window was wound down and I heard a snort – when I looked out I could see a pink nose with a dewdrop on the end. I looked higher and I could see its head, which was tilted so that one eye could look straight at me. Four minutes previously my stomach had been rumbling at the smell of bacon coming from the factory. After seeing the pig I began crying freely at its fate. (Michael, diary; p. 1)

Michael's rumbling stomach and his empathy for the pig point to his ambivalence within this story of change. Also, emotional conversion experiences were not always purely 'associated with distress or disgust'. For Elizabeth, the turning point was also "a very good experience" as well as making her feel sick:

But a year and a half ago I had a very good experience which guided me toward a vegetarian lifestyle. I visited an ostrich farm on Vancouver Island (where I'm from). Ostriches are my favorite animal so I was intrigued to see them, even if on a farm. I found them so fascinating and they brought me so much joy. But at the same time I felt sick knowing the ostriches I loved so much would be slaughtered for human consumption. I vowed that I would never eat ostrich, but that didn't seem to satisfy me. I look on all animals as equal beings, with souls and rights deserving of life and freedom. For this reason I couldn't justify eating chicken or cow or pig – it would be no different from consuming an ostrich. So from that day on, I stopped consuming animals altogether.

(Elizabeth, diary; p. 1; underscoring added)

There was a *mixture* of joy and sadness for Nicola too:

On 14th March, which was Mother's Day, my daughter, Jesse, went to see some lambing at an agricultural college. There were loads of people there, all eagerly awaiting the birth. Lots of labouring sheep being watched by eager spectators. After a long wait and assistance from one of the college lecturers a lamb was produced. I felt very emotional, new life, mother and child, me and my daughter, great joy, great sadness. I thought, "Fuckin' hell, I could end up eating that lamb, that's awful". So I decide there and then, no more meat, no more dairy products. A VEGAN. [...] When we left, Jesse and I stood outside, waiting for our lift to arrive I said, "I'm not gonna eat meat anymore, I'm gonna be a vegetarian".

(Nicola, diary; p. 2; underscoring added)

This conflict and complexity of emotions in accounts is unsurprising as the sadness and disgust at their treatment draw upon the enthusiasm for animals. But other accounts from vegetarians place a higher value on *personal gratification* from encounters with animals ('seeing animals in the fields') than on concerns about their treatment. For example, two vegetarians defend not becoming vegan by saying veganism would entail the loss of sheep and cows from fields. There is, perhaps, a similar dilemma (and rhetorical flexibility) involved in visiting zoos – enjoyment of seeing animals may be prioritised over concern for their welfare.

Previous studies do not discuss possible differences in conversion experiences between vegetarians and vegans. The classic conversion experiences of distress and disgust that Beardsworth & Keil identify appear to be less in evidence for transitions to veganism (i.e. dairy foods), but this distinction may be challenged to a degree with closer analysis. Six of the nine new vegans report conversion experiences: comprising 4 of the 6 *vegetarian-to-vegan* participants (Cathy, Paula and Richard) and 2 of the 3 *meat-eating-to-vegan* participants (Alison R, Nicola). However, none of those moving from *vegetarianism-to-veganism* give two separate conversion experiences, i.e. one for going vegetarian and another for then going vegan. Nor, generally, do the accounts of vegan conversion experiences spotlight the dairy industry in the same way as the killing of animals for meat is mentioned in vegetarian conversion experiences (e.g., Greg or Elizabeth, above).

However, Richard says that seeing the pig carcasses going into the butchers provided an impetus for becoming *vegan*. And though Nicola had largely already given up dairy but not meat she also *groups meat and dairy together*: “So I decide there and then, no more meat, no more dairy products. A VEGAN” (see diary extract, above; underscoring added). Also, Cathy’s account of deciding to become vegan describes how her “heart sank” as she read about the life of a dairy cow and the ties with the meat industry. The difference, then, is not an absolute one; the dairy industry is often associated with the meat industry in vegan accounts. This lack of a vegan conversion experience to match the vegetarian conversion experiences suggests a significant difference but the experiences that were given as the reason for going vegetarian may also motivate the later step to veganism. Whilst the transition may come later, the first experience may be seen as motivating two conversions, if indeed they should be viewed as separate.

The issue of *continuity* as well as difference between vegetarianism and veganism is a potentially important one. Alyson T represents going vegan as a progression of vegetarianism which barely requires further (re)explanation of motivation:

Going Vegan: Then, one autumn before I started sixth form college (September 1991), my sister and I went vegan. She had a vegan friend who was a bit older

than her and we got some literature from her and the Vegan Society. I remember that we ordered the Animal Free Shopper that September to help Mum with the cooking etc. Then my sister left for a year abroad and I continued to be vegan, ... (Alyson T, diary; p. 3; underscoring added)

“Then...” follows her account of going vegetarian and introduces her transition to veganism, suggesting a continuation of a previous story. This is also reinforced by the lack of any statement or restatement of motivations, implying that they have been covered in the previous account of the move to vegetarianism. So the ‘vegetarian’ conversion experience can also be seen as a part of the stories of conversion to veganism. Vegan conversions may be seen to draw implicitly, as well as explicitly, on accounts of vegetarian motivations and conversion experiences. As seen with accounts of factory farming and the difference between in practice and in principle killing, the merging of dairy and meat industries allows greater, generalised, criticism of the dairy industry.⁴ The experience may be recalled and recounted again for later conversions. This complexity in how continuity, change, causality and motivations are constructed makes the distinction between abrupt and gradual conversions less clear, especially for transitions to veganism.

In the accounts above, a ‘conversion experience’ is heard as a defining moment in the process of changing or being changed. It is easily overlooked that being able to define an experience as a *conversion* experience depends largely upon subsequent change. *The ‘defining moment’ is itself defined within a wider narrative context and so itself defines much more than the moment.* Reports of conversion experiences illustrate well the narrative orientation towards ‘temporal trajectories’ and morality which Gergen ascribes to them: “[S]elf-narratives [...] serve to unite the past with the present and to signify future trajectories (Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, 1979)” (Gergen, 1994; p. 207). Conversion-experience stories, then, have a quality of constructing both the past and future at once. As such they ostensibly describe experience but also define identity and guide behaviour.

⁴ This is not to deny or downplay the actual and extensive involvement of the meat industry with the dairy industry.

But giving the experience this status when seen and talked about in retrospect not only *depends* upon conversion but may also be seen as actively *constituting* conversion. Seen as narrative, the conversion experience is a resource for identity change rather than a mere description of it. As discussed in Chapter 3, language use can be seen as social action. Presenting oneself as a vegan/vegetarian is part of having that identity. And so being converted by an experience includes the act of telling the experience as being one of conversion. In the extract above, for example, Nicola reports publicly declaring her conversion: ‘When we left, [...] I said, “I’m not gonna eat meat anymore, I’m gonna be a vegetarian”...’. Thus, *giving accounts of* conversion experiences – to others and oneself – is an aspect of the *criteria* for a conversion experience and, simultaneously, is a *means* of achieving conversion. Dietary behaviour and accounting for it (‘walking the walk’ and also ‘talking the talk’) may together be seen as one complex set of practices of accountability and account-giving. A view of account-giving as constitutive of identity, and of self-narratives as resources for self-change as well as descriptions of it, begins to emerge and the study of accounts is underlined and supported.

ii) Notable calendar dates & special occasions

The second theme within the accounts of converting is the common reference to special occasions and notable calendar dates. 9/23 (39%) of all participants reported a conversion experience, and/or the launch of their new diet, as happening on such an occasion.

- ❖ Five participants described taking advantage of *New Year Resolutions* and or the *New Millennium* to begin the change and to tell others of their decision (Shannen, Richard, Greg, Karen, Jane).

Since it is the new Millennium, I think I should start this meaningful lifestyle.

(Shannen, diary; p. 1)

Greg’s account of converting also refers to the New Year and the associated custom of resolving to make changes, which may be heard as helping Greg to

make a public statement of intent. Although the meal is vegetarian and his son (Paul) is pleased, Greg also reports gasps of surprise, and it is reportedly the first time he broaches the subject with his wife, Sharon:

Sharon and myself were having a vegetarian meal at home with my vegetarian son Paul and his fiancée Wendy and the subject got around to 'New Year resolutions'. I was inevitably asked if I was making any and I thought to myself, 'Well, now's the time if you're ever going to do it'. I announced that it was my intention to become a vegetarian within 6 months of the turn of the New Year. It was as if I had announced that I was pregnant. There were gasps of surprise all round. Someone asked if I was serious and I said that I was. Paul, of course was very pleased. [...] I asked Sharon how she felt about me becoming a vegetarian and she said it wouldn't be a problem, as probably half the meals that we eat are vegetarian anyway. (Greg, diary; p. 2; underscoring added)

"Well now's the time if you're ever going to do it" suggests the importance and potential difficulty of social accounting in dietary change and stresses the opportunity presented by New Year Resolutions.

- ❖ Two participants mentioned *Christmas*, and the glut of meat around this time, as an instrumental factor in the timing of their conversion. Jacqui said that she had "always had a problem with Christmas", "the "butchers' shops full of turkeys" and the "mass slaughter"; "for me it was the best time [to give up meat]" (Jacqui, interview 1). Alyson T cites one Christmas as a turning point:

Then, one Christmas (1988) my sister and I had a very big turkey and I just couldn't eat much of it at all. The way it went on forever, [...] but I had just gone right off it. [...] I think it was that last turkey that did it for me, ...

(Alyson T, diary; p. 2)

- ❖ *Birthdays* were significant in the accounts of two individuals. Michael and his wife planned several weeks in advance to begin their new diets on his birthday:

When I reached home, Anne and I sat down and had a long chat and decided that we would try becoming vegetarians. We decided that on my birthday we would start and would give it one year and re-evaluate at that point.

(Michael, diary; p. 1; underscoring added)

Karen said that turning 40 recently was a particularly good time to change her diet. Age was cited by another 25-year-old female as adding to her motivation at this time because, “I’m going to really take care of what I eat now” (Dawn, interview 1).

- ❖ Another kind of *anniversary* was seized on by Tina in beginning her veganism:

Tried to stick to a totally vegan diet today. I feel like it is important for me to attempt this now. This month is my 1 year Vegetarian anniversary, yeah!

(Tina, diary; p. 1)

Anniversaries are also indicated by the trial period of one year referred to in Michael’s account above (though the year may not be viewed as a trial period in hindsight when the year has elapsed).

- ❖ *Mother’s Day* featured prominently in the account of one participant. As seen in the extract in the previous section, a key feature of Nicola’s account of her emotional conversion experience was that it occurred on Mother’s Day:

I mean I’ve seen lambs being born, as a child, but this was like, but this was li-ke, I don’t know, cause y’ know this was Mother’s Day ... [...] Errm, and that was sort of like where the thought came in, it wasn’t necessarily going to be *that* lamb, but it was going to be a lamb of another mother, sort of thing, the massive connection between the child-

(Nicola, interview 1; underscoring added).

Such significant dates and special occasions have important cultural and personal meanings and may be viewed as *resources* for accounting for and narrating dietary and identity change. Three points may be made in connection to these cultural resources - these concern narrative accounting, autobiography and social custom.

Highlighting a specific day/date in a conversion story provides a more concrete watershed for the potentially fuzzy and fallible process and experience of changing diet and identity. This provides a memorable and more dramatic inauguration of the new diet and also allows for further special dates in the form of anniversaries, and so, for subsequent commemoration, celebration and affirmation of the new identity (as the above accounts of vegetarian anniversaries from Michael and Tina suggest). Both story-telling and recall are facilitated by a degree of drama (Nicola's experience) or ceremony (Greg's resolution). The explicitly commemorative aspect of birthdays, anniversaries and New Years are occasions that can be used to mark time and transition and, so, to write autobiographical change.

Secondly, then, the different types of special occasions featuring in the different participants' accounts point to individual *biography* and *autobiography* as well as cultural meanings. For example, it is *Karen's* 40th birthday, and Mother's Day is important for *Nicola* (who is a mother herself). These occasions are understood, interpreted and invested with meaning within a biographical and autobiographical context, and are material in and for *re-writing* the self (which is not a blank slate). This bears out to some degree the concern with biographies shared by a number of writers mentioned in Chapters 2 & 3. Notable in this regard are Billig's arguments in favour of studying the particular details and personal contexts of identity, and to repopulate social psychology with the 'ordinary individuality' of individuals (Billig, 1994, 1996b). Cohen (1994) and Rapport (1992, 1993) have argued for the importance of recognising individual variations, circumstances and experiences as inevitably limiting and complementing generalisations. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) also identify individual biographies as crucial to future work on vegetarianism.

Thirdly, there is also a paradox to be drawn out from these accounts, which move away from conventional meat-eating diets by using (discursively, psychologically, and socially) other elements of tradition such as the institutions of Christmas, New

Year Resolutions or Mother's Day. The excesses of Christmastime can be used as a springboard for taking a stand against meat-eating culture. A resolution is more socially accepted and psychologically compelling if made at New Year. The grip of alimentary traditions and conventional foodways is loosened by recourse to more tradition and other conventions. And so the break from the old identity as a meat-eater has the weight of social custom put behind it.

As suggested, these dates or occasions render the emergent and vague more concrete. For many, the new, unfamiliar and threatening is also made less problematic, more acceptable, respectable and familiar. In this respect, Moscovici's notions of anchoring and objectification are called to mind. 'Anchoring' is the process by which *the unfamiliar is rendered familiar*: stimuli are compared, interpreted and understood in terms of what we already know. 'Objectification' refers to the process of *transforming the abstract into the objective and concrete*: "to discover [...] the iconic quality of an imprecise idea" (Moscovici, 1984; p. 38), or, "what is *perceived* replaces what is *conceived*" (p. 40; emphasis in original). Talk of having had a 'conversion experience' itself reifies the process of conversion into a moment of epiphany. More specifically, Mother's Day adds an iconic quality to the mother-child relationship. Through Mother's Day concern for the lamb and ewe is seen in terms of a universal bond ("the massive connection between the child-"). The familiar, human institution of Mother's Day becomes a vehicle for rendering familiar and concrete an unorthodox concern for animals.⁵ The above three points demonstrate the argumentative use of cultural resources by individuals in narrating identity change.

Nicola's account of being converted on Mother's Day raises another point concerning

⁵ Seen from another point of view, this also illustrates the opposite of making an abstract or new concept more familiar. Social representations theory concentrates on the unfamiliar being rendered familiar and the abstract being made concrete, but Billig (1988b) points to rhetorical activities which are the opposite of the processes proposed by Moscovici. The opposite of objectification can be seen in individuals' 'transcendentalisation' of ideas into *more* abstract concepts such as 'truth', 'evil', or 'society'. Billig also gives a counter-example of anchoring in the *novel* use of the word 'radical', used to describe Margaret Thatcher's politics ('radical' normally being associated with left wing politics). In making an unconventional diet or concern for animals more concrete and familiar, Mother's Day and New Year Resolutions are also being understood in novel, unfamiliar ways. The association of the new vegetarian/vegan diet with traditions stretches the usual understandings of those traditions or institutions to include new meanings. By extending the sentiments of Mother's Day to the bonds between the ewe and the lamb, for example, Mother's Day acquires a new, unfamiliar, less mundane meaning.

social psychological accounts of social categories. Nicola's attention to or invocation of the identity of *mother* in her account of the lambing challenges Self-categorisation theory's dogmatic emphasis on social identities as hierarchically organised and contained by the category '*human*':

[Assumption] 6: That there are at least three levels of abstraction of self-categorisation important in the self-concept: (a) *the super-ordinate level of the self as human being, self-categorisations based on one's identity as a human being, the common features shared with members of the human species in contrast to other forms of life, [...]* (Turner, 1987; p. 45; emphasis added).

According to this schema there is no level of social self-categorisation in which human and non-human can be seen as similar or sharing a social category. But in Nicola's account of the lambing on Mother's Day, the category/identity 'mother' cuts across species boundaries. Indeed, the common maternal category functions expressly to break down anthropocentric ethics and to extend concern to non-humans. Whether or not the category/identity of 'mother' is used to discriminate self from other humans, its ascription is *not* confined to humans.

More generally than Nicola's account, the category 'mother' may draw powerfully on notions of maternal instincts and of continuity with other maternal (esp. viviparous) animals and the rest of Nature. The dilemmatic nature of claims to be similar to yet different from (or not *too* similar to) other non-human animals, as discussed by Twigg (1983), is entirely lost in laying down 'human' as the most general and inclusive "super-ordinate level of the self" (Turner, 1987; p. 45). The 'social'/'inter-group' and the 'personal' levels of identity do not operate in isolation from all non-human aspects of identity, and social categories are not related hierarchically in 'levels'. This is not to deny that speakers are usually concerned with talking about other humans and that the common-sense backdrop for social comparison is a species boundary. But the categories we use to talk about ourselves and other humans are not only or uniquely 'human' categories, and 'human' is not a straightforward commonsense category

itself.⁶

Haste (1993) argues that how we make sense of the world draws profoundly on dualistic metaphors of gender (or gendered metaphors of polarity). A relevant illustration can be seen in understandings of vegetarianism and meat. As seen in Chapter 2, Twigg (1983) discusses the gendered understandings of vegetarian diets which revolve around the animal passion of meat valued as a *masculine* quality. Fiddes (1991), too, notes the gendered and sexual meanings of meat. It may be added that the association goes (and can be used) both ways: not only is meat (and animals) understood socially in terms of gender identities but, also, sexual identities are understood through and draw upon understandings of meat and diet.⁷ Not only does the non-human/animal/natural permeate talk of the human/social, as Twigg (1983) argues for gender identities and meat, but our ways of talking and thinking about gender run deep in our understandings of the wider, non-human world, as Haste argues.

The analytic distinction between 'social' or 'human' identities and the 'non-human' or 'non-social' is problematic but the construction of the natural and non-human in accounts of identity is of considerable analytic interest. Nicola's account draws parallels between the ewe-lamb bond and the human mother-child bond, and this is animated by and narrated through her own experience and relationship with *her* daughter, Jesse. As such it illustrates the interpenetration of the human and social identities with the animal and natural. Thus, in this Mother's Day conversion story there is a confluence of personal change, cultural tradition, the human and the non-human.

⁶ In a related point, Michael argues, "We should not prioritise persons, for what is to count as a person is something that is subject to negotiation, struggle and construction" (1996; p. 30). A distinction may be made here with regard to 'persons', between the promotion of analytic *attention to individuality* in the idiographic, biographical sense advocated, for example, by Billig or Rapport and, on the other hand, the theorisation or use of *personhood* in terms of category membership (usually human), especially when cast as ideologically neutral. Though, ultimately, connections might be drawn between them (in terms of ignoring the 'non-social' in analyses), it is the analytic assumptions of the latter sense of 'persons' with which issue is being taken here. As with the term 'persons', Michael prompts analytic reflexivity with regard to the notion of 'identity' when he asks: "What 'identity' do we perform when we talk of 'identity'?" (1996; p. 161).

⁷ To illustrate further the above discussion of 'objectification', the association of meat and masculinity involves the objectification or physical embodiment of masculinity in meat. But meat/meat products are also 'transcendentalised' as signifying non-physical qualities of masculinity, power, animal and sexual passion etc. The physical incorporation of meat into the eater's body, of course, helps this association.

Before summarising this overview of the material, a final theme within accounts of conversions will be discussed.

iii) Character change & personal development

It has been argued that the accounts of motivations are often combined with accounts of *becoming* motivated and of converting or being converted. These changes are presented as positive, and reports of conversion experiences in particular present change as positive inner transformation. Some accounts emphasise the idea of changes in diet and identity as a process of making or experiencing changes in the self in terms of character. Moreover, these ‘psychological’ changes are heard as being *progressive* and morally positive. Previous studies of vegetarianism have not focussed explicitly on individuals’ accounts of character change, probably because the focus has rarely been on dietary *change* and *conversion* itself but also because narrative aspects of accounts were not explored. Given the social, ethical, and ideological aspects of vegetarianism, seeing becoming vegetarian in terms of character-development is an obvious possibility when self-narrative is considered.

Five participants (22%) associated becoming Vegetarian/vegan with a change or development of character in some way. Shannen links her decision to become vegetarian with becoming more ‘mature’ and less ‘materialistic’. Dawn talks of ‘growing up’ and she points to her greater responsibility and independence after leaving university and starting work, which she cites as lessening her prior worries that she will be seen as just ‘following the in-crowd’.

But when you grow up a bit it doesn’t really matter what other people think, I’m going to do what I want anyway. (Dawn, interview 1)

There are clear autobiographical and life-historical aspects to this positive, progressive account of becoming vegetarian as ‘growing up’. There is similarity in this regard with Nicola’s account of seeing her veganism as part of “getting her life together” and she talks in terms of ‘a re-birth’ and a ‘new me’ (interview 1). The

transition to a new diet therefore becomes an affirmation of positive personal change of wider and more profound personal significance than dietary matters.

These discourses or narratives of self-development also have a considerable potential for moral evaluation and judgement, and suggest a critical edge nascent in all accounts of becoming vegetarian and vegan (Chapter 6, especially, explores some of the issues involving moral criticism of others). Here, comparison and criticism is ostensibly vis-à-vis an earlier self rather than with others. This illustrates the way direct criticism of others is commonly avoided but also points again to the importance of personal and autobiographical narrative (Chapter 6, 7 and 8 all discuss the importance of the construction of personal character, which may commonly be seen as storied and as denying stereotypes). But the idea of changing or *developing* as a person may also be seen as managing potential criticism of himself or herself for eating meat (etc.) in the past. In a twofold effect, they are heard as acting as their own critics but, also, they are no longer the person they were – ‘a new me’ (or a change in the self) implies that the old me has gone and so accountability for former meat-eating is managed. These accounts draw heavily on discourses of psychological health and personal development including those of the ‘self-help’ literature whose importance in identity and identity change is perhaps understudied (but see Harré, 1983a, 1983b).

Other accounts more clearly stress the issues of *agency* in personal-development which are often prominent within personal development discourses. Although previous research has suggested a link between vegetarianism and a motivation of *control* (and also *anorexia nervosa*, Jarman *et al.*, 1997), earlier work has not discussed accounts which depict going vegetarian as an exercise in, or vehicle for, personal-development/growth. The notions of difficulties and of failure are common in accounts of transitions but this idea can be re-cast more positively as a ‘challenge’:

I actually like eating vegan – I find it a challenge. (Cathy, interview 3)

This *self-efficacy/personal-development or challenge theme* was reported as a major motivating factor for 6/23 (or 26%) of the participants: five new vegans and one new vegetarian (Alison R, Cathy, Paul, Richard, Tina and Shannen respectively). Alison R

reports deciding to become vegan after attending a self-development workshop lead by Anthony Robbins during which she successfully completed a ‘fire-walk’ over hot coals. “I thought if I can do that I can go vegan” (interview 1). At face value the account reports that the fire-walk gave Alison R confidence in her ability to go vegan, but the self-development narrative also has the effect of casting her veganism in terms of self-enhancing positive character traits – becoming vegan comes to represent a personally desirable quality and personal success. Couched in terms of ‘challenges’, difficulties offer the possibility of ‘success’ and are a means for self-affirmation. These accounts indicate the idea of self/identity and identity-change as a ‘self-project’ (see, Harré, 1983a & 1983b). Chapter 6 explores further the flexible construction of problems and the process of conversion.

Rhetoric and autobiography in becoming vegetarian & vegan

In summary, some broad features of the accounts of motivations and conversions may be reiterated and two theoretical points emphasised. Substantively, the motivations reported by participants were comparable to the findings of previous studies. Notably, moral motivation was once more the most commonly-reported. The accounts also included many reports of ‘conversion experiences’, as noted by Amato and Partridge (1989) and Beardsworth & Keil (1992a). Some new themes within the accounts of motivations and conversions were also suggested: *specific health problems* were given as an important factor by some; *notable days/dates* in the calendar featured in many accounts; and dietary transition was strongly associated with *change in character and/or efforts at self-development* by a proportion of new vegetarians and vegans (though there were not sufficient numbers to draw conclusions, this theme was heard from proportionately more vegans than vegetarians: 3/9 or 33% versus 1/14 or 7%).

Some limitations of content-frequency treatments of such discourse materials were highlighted and two major theoretical arguments may now be stressed. Firstly, accounts of motivations are not easily categorised but are complex and particular, discriminating between foods, incorporating personal details, and constructing and combining multiple themes (as in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). This mixing and

blurring of traditional categories of motivation is especially noticeable in accounts of revulsion and objections to factory farming practices. Accounts of motivations are argumentative and position the speaker through implicit criticisms of other positions and the groups, diets and attitudes associated with them. Treating accounts of motivations as explanations for behaviour or information about beliefs and attitudes neglects the role that language, account-giving and arguing play in thinking and in identity change. Also, reported motivations are intertwined in accounts with past diets, autobiography and change, descriptions of self and others, and accounts of both inner psychology and outer behaviour. As this chapter has argued and has begun to illustrate, motivations are rhetorically constructed in complex ways and are bound up in accounts with conversion stories and accounts of personal transformation.

Accounts of conversions were also explored. As noted, although Beardsworth & Keil discern ‘abrupt’ and ‘gradual’ types of conversion careers they also acknowledge that the processes of conversion are “clearly linked to the idiosyncrasies of personal biography” and acknowledge the *dual* role of sudden changes and slower changes in attitudes. They describe a, “respondent [who] immediately gave up red meat, and then progressively excluded all meat from his diet” (1992a; p. 267), thus exhibiting abrupt and gradual elements to the conversion. The role of the environment and the tension between wishes and actions are also recognized:

In several instances, moving out of the family home meant that the individual could break with the foodways imposed by parents, and make the move towards vegetarianism they may have aspired to for some time.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 267).

The data in this study suggest that this sort of combination –of tensions and gradual changes punctuated by abrupt changes– is more representative than either simply gradual or simply abrupt change. Under scrutiny, the categories ‘gradual’ and ‘abrupt’ were found to be difficult to apply to individuals’ accounts of their conversion careers. The speed or abruptness and the criteria for conversions can be seen as *contestable*. As with types of vegetarianism, ‘abrupt’ and ‘gradual’ change can be seen as ideas which participants attend to and use, and they may be less useful as *analytic* terms.

It may be added that other features emerged which were more useful in looking at gradual and abrupt *elements* in participants' accounts. Consonant with Beardsworth & Keil's recommendation to study vegetarian biographies, a level of *greater autobiographical detail* was found to be more meaningful for characterising conversions rather than a broad distinction between abrupt and gradual. Also, some of the specific cultural and discursive *resources* for narrating identity change have been highlighted. These include: the notion of a 'conversion experience'; special days/dates; and discourses of self-development.

A second major theoretical theme running through this chapter suggests that the accounts of motivation and conversion are not only complex and autobiographical but *play an active role in the constitution of identity and identity change*. Related to this is a view of accounting as social action and the idea that identity and account-giving can be seen as a social practice. The social *activity* of accounting was highlighted by extracts which recounted account-giving on other occasions, but is also indicated more generally by the rhetorical and argumentative nature of accounts which can be seen as justifying, criticising and positioning the speaker relative to others. These social aspects of accounting are pursued further in the following chapter which focuses on the way accounts of problems construct and constitute identities and which looks at social problems as problems of accounting.

6

Social problems, criticism, and vegetarian identities

- I. Becoming vegetarian as a 'social process'
- II. Social problems as accounts of becoming vegetarian
- III. The dilemma of moral superiority: Criticism and tolerance
- IV. Relationships and the repression of criticism
 - Tolerance and suppressed criticism
 - Accounts of repression
 - Repression in accounting

The preceding chapter introduced a discursive-rhetorical approach to participants' motivation-reports. Categorising participants according to diets, motivations or conversions was seen as problematic and difficult to apply to actual accounts, which were seen as complex and argumentatively constructed. Instead, the *participants' use* of categories and the construction of identities in accounts were considered as objects for study in their own right. A similar shift –from looking for the broad and rigid patterns 'behind' reports to examining the details of identity construction in accounting practices themselves– will be developed in this chapter for accounts of social problems encountered in becoming vegetarian/vegan. Some general features across participants will be proposed in the form of some major tensions and dilemmas managed in these accounts.

The preceding chapter began to show that motivation-reports do more than just report and deal with more than motivations. Stories of conversion experiences were found to narrate being motivated in tandem with stories of transformation. Participants'

accounts could be seen as yoking motivations to ‘storied’ narratives of change and or changes in the self (e.g., being changed by a conversion experience; telling others; planning the new diet; or becoming more mature/less materialistic etc.). Constructing the self as motivated can be envisaged as bound up with other issues to do with identity and accountability in a larger biographically and socially situated narrative of becoming vegetarian/vegan.

Like accounts of motivations, reports of problems experienced in becoming vegetarian are neither merely descriptive nor are they concerned only with problems. This view of accounts as complex webs of numerous issues that construct identities suggests that the issue of identity and identity change is implicitly dealt with in much of the participants’ accounting. The view that the new vegetarian/vegan identity is connected to other matters and is narrated widely throughout the participants’ accounts will be contrasted with other more ‘realist’ studies of the process of becoming vegetarian which have narrower conceptions of identity change and less interest in accounting practices.

Both the earlier studies of vegetarianism and discursive perspectives on identity stress the *social* aspects of becoming vegetarian. Although all accounts of problems may be seen as social inasmuch as identity-construction is involved, this chapter will focus upon participants’ accounts of the social ramifications of the new diet, especially problems with significant others. However, instead of seeing reports of problems as simply revealing obstacles to becoming vegetarian which are *given* by the social environment, it will be argued that accounts of social conflicts themselves construct and manage vegetarian identities. It is argued that becoming vegetarian or vegan may be seen as understood and accomplished in no small part through accounting practices and, moreover, that some of the social problems involved are problems of account-giving.

As discussed in Chapter 3 and introduced in the last chapter, it follows from the argumentative, justificatory and critical nature of accounts that narrating self-identity also involves constructing the identities of others. The theoretical notion of *identity as relationship* will be used to highlight the tension between constructing the self positively and criticising counter-positions or Others. The significance of relationship

is most apparent when to disparage the Other would involve the new vegetarian's or vegan's meat-eating nearest and dearest. The ambivalence which arises, and its management in accounting, is an important and enduring characteristic, it is argued, of becoming and maintaining a vegetarian or vegan identity. This chapter aims to explore these ambivalences around criticism.

I. Becoming vegetarian as a 'social process'

As seen in the review of previous studies of vegetarianism in Chapter 2, Maurer (1989), Jabs (1997) and McDonald (2000) adopt a realist or objectivist stance towards respondents' accounts of transition inasmuch as reports are taken at face value and treated as giving information about events, behaviours and experiences. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) are also interested in recovering and describing experiences and changes in dietary habits from the respondents' reports.

To recap briefly, Jabs (1997) reports that, "[a] *model* of the process of adoption and maintenance of a vegetarian diet was developed" (p. 1; emphasis added). McDonald (2000) aims to address "a lack of information about how people become vegan" and writes that she "identified a psychological process of how people learn about and adopt veganism". She concedes that the psychological emphasis to her model of the process of becoming vegan is a weakness but she does not suggest a discursive-rhetorical focus. And, though idiosyncrasy and biography are stressed,¹ Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) are interested in detecting types of conversions which *underlie* respondents' descriptions:

The processes through which individuals are converted to vegetarianism, or indeed convert themselves, are clearly linked to the idiosyncrasies of personal biography. However, *a number of significant underlying features could be detected in respondents' descriptions which made it feasible to distinguish two*

¹ In Beardsworth & Keil (1997) they also elaborate that the themes that they draw from accounts are comprised of both *motivations* ('considerations which may impel an individual..') and '*rhetorical idioms*' ('arguments that individual may employ retrospectively..') (1997; p. 226)

main types of conversion 'career' [abrupt and gradual]

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 266-7; emphasis added)

The findings of earlier studies have emphasised the *social* aspects of these patterns or models of becoming vegetarian/vegan. For example, Dwyer *et al.* (1974) offered a distinction between the social affiliations of '*joiners*' and '*loners*'. Freeland-Graves, Greninger & Young (1986) also report that vegetarians tended to form supportive networks of family and friends who were also vegetarian and stress their importance for maintenance of the diet. Amato & Partridge (1989) discuss the effects on personal relationships, citing negative parental responses as common and major changes in family relationships not uncommon. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) write,

Eating patterns are such a fundamentally important part of everyday life, in symbolic and expressive as well as nutritional terms, that changing them may have significant effects on social relationships. (p. 276)

They emphasise the range of reactions: "sympathy and support on the one hand, or on the other criticism, bewilderment or even outright hostility" (p. 276). Reports of "tensions and opposition" were particularly common however, especially with family and in-laws and most acutely at Christmas. They conclude that an *avoidance* of these tensions was suggested by "evidence of a tendency for networks of vegetarian friendships to develop" (p. 280). They write,

Despite the fact that tensions within the family appear to be relatively common, little evidence was found to suggest that the adoption of vegetarianism creates strains between spouses. (1992a; p. 279)

There is some similarity with Maurer (1989), who found that a majority of respondents reported some degree of social conflict, but she concludes that between partners:

No one expressed major conflicts on the issue of vegetarianism, but in general, it seems to be an area of difference which has the potential to turn into conflict.

(Maurer, 1989; p. 64)

However, Beardsworth & Keil note shrewdly that their sample would not reflect those deterred by their spouse from becoming vegetarian. They also consider that the social aspects of becoming vegetarian involve not only others' reactions but also the way in which the individual presents their newly adopted dietary practices to others. Here too, "there was a considerable degree of variability as to the stance adopted, ranged along a continuum with self-effacing reticence at one end, and an assertively evangelical attitude at the other" (1992a; p. 280).

In general, Maurer argues that becoming vegetarian is an "inherently social process" (1989; p. 69) which is, "characterized both by learning a new behavior (vegetarianism) and learning to deal with the new responses to the behavior" (p. 48). She proposes a series of 'processual elements towards becoming vegetarian' which,

... are defined generally enough as to describe the experience of virtually every vegetarian in the study for each element [...and...] basically occur chronologically,... (Maurer, 1989; p. 48-9)

And Jabs concludes, "maintenance of vegetarian diets was supported by personal factors, social networks, and environmental resources [...] most vegetarian respondents faced dietary challenges with family members and often compromised their dietary practices in social situations" (1997; p. 1).

As well as stressing the impact on and influence of social relations in becoming vegetarian, the above studies of vegetarianism almost exclusively focus on the *problems* experienced by respondents and positive experiences are apparently absent or elided. Although positive aspects to being/becoming vegetarian have already been glimpsed in the accounts of conversions in the last chapter, benefits to social relations were not commonly reported in this study.

Nearly all participants (21/23) reported some degree of social difficulty or conflict, covering a range of problems. Only 6/23 (26%) reported encountering relatively few difficulties in dealings with others. Unsurprisingly (given their greater divergence from popular 'foodways'), more vegetarians reported experiencing few problems in social relations than did than vegans: 36% (5/14) of vegetarians as opposed to 17%

(1/6) among new vegans. Of the large majority of new vegetarians and vegans who reported problems with others, the frequency increased with regard to: strangers (4/21), work (6/21), friends (7/21), and family (10/21) respectively. The emergence of a pattern might be ventured by which reports of problems increase with the closeness of the relationship – strangers being the least commonly mentioned source of problems, with work and friends following, and family-members being the most commonly cited source of troubles. Following this pattern, spouses and partners might be expected to be the *most* commonly given source of problems. However, the accounts of difficulties with partners seemed the most resistant to content-frequency analysis of problem-reports and would be better characterised by Maurer's position that there is a *potential* for conflict. This suggests the importance of examining the tensions, ambivalences, and how these potential problems are avoided and managed through accounting. *Close attention to these accounts will illustrate particularly clearly some lacunae in approaches that study becoming vegetarian as a process lying 'behind' the accounts rather than within ways of accounting itself.*

II. Social problems as accounts of becoming vegetarian

In the preceding chapter, motivation-accounts were seen to construct identities in contrast to others and in relation to previous identities. In this chapter, reports of problems will be considered as accounts of becoming vegetarian or vegan. Problems with others are not 'given' events, requiring simply to be communicated or relayed by the participants' reports, and are not self-evident phenomena which can be assumed to hinder becoming vegetarian/vegan. For example, the construction of problems through language may be demonstrated with extracts from Carol's diary, below.

Once you discover that someone else is a vegetarian, it is rather like being in a club – you immediately start chatting about food, and this helps support your decision to be vegetarian. People who are only thinking about becoming vegetarian like to talk about it and discuss problems with someone who is in the same boat. Now that I've found my Vegetarian Society badge again, I must wear it more often and see what effect, if any, it has. I rather like being labelled as a

vegetarian – the sort of people I like approve, and the sort of people I don't like see it almost as a threat, which I find amusing – so far!

(Carol, diary; p. 4; underscoring added)

In studying *how* conflict with others is narrated by Cathy, it is immediately noticeable that there is barely a problem at all being depicted here. Both positive and negative reactions from people are heard as enjoyable. This is done largely through the way in-groups and out-groups are constructed and both serve to galvanise her identity as vegetarian.

Challenging the emphasis on negative social reactions in the literature, Carol explicitly portrays her decision to be vegetarian as supported by both positive and negative reactions. Solidarity is developed through her use of the images of being “in a club” and “in the same boat”. This is backed up with an account of also actually interacting in a friendly (and enthusiastic) way on an everyday basis in: “...you immediately start chatting [...] People [...] like to talk [...] and discuss...”. This develops a clear sense of an in-group which is extended beyond just vegetarians to include, “people who are only thinking about becoming vegetarian like to talk about it”.

Like the badge itself, *mentioning* her Vegetarian Society badge (and therefore her Society membership) clearly marks out her vegetarian identity. The account of intending to wear her badge also displays her as actively presenting herself as vegetarian in public – she is, in a sense, talking of literally, physically labelling herself as a vegetarian, wearing the label with pride, and as not intimidated but curious about others' reactions: “I must wear it more often and see what effect, if any, it has”. Awareness of negative reactions to vegetarians is described, but they are given as a source of amusement which, crucially, also makes being labelled a vegetarian *more*, rather than less, attractive and enjoyable (“I rather like being labelled [...] which I find amusing-”). What being vegetarian is like, and what vegetarians are like, is being argumentatively constructed – and here the notion of argument features in the account.

Indeed, Carol's attitude towards others' reactions is even a little provocative, and the fact that some people "see it almost as a threat" serves to define Carol's vegetarian identity more clearly, positively and, again, as being pleasurable. The differentiating aspects of social categories and identities is clear: an 'Other' or out-group serves as a foil to reflect Carol as visibly and happily different as a vegetarian. The reported support and approval of an in-group ("the sort of people I like") also helps to differentiate an out-group ("the sort of people I don't like"). There is much implicit criticism and derogation of the out-group besides this. The out-group is identified more clearly in another diary-entry from Carol:

The only derogatory comments I get are from people who I would categorise as right-wing. Especially in this area they tend to be farmers, who can't believe that anyone would refuse British pork! I tend to point out that British chicken farms are the best advert for vegetarianism I've met, and we have quite a lot of them around here. (Carol, diary; p. 3; underscoring added)

The conflict is not with *all* meat-eaters/non-vegetarians but with particular groups of people or sub-groups of meat-eaters: those who make 'derogatory comments', who are 'right-wing', and who 'tend to be farmers'. 'Right-wing' people are a relatively safe target as this is a fairly negative category-label with sufficiently vague criteria for membership. This out-group can also be heard as rude and hostile in making 'derogatory comments'. The farmers can also be heard as having vested interests and hidebound attitudes – as being extreme, unreasonable and closed-minded ("who can't believe that anyone would refuse British pork!") and as running bad farms ("British chicken farms are the best advert for vegetarianism I've met"). Finally, the category 'right-wing' is further developed with a depiction of blind or misplaced *national* pride: "[...] farmers, who can't believe that anyone would refuse British pork! I tend to point out that British chicken farms [...]". In the context of 'right-wing' this can be heard as implying nationalism, chauvinism and narrow-mindedness in the farmers, and, so, her detractors.

Criticism, then, is not directed at all non-vegetarians/meat-eaters, however, but is directed and constrained in some ways. There is criticism and derogation of those who

attack her, but this is justified as largely retaliation and is directed to specific (right-wing and bigoted) groups. Criticism of others and justification of the criticism are bound up together. As with criticism and justification, the construction of the out-group and presentation of the self go hand-in-hand. *This co-construction of self and other can be discerned throughout the accounts and is also a source of tensions, as will be seen later.*

The extract can be seen as having some powerful rhetorical upshots for the narration of becoming and being vegetarian. The confession that she finds it amusing to unsettle this 'sort of people' defies a vegetarian stereotype of a victimised minority or as being po-faced or meek. In the first extract, Carol's amusement is at the out-groups' expense. In the second excerpt she is ready with a knock-down argument: "I tend to point out that British chicken farms are the best advert for vegetarianism I've met" (the added, "and we have quite a lot of them around here", acts to warrant her views).

Moreover, potential 'problems' become opportunities or resources for supporting her vegetarian identity and establishing its/her character. 'Being labelled as a vegetarian' does not mean being defensive, angst-ridden or victimised but is heard as a fun way of ruffling a few chicken farmers' feathers. Unsympathetic reactions from others are given a positive spin and actually provide an opportunity for affirming Carol's vegetarian identity *by contrast with* the sort of people who don't like vegetarians and who she doesn't like. In Gergen's (1994) terms of identity as relationship they play the insecure right-wing bigots to Carol's confident, amused vegetarian. The assumption that conflict is a problem is denied and argument is celebrated. The vegetarian identity is developed thanks to, rather than in spite of, this conflict and is presented in a positive and enjoyable light whereby conflicts do not threaten to derail the diet.

The extract from Nicola's diary, below, also portrays her vegan identity as drawing strength from or reinforced by conflict with others. This is combined with a strong *progressive* narrative of becoming vegan as personal change within this context.

I have been suffering much less with sinus problems, which is good. I am really happy I have given up meat. I can look at the lambs in the fields with a clear conscience. I have felt anxious about telling people about being a vegan, because of their reaction and expectations. But now I feel more confident in my own belief and conviction. I do not pass judgement on their choice of body fuel, why should I let their opinion on my choice bother me? I'll tell ya why, historically, when this sort of thing has arisen I would react by being aggressive/defensive, "Fuck you, I don't care wot you think", or, "I feel hurt misunderstood, rejected." Hey, this is great, not only am I cleaning out my body, but also my mind. Now I feel I don't need anyone's approval/ disapproval. It doesn't matter, I am not angry or sad. I feel interested, intrigued by wot peoples reaction is gonna be. I have not told my dad, although my sister may have. It could be the VEGAN REACTION EXPERIENCE. I wonder what the lambs think?!

(Nicola, diary; p. 5; underscoring added)

Rather than simply reporting ambivalence, the extract suggests the management of complexity, contradictory perspectives and ambivalence through accounting. The story of a new perspective depicts (and, as will be argued later, reflects) a context of outer argument ("I have felt anxious about telling people about being a vegan, because of their reaction and expectations") but also *inner* debate ("I am really happy I have given up meat. I can look at the lambs in the fields with a clear conscience"). Though Nicola does not claim to be *amused* by how her veganism is received by others, as Carol does, she is presented as no longer being anxious and, moreover, as interested and intrigued instead –the anxiety is described as being in the past, "I have felt...". A prior personal history of anxiety and defensiveness are indicated, illustrating autobiography as an accounting resource, or simply the serial nature of autobiography. The account of personal change has meaning within this autobiographical and argumentative context: "Hey, this is great, not only am I cleaning out my body, but also my mind. Now I feel I don't need anyone's approval/ disapproval".

Nicola's account ties the process of becoming vegan in with the sorts of stories of personal growth seen in Chapter 5. Reports of positive changes since becoming vegan

(improved sinus problems, feeling good, having a clear conscience) are presented as leading to a change in inner “belief and conviction” which in turn make Nicola less “aggressive/defensive”. Even better than having people’s approval is not needing it, and this is acquired through becoming vegan. Not being ‘bothered’ by others’ opinions is strengthened by an account of being non-judgemental herself in which she uses the morally neutral term ‘body fuel’ – this language may be contrasted with accounts on other occasions in which she foregrounds meat as animal flesh. Becoming vegan is heard as promoting self-development. The metaphor of ‘cleaning out’ her mind as well as her body again links dietary change with psychological changes and trades on ideas of mind-body holism as well as detoxification. This image constructs becoming vegan strongly and positively as becoming cleaner and healthier, in both body and mind. Becoming vegan is thereby reified as a process of psychological change, which is given further ‘facticity’ through the playful suggestion that this is an experience shared by other vegans (“It could be the VEGAN REACTION EXPERIENCE”). This account of a shared (vegan) experience, then, may be seen as working to establishing Nicola’s new vegan identity.

In this account, as with Carol, social conflicts do not just fall away with her newfound self-assurance but actually point up a new, confident *vegan* Nicola. This context of argument over veganism forms the basis for her account of personal growth. Without this rhetorical context of difficulty and criticism a vegan identity and commitment to it would not be so visible, but her newfound confidence and psychological strength would also not be seen.

Conflict with others, however, is commonly told as more clearly negative or problematic than in the extracts above. But these ‘troubles stories’, too, may also be seen as constructing the new vegetarian or vegan identity, as they depict the participants’ commitment or resolve as proven. Paul’s problem-story below, for example, can be heard as testing (and thereby showing) his commitment to becoming vegetarian. As in the preceding extracts, the account can also be heard to justify, excuse and criticise. In interview, Paul foregrounds the difficulty of his social situation:

Or in the worst case scenario, I went to this barbecue and (I usually don't say I'm vegetarian) but I said it and this bloke standing next to me said in perfect Germanic English, "More burnt corpse for me, please", y'know, and holds his plate out towards the barbecue, and it just made me feel, well y' know, it just made me think, 'what a knob', [...] – I won't say it was discouraging- I mean it didn't discourage me from what I was doing - but it made the whole getting what you want, it makes it a lot more difficult to get what you want if you know that's the reaction you're gonna get- (Paul, Interview 1; underscoring added)

As is common, the rhetorical effects of the account can be seen as ambivalent to a degree. Paul nonetheless does report presenting himself as a vegetarian – something that he reportedly does not normally do and has some resistance to. This could be seen, then, as a progressive narrative of Paul developing his vegetarian identity in public. But though he is seen to deal with a problematic reaction ("I mean it didn't discourage me from what I was doing...") this is followed by "- but it made the whole getting what you want...". It is also maintained that such people make being vegetarian a struggle and Paul does *not* appear to shrug off these problems.

Significantly, this isolated 'worst case scenario' becomes the theme for people's reactions *generally*. The exceptionally hostile reaction is no longer presented as the exception but is heard as being the rule. Further, Paul does not say, "it *doesn't* discourage me from what I *am* doing" but uses the past tense. He wasn't discouraged at the time but the tone shifts to a more pessimistic one with the change to present and future tenses: "but it made the whole getting what you want, it makes it a lot more difficult to get what you want if you know that's the reaction you're gonna get-". This bleak future is heard as a certainty in "if you know that's...". Discourse analysts have noted that, routinely, there is a point or a moral to stories told – here the implied moral of the story is perhaps the depiction of the vegetarian as unavoidably embattled, thus pointing up Paul's commitment and mitigating his potential failure. The diary account of the same event, below, also constructs the reaction of others as a significant problem whilst also attending to commitment and the possibility of Paul emerging as too much of a victim.

Also, went to a BBQ tonight & was offered any number of kebabs. For a change I said, 'Oh no, I've stopped eating meat', which provoked the guy on the left of me to say, 'Another burnt corpse'. This left me slightly staggered. Basically, this was the most hostile reaction that I'd ever had in all the times I've told people that I'm vegetarian (including the previous time – 1990~1992). I was really tempted to have a go but didn't. Firstly, I can't swear that I won't go back to eating kebabs. Secondly, I didn't want to come across as a preaching vegetarian. (Paul, diary; 28.7.99; underscoring added)

The comment leaves Paul "slightly staggered" rather than angry. This both requires and renders him less able to retaliate, as his pride might demand. He "was really tempted to have a go" and this foregrounds the idea that he had the impulse and ability to do so. Also, "have a go" can be heard as aggressive which again backgrounds the picture of Paul being bullied or being a meek vegetarian. This issue, perhaps, has greater resonance for a male vegan, not only given gender identities generally but also understandings of vegetarianism and vegan stereotypes as unmasculine. Paul is seen as resisting the temptation to argue but not cowed by the 'hostile reaction' - his lack of response is presented as reasoned: 'Firstly..' and 'Secondly..' clearly list (multiple sufficient) reasons and justify why he did not retaliate at the time.

He does not spell out exactly why the possibility of reverting to meat-eating undermines his right to speak but raises consistency as a requirement and concern. The implication is that publicly giving an account of being vegetarian requires him to live up to it and that this is problematic: describing himself as vegetarian is a problem itself given a rhetorical context of criticism of vegetarians/vegans for inconsistency. The significance of account-giving is flagged but problems of public account-giving themselves also become a resource in Paul's accounting. This extract maintains the elements of doubt and struggle and portrays his vegetarian identity as a fledgling and potentially fragile one. The issue of having a strong commitment is introduced as an important one: "I can't swear", stresses but does not explain a need for a high degree of certainty and commitment, and this is presented as limiting how he can present himself publicly now. A possible future reversion is given as undermining Paul's

position already: private commitment is required to bring off being vegetarian in public. This hesitant orientation to commitment reoccurs in Paul's accounts and will be further discussed in the following chapter on discourses of lapsing. Here though, Paul's account of social problems is visibly complex and involves inner conviction, restraint, self-presentation as a vegetarian (or not), and possibilities for developing and showing commitment.

But showing commitment is presented as problematic in this extract for a second reason. Being seen as 'preaching' is also given as a concern. The nominalization (attributing noun status to) of 'a preaching vegetarian' helps to imply a consensus about the existence of a commonly perceived stereotype of vegetarians as preaching² and, so, the need to avoid it ('...to come across as preaching/preachy/a preacher', say, would not reify preaching into a recognisably vegetarian trait or a sub-type of vegetarians). Paul portrays the transition to vegetarianism as stymied by both uncertainty about his commitment to the new diet and avoidance of being perceived as 'a preaching vegetarian'.

There is more derogation of his aggressor in the interview version than in the diary excerpt (see above). National identity is brought to bear ('in perfect Germanic English...') and Paul derogates and dismisses the source of the attack ("it just made me think, 'what a knob'..."). As in the account from Carol in which her detractors are derogated as being 'right-wing' and/or small-minded, rude farmers, Paul's criticism is heard as justified retaliation for outright hostility. Criticism of non-vegetarians/non-vegans is potentially problematic, as Paul's explicit mention of a 'preaching vegetarian' stereotype suggests. It is also attended to implicitly in the accounts of problems with others.

² Religious associations are indicated by the 'preaching' stereotype. The significance of the historical links with monasticism in the history of vegetarianism (Twigg, 1983) are debateable here, but this image of the preacher perhaps helps to construct the vegetarian/vegan as solitary and different to normal (meat-eating) folk. As only priests should preach and the vegetarian is no kind of priest, this term may also be heard as helping to cast the vegetarian as having no right to speak that way.

III. The dilemma of moral superiority: Criticism and tolerance

In the last chapter, moral reasons predominated in participants' accounts of their motivations for becoming vegetarian or vegan. Accounts of both motivations and problems have been shown to be argumentatively structured and to construct identities through comparison with, and criticism of, others. This co-construction of identities, of the self and others, entails a degree of derogation of the other when taking a moral stance.

According to Self-Categorisation theory (SCT), a positive self-concept is maintained through a process of social comparison and derogation of the out-group. This overlooks the ambivalence and tension in criticising the other indicated by the above accounts which justify criticisms made and construct the out-group rhetorically. The SCT account of identity change, which emphasises self-stereotyping, is contradicted by Paul's account of avoiding a preaching stereotype. What has emerged already is that *both criticism and self-construction involve the management of dilemmas*. Just as moral superiority is the most commonly given motivation, a dilemma of moral superiority is perhaps the most fundamental dilemma managed.

Paul's stereotype of a 'preaching vegetarian' is found in several other participants' accounts. Many new vegans and vegetarians explicitly mention concern over being seen as preaching, righteous or morally superior. In these accounts, a critical edge to accounting now appears explicitly as socially problematic: how to account for one's vegetarianism/veganism without being seen as preaching or criticising others. This social problem is clearly both rooted in and managed by accounting practices. These are, then, accounts of account-giving problems and they support the case for a discursive study of becoming vegetarian/vegan.

These accounts of a preaching vegetarian or vegan stereotype may reveal something of the argumentative context for being vegetarian or vegan but need not be taken as simple indications of inner states of anxiety. The righteous vegetarian/vegan stereotype can be seen as a *rhetorical resource* for vegetarian accounting as well as their detractors. Again, accounts do not just communicate inner concerns but construct

and manage vegetarian or vegan identities. In the accounts below, for example, such problems can be heard as flagging a vegan identity, albeit one with potentially negative aspects:

[...] And errrm, [...] I feel like people might think I'm a preacher [...] I think that people may think that I'm righteous. (Nicola, interview 1; underscoring added)

People are starting to ask me questions about my veganism, a bit hesitantly because I think they're worried that I might go off into a preach. So I keep my answers fairly short. (Cathy, diary, p. 34; underscoring added)

Both accounts depict the participants as likely to be categorised by others as not only vegan but as having strong moral motives. An account of being ascribed a stereotypical vegan identity still helps to inscribe their identity as vegan. This was also seen in Carol's account of enjoying a certain amount of antagonism with farmers. Encountering such conflict and criticism may be seen as a vegetarian/vegan 'rights of passage', and so problem-stories may be expected and provide a resource for narrating the new vegetarian/vegan identity. The dramatic problems or anecdotes recounted in participants' accounts later in this chapter might also be heard as emblematic of, or hallmarks of, vegetarian and vegan identities.

In the accounts of Nicola, Cathy and Carol, being a 'preacher' is described as undesirable and is distanced or denied. This denial need not, however, question the stereotype itself, and the denial may partly trade on a comparison with other, vegetarians who 'really are' preachers. For example,

And she was a vegetarian when I first met her, and she was one of these who was quite- quite righteous with it, and err but gradually she err, she kind of like started eating meat and eats meat now. (Nicola, interview 1, underscoring added)

The ambivalent effects of mentioning but denying a stereotype may be contrasted with the Self-Categorisation theory account of acquiring a new identity as simple self-stereotyping. This chapter argues that ambivalences and tensions are fundamental to

becoming vegetarian/vegan and are particularly clear in relation to claims of moral superiority. Interestingly, a preaching vegetarian/vegan stereotype may be seen as a rhetorical resource to manage this dilemma in the accounts above. The preaching vegetarian stereotype is an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) that works as prolepsis: charges of moral superiority are anticipated and dismissed by couching them in extreme terms. The 'righteous preacher' is easily and implicitly denied but with it more moderate accusations in the same vein are backgrounded with it *en masse*. The dilemma of moral superiority is implicitly constructed as either/or with an excluded middle, and so the threatening stereotype actually provides a way of disposing of possible accusations of moral superiority. Also, using the term 'preaching' uses the same language as might be used by non-vegetarians, and so acts to establish the speaker as moderate.

Accounts of being stereotyped may have further argumentative upshots in addition to flagging vegetarian identity and managing moral superiority. Accounts of stereotyping construct identities and justify, excuse, and criticise. For example, Paul's account of wanting to avoid being seen as 'a preaching vegetarian' has the effect of justifying his behaviour (not arguing back) and his possible future behaviour (not presenting himself as vegetarian, and perhaps, his abandonment of the diet).

So, I think, yeah, if I was more organized it would be easier, but by the same token, I think, being more organized means that I would get more sort of questions about why I'm doing what I'm doing, and that's the bit I find hardest to deal with, because, I mean, however non-confrontationally you put it, people will always take it as a [unclear] attack on their way of doing things, and I suppose it is, when you come down to it, you are rejecting what they do and saying that I regard it as ethically unacceptable. So there's no nice way to talk about it really, unless you've got someone who's come across the concept, thought about it, and decided, on balance, they will carry on eating animals, you're always going to have a hard time. (Paul, interview 1; underscoring added)

This account constructs being seen as preaching to be an inescapable impasse that bars Paul from presenting himself as vegetarian and gives a reason for him not to take

food to work (further allowing obstacles to be foregrounded and potentially warranting lapsing). So, accounts of social conflict can work as justifications for a lack of commitment in behaviour. Responsibility and agency are also denied by casting criticism and offence as *taken* rather than within the control of the vegetarian speaker (“however non-confrontationally you put it, people will always take it as...”). If he comes across as preaching it is just how others take it. Thus Paul denies that he is really preaching but also appears as unable to present himself any other way.

As the earlier contrasting accounts show however, this is by no means a given effect of all accounts of social conflict. Different constructions of vegetarian identities, others, and of what constitute reasonable and justifiable courses of action, are involved. Problems may be presented as either hampering commitment or demonstrating it, weakening the vegetarian identity or strengthening it. Conflict may be constructed as enjoyed, as actively sought, as feared, as dismissed, as avoided, or as inexorably derailing the new identity. In the last extract, being vegetarian is presented as unavoidably and unbearably confrontational and as thereby jeopardised. However, Paul still constructs vegetarianism as morally superior and, even though he does not follow them through, Paul can still be heard as having moral motivations. Similarly, in the interview extract from Jacqui below, the denial of preaching is still a claim of moral motivation:

I don't like discussing moral reasons - I feel like I'm preaching.

(Jacqui, interview 1)

Jacqui distances herself from ‘preaching’ by the fact that she only *feels like* she’s preaching. As in Paul’s account, there is no nice way of talking about moral reasons and ‘preaching’ is again heard as a matter of appearances, and Jacqui is also heard as being uncomfortable with seeing herself as preaching. In other accounts too, moral righteousness and criticism are constructed as matters of personal concern and self-criticism as well as self-presentation to others. Sometimes, this dilemma between taking a moral stance and being seen as righteous and superior is heard as a continuing inner debate, as in the extract below: “...so I wonder if they’re right sometimes”. Clare can be heard as not wanting to *be seen as* “trying to be better than

everybody else” but also as not wanting to *see herself* that way either (“...did bother me though...”):

Something they said did bother me though [...] they said, “You think you’re above us, don’t you, but you’re a bit boring really, aren’t you?” How do you answer that? I said “No”, but something got through and I didn’t have a clever reply ready in time. Something about living by your principles - people often see it as a kind of middle-class priority, and that all it is is trying to be better than everybody else. It does boost my self-esteem to be pursuing a greater-good lifestyle, so I wonder if they’re right sometimes ... (Clare, diary; p. 5; underscoring added)

‘Preaching’ is attended to in accounts implicitly as well as being mentioned explicitly. As seen, accounts mentioning preaching/righteous stereotypes can also be heard as denials. For example, Clare claims to be “living by [her] principles” and “pursuing a greater good lifestyle”, but the ‘confessional’ account of self-examination and lingering guilt inoculates somewhat against appearing to be self-righteous. Whether public self-presentation or self-talk, these denials can be seen as part of a general feature of vegetarian/vegan accounting to show tolerance and to distance the self from a morally superior, preaching, self-righteous stereotype. The tension between having a moral stance and criticising others is a major feature in accounts of social problems. The *explicit* accounts of anxiety over appearing to ‘preach’ are shadowed by a wider implicit management of criticism of others. Instead, vegetarian/vegan identities may be promoted and meat-eaters criticised on other, less moral or ‘righteous’ grounds. Below, Nicola’s friend, Joe, is presented as being a fussy eater, as overweight, and as dishonest about how much meat she eats:

Joe had, yep, a steak-pie. Thoughts of, “I’m not that big a meat-eater”, rung around my head. She left the salad on her plate stating, “that’s not a salad”. [...] Anyway my 11 stone 8 lb. makes more of a statement about eating a vegan diet than her 15 stone, carnivorous diet does. Oh, bitchy ...
(Nicola, diary; p. 30; underscoring added)

As reported by Jacqui, above (“I don’t like discussing moral reasons”), many participants also describe a wish to *avoid* talking publicly about the subject altogether, or at least moral reasons. Accounts of avoidance may depict the speaker as unwilling to moralise or be seen as moralising, and as trying to be tolerant whilst still having strong moral motivations. See below, for example (“It is tricky though, when you feel as strongly as I do”):

In the few weeks since my decision, I have felt as though the only people I would be able to associate with are other vegans, but I now recognise that this is impractical and that the adaptation has to be made by me, not those around me. In my more rational moments I resolve that I will achieve this by not referring to my diet unless asked or if I or if I find myself in a situation where I can’t avoid it, such as a dinner invitation. It is tricky though, when you feel as strongly as I do.

(Cathy, diary; p. 11-12; underscoring added)

Significantly, a total of 10/23 participants (43%) reported avoiding talking about their new diet with meat-eaters, for a variety of reasons (see Appendix 4: Table 5). For example:

I mean, it’s not just over this that I’m so reluctant to come clean - I do not generally talk about any such “bad dinner” topics of conversation - politics, religion or whatever. (Paul, diary; p. 19; underscoring added)

Being ‘reluctant to come clean’ suggests a habitual strategy of concealment in his self-presentation and a privately held inner attitude distinct from this. The phrase, “any such ‘bad dinner’ topics of conversation”, sets up as a *given* that vegetarianism is, or is generally considered by everyone to be, an unacceptable topic and that Paul is not alone in avoiding it. “[B]ad dinner” topic” may be heard as ironic and, so, as distancing Paul from that attitude, but vegetarianism is still heard as anathema and offensive to others. This strengthens the image of vegetarianism as difficult or impolite to present in public even -or perhaps especially- at the table. Subsuming vegetarianism within a larger set of supposed traditionally socially undesirable and best-avoided topics (“politics, religion or whatever”) helps to normalise and validate

his avoidance of vegetarianism. Also, setting his avoidance within a general pattern of personal behaviour (“it’s not just over this [...] - I do not generally talk about any such...”) and associating it with his character suggests that it may be hard to change. The account, then, presents him as both personally inclined and socially required to avoid the topic.

Moralising was also managed in accounts by praising vegetarian and vegan diets, or criticising the *practice* of meat-eating rather than attacking the *people* who eat meat. This avoidance of directly criticising the person is less likely to invite accusations of being righteous and preaching. For example, Richard, who described his vegan diet as ‘stronger’ and ‘clearer’ than a vegetarian one, does not say that vegetarianism is weaker and more vague or that vegetarians themselves are vague and weak. Also, there is tolerance and only indirect criticism in Paula’s account below, in which she appears reluctant to judge:

I go down to north Devon every so often (to surf), and the most convenient place for me to stay is a small farm which also has a camping field and does B&B. This is a bit of a contradiction for me because I don’t agree with farming animals, but I still stay on this farm, and will probably stay there next time I go (next month) unless the weather is bad in which case I’ll stay with a friend. I suppose that I really should stay somewhere else, but this place is ideal. The people that run it are really nice, and it’s hard to think that they are doing anything that I would consider to be ‘bad’. (Paula, diary; p. 14; underscoring added)

Paula is heard to praise the farmers as being ‘really nice’, and undercuts and distances herself from criticism further by her use of quotation marks around ‘bad’. But this is a denial of being judgemental rather than a denial that the farmers are actually doing anything bad: “it’s hard to think that they are doing anything that I would consider to be ‘bad’”. This ambivalence, and the contradictory accounts of tolerance to which it gives rise, may be one of the most fundamental dilemmas which vegetarians manage. SCT’s account of untrammelled out-group derogation and self-stereotyping overlooks this dilemma around claiming, or appearing to claim, moral superiority. This dilemma

may be seen, in part, as a feature of way the construction of the identities of the speaker and others are tied together.

A preaching, self-righteous or superior vegetarian stereotype represents both a hazard to the vegetarian and a potential rhetorical resource for denying the accusation of moralising. It is a cultural resource for both critics and vegetarians themselves. This stereotype is seen to threaten the vegetarian/vegan identity and to be avoided but may also be seen to *aid* the new vegetarians/vegans in pre-emptively disposing of any criticism as morally superior by denying this extreme case/identity. Willetts, in contrast, reports a total absence of criticism of meat-eaters in the accounts from her sample of vegetarians and vegans. Leaving aside differences in respondents, recruitment and interviewing between the two studies, this too is misleading and again misses the complexity of criticism. Tolerance, again, is only half the story and must be seen rhetorically. Some degree of criticism is to be expected given the argumentative nature of accounts of identity-change, out-grouping and comparison, especially in view of the moral motivations given by most of the new vegetarians and vegans - and this expectation is acknowledged and claimed by the participants themselves. It is contended that criticism of the old diet and of the new out-group of meat-eaters is an important basis for accounts of being motivated and committed to the new identity. Willetts misses argument and moral criticism of meat-eaters and the tensions surrounding how that criticism constructs the speaker. It will be argued that the greatest conflict between criticism and tolerance is seen when investment in the new vegetarian/vegan identity conflicts with investment in existing relationships.

The above extract from Paula begins to suggest the importance of personal relationships. Paula knows these farmers personally and she has an ongoing involvement and relationship with them. Far from being depicted as bigots, they are described as 'really nice'. As well as demonstrating tolerance, as noted above, this helps to mitigate her staying on their farm (along with it being 'ideal'). Her reluctance to openly attack them might also be seen as reflecting her investment in a relationship with them more generally. But also as noted, although tolerance or a reluctance to criticise is heard, judgement is not totally absent. Rather than a complete lack of criticism or resolution of the dilemma there is tension and management of ambivalence in which relationship figures strongly.

IV. Relationships and the repression of criticism

As noted, previous studies have emphasised personal relationships as important sites of potential conflict in the transition to a vegetarian or vegan diet. For example, Amato & Partridge (1989) report negative parental responses and major changes in family relationships. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) also stress the significant effects of the new diet on relationships:

This applies most to the relationships within the elementary family, for example between parents and children. Relations with wider kin and in-laws may also be affected, as indeed may relations with friends and colleagues.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a, p. 276)

This is borne out by the data from this study in that problems are reported most frequently in connection with family, followed by friends, work colleagues, and lastly, strangers. However, this chapter has argued that accounts of problems with others do not simply reveal conflicts but are complex argumentative constructions of problems and the behaviour and identities of the speaker and others. A particular reluctance to criticise known and liked individuals may be claimed or made out within the accounts. In the remainder of this chapter it will be argued that the notion of *relationship* – both as context and as identity – is a useful one for understanding accounts of problems with others.

Certain ties and investments exist which are not seen outside close relationships and thus, new problems are reported and new features in the accounts of them are seen. A major set of reported problems concerned the social aspects of shared meals. Beardsworth & Keil also note this to be a commonly given area of conflict within families:

Perhaps the settings in which intra-familial tensions became most pronounced were the kinds of gatherings where family identity and solidarity are, ideally, celebrated and re-asserted. Discordant notes in such a situation seemed to be particularly unwelcome. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 278)

Cathy writes,

Anyway the first hurdle was the annual restaurant dinner which Steve's mum holds every year for the whole family. [...] It was made very clear that we were expected to attend this dinner, despite my discomfort at being surrounded by people stuffing their faces with dead animals and despite the fact that the restaurant had not a clue about how to cater for a vegan.

(Cathy, diary; p. 46; underscoring added)

Steve's Mum is presented as being insensitive to Cathy's feelings and needs, and as tyrannical and domineering: "It was made very clear that we were expected to attend this dinner, despite my discomfort...". The impersonal phrasing, "It was made...", backgrounds criticism of the mother-in-law but it is also as if Cathy is confronting an edict from 'The In-laws' rather than receiving an invitation from an individual which might be declined. The significance of power-relations or obligations within the family is also indicated, which again underlines the importance of relationships.

This account may also be heard as showing Cathy's commitment to her relationship with her husband, Steve. The account also casts Cathy as tolerant: as prepared to endure the meal to avoid friction with Steve's family. There is no tolerance without a problem, and here both the 'hurdle' and Cathy's tolerance of it are heightened by Cathy's isolation, moral disgust and discomfort (for example, "being surrounded by people stuffing their faces with dead animals"). The scene depicted is extreme and marks out Cathy's difference to "the whole family"; the situation is heard as intolerable and yet somehow tolerated. The use of 'anti-language'³ can be seen in the phrase "dead animals" (instead of 'meat') with the effect of stressing Cathy's experience, her difference, and a 'matter-of-fact' moral criticism. This moral criticism is underlined by "stuffing their faces", which is not so much morally righteous but

³ 'Anti-language' is defined by O'Sullivan *et al.* as, "A term used to describe those languages that are more or less consciously generated and sustained to express opposition to a dominant linguistic order" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1983; p. 12). Though Cathy is not using a different *language* her *language use* here deviates conspicuously from the linguistic norms (which favour the word 'meat', not 'dead animals') and shares with anti-languages a common link to 'anti-societies' (here, vegetarians and vegans) and their function "to express opposition to the dominant order, [...] and as a means of expressing the tensions and antagonisms between the realities of subordinate groups and the wider, hegemonic order." (p. 12)

instead paints an ugly picture of excess and insensitivity. Criticism that avoids explicitly moral grounds was discussed earlier in this chapter.⁴

Extreme description is again seen in an earlier diary-account of the same recalled and much-anticipated annual Christmas dinner:

Even without this aspect [poor choice of vegan food], I have to say that I do not enjoy sitting with fourteen other people who are scoffing pate + rack of lamb and gushing about how tender it is. I want to scream at them that they are eating lamb for Christ's sake, and not some polystyrene-trayed anonymous red stuff, but actual lamb's flesh, that one of those trusting, boingy woolly little beasts has been stunned electrically, had a bolt shot through its skull, been chopped up, stuck in an oven, and that is what you are drivelling on about how good it tastes. [...] It makes me sick and I have to pretend that I'm enjoying myself because someone else is paying. So that's what's going on in my head whilst the public face holds its tongue and smiles sweetly at the kindness of the restaurant in providing some tedious vegetable lasagne. And I know that I'm the one out of step. The added complication is that Steve is tucking in with the rest.

(Cathy, diary, p. 12; underscoring added)

The difficulty of the situation, and so, also, Cathy's tolerance and her commitment to Steve, are heightened by the foregrounding of moral objections/discourses about meat. There is scathing moral criticism of the assembled family members for their insouciance, "gushing" and "drivelling on about" how good the "actual lamb's flesh" tastes. "[G]ushing and "drivelling" suggest stupidity as well as the emotional insensitivity of their unrelenting talk about meat in front of Cathy. "[S]cuffing", like "stuffing their faces" in the previous extract, helps to give an impression of excess and degeneracy.

The significance of Cathy and Steve's relationship is heard in the specific mention of Steve's "tucking in with the rest" as being a problem, but it may further be seen in

⁴ The *gluttonous* meat-eater is again seen in an account from Nicola (interview 1):
Errm, I mean I suppose I think like, 'Look at you, like, filling your face' {laughing}. But yeah, it's everybody's own choice.

what is said, and not said, about Steve. Cathy is the only one eating the “tedious vegetable lasagne” and feeling “out of step” (“fourteen other people” and “surrounded by” in the previous extract compound this). But although Steve’s “tucking in with the rest” places him in the other camp (with the rest of *his* family) and draws attention to Cathy’s isolation, it minimises criticism of him. He is not described as “drivelling on” or “gushing”, and he is “tucking in” rather than “scoffing” or “stuffing his face”. Direct criticism of Steve is avoided. Although the focus is on being a lone vegan “out of step” among many meat-eaters, the use of “they/them” also puts Steve as an individual in the background throughout the criticism (e.g., “I want to scream at them that they are...”). Nor does Cathy, for example, blame Steve for expecting her to attend the meal despite her discomfort and does not ponder alternatives to going. Steve’s involvement is “the added complication” rather than the main focus of the difficulty or its cause. Here, the conflict is not with faceless categories of “farmers” or “right-wing” types, as seen in Carol’s diary, but with a partner and in-laws. The former, more vaguely identified, group of targets may be criticised with greater impunity; here Steve and his behaviour are characterised differently to the rest of his family.

The relationships between Cathy, Steve and the rest of the family are all implicitly *constructed in the account* as well as being part of the *context* for the accounting: *relationships are, in this respect, both contextual and textual*. The obviously poor relationship between Cathy and her in-laws could be seen as a biographical context for potential criticism, as well as itself being constructed in her critical account. In contrast, Cathy’s relationship with Steve is here and elsewhere always constructed positively.

Tolerance and suppressed criticism

A further feature of the second extract from Cathy is the construction of *suppressed* feelings and criticism, see especially:

I want to scream at them [...] It makes me sick and I have to pretend that I’m enjoying myself because someone else is paying. So that’s what’s going on in

my head whilst the public face holds it's tongue and smiles sweetly at the kindness of the restaurant in providing some tedious vegetable lasagne.

“I want to scream”, “I have to pretend”, “[s]o that's what's going on in my head whilst...”, “the public face” and “holds it's tongue”, are clear depictions of suppressing true (critical) inner feelings. This account is furthered by the extreme and opposing descriptions of Cathy's inner emotions and outer behaviour: “I want to scream [...] It makes me sick”, is counter-posed with, “smiles sweetly”. The contradiction within the sarcastic “the kindness of the restaurant [...] some tedious vegetable lasagne” helps to conjure up both Cathy's outer polite dissemblance and the contrasting anger behind it.⁵ “I want to scream” (rather than I want to *say*) also suggests that what is suppressed is a desire to be rude and aggressive in a context which demands a polite facade.

An account of suppressed emotions (anger, disgust, moral outrage) can be seen as managing the dilemma of being moral and critical yet also tolerant – in this case out of loyalty to Steve. Strong emotions and judgements, although not expressed at the time, are reported as not only felt now but also as acutely felt *at the time*, albeit hidden. Restraint and tolerance are thrown further into relief by the contrasting characterisation of the in-laws as totally unrestrained and tactless to the point of provocation (‘gushing about’, ‘drivelling on’, ‘scoffing’, ‘stuffing their faces’) – they are not presented as reciprocating or even acknowledging Cathy's tolerance.

But these accounts of suppressed emotions not only highlight tolerance but also manage it. *Too much* tolerance is also possible and these descriptions of suppressed criticism can also be seen as saving-face and asserting her vegan identity. She was polite at the time but now indulges her invective against her meat-eating tormentors, and moreover, that is what she was feeling at the time as well (and the more excoriating the criticism now, the greater her past act of restraint). Cathy's accounts construct her vegan identity without inviting accusations of intolerance, but they also reflect and construct relationships and suggest the investments and obligations associated with them.

⁵ Sarcasm and irony are perhaps particularly useful for accounts of suppression. The contradictory second meaning behind a veil of polite literal meaning mirrors the inner ambivalence.

Accounts of tolerance and of unexpressed feelings are given by many other participants in connection with close relationships. Not only eating with others but also *preparing food* for partners and or children was a fairly common complaint, mentioned by 7 female participants. This represents 30% of the whole sample (7/23), or 37% of all female participants (7/19). It is reported by women only and when seen as a proportion of the *female participants who live with meat-eating partners or family*, the rate of complaints about cooking meat rises to 77% (or 7/9). Just one woman who lived with a meat-eating partner (1/9) did *not* to cook meat for him (Cathy). Cathy reports that she and her husband even stopped shopping together, though without acrimony.

This account of being prepared to cook a Sunday lunch for her family develops a tolerant and moderate vegan identity for Nicola:

Nicola: But it is a thought of like making Yorkshire Puddings that I can eat, but I mean I've like said I'm quite happy to like cook a Sunday lunch for Ian and Jesse, but Ian's not particularly into that.

Interviewer: Cos- for himself?

Nicola: For himself because- because he has this family values thing of like a Sunday dinner is something we all sit down to, we all eat the same thing.

(Nicola, interview, 1; underscoring added)

She does not cook a Sunday joint, but this is her partner's choice rather than her refusal. Whereas Cathy's in-laws are 'gushing', Ian is reported as being tolerant and moderate himself: "I'm quite happy to [...] but Ian's not particularly into that". Reciprocity and solidarity in the relationship is suggested and this is also hearable in "something we all sit down to, we all eat the same thing". More often, however, cooking meat for a partner is reported as done but as problematic, though this too allows tolerance to be narrated.

I do feel uneasy when comes to eating out because all my social groups are meat-eater. I don't mind to have limited vegetarian choice but watching them

eating meat is a bit unpleasant. My spouse is meat-eater too. I feel bad to cook his meat for him. (Shannen, diary; p. 3; underscoring added)

Shannen is heard as tolerant in cooking her spouse's meat despite feeling bad. To cook meat without feeling bad would potentially undermine her vegetarian identity and would be *over*-tolerant. Her vegetarian moral sensibilities are voiced through this and the report that watching her friends eat meat is unpleasant. However, criticism of her husband is once again implicit only: Shannen says that watching her social groups eat meat is unpleasant but does not say this about her husband, only cooking it for him. Again, the relationship can be seen as reflected in the degree of criticism but is also constructed by the account and its avoidance of criticism.

Accounts of repression

Another explicit account of unexpressed feelings is seen in Jenny's talk about cooking for her husband and children:

Y'know I put it out of my mind. If I stop and think about what I've got cooking up I'll- it'll do my head in {laughing} Y'know I start picturing what it looked like when it was alive. (Jenny, interview 1; underscoring added)

Here, the account differs to that of Cathy's account of putting on a 'public face' in that emotions are described by Cathy as suppressed in public for the sake of others whereas Jenny claims to "put it out of my mind" in private: an account of *repression* rather than suppression (though she is conscious of this now and so this is not true repression, or at least not successful repression). In both cases, the behaviours (attending the Christmas meal and cooking meat) strongly suggest compliance with spousal or maternal roles, and conflict between the new vegetarian/vegan identity and normative behaviours associated with roles within the family is indicated. This conflict is not resolved but is managed in the accounts of ambivalence (suppressed or repressed feelings) seen above.

The account of repressed disgust above may be seen as managing the account-giving dilemma of moral superiority and criticism within the context of the family and

partnership. Once more, though she cooks the meat and there is no open criticism of the spouse this account of repressed revulsion once more retains moral judgement. “[I]t’ll do my head in” is an extreme but ambiguous term, which is perhaps fitting, as Jenny is talking about something which will happen *if* she did stop and think, which she reportedly hasn’t. She does not say what she would/will *do* and there is a visible shift from “I’ll...”, to, “it’ll...” (“I’ll-it’ll do my head in”), which perhaps indicates an avoidance of linking her feelings with her actions – alternative courses of action to cooking is what the account claims are being repressed. This is an account of not acting on or wanting to act on her feelings, and her continued catering to her family depends upon this.

The importance of the concept of repression as a resource in accounts is suggested by its recurrence throughout the corpus of data. As Moscovici (1961) and Parker (1998) have shown, the language of unconscious motives and repression has wide currency outside of the professional sphere of psychoanalysis. This can be seen as part of a more general influence within contemporary Western society of ideas from psychology and what Rose calls the ‘Psy-complex’. Billig notes discursive psychology’s failure to engage with psychoanalytic ideas but argues that its interest in how psychological phenomena are constituted through conversation suggests that:

Discursive psychologists could specifically examine the current use of psychoanalytic concepts, thereby examining in discursive detail the phenomenon identified in broad out-line by Moscovici. (Billig, 1997; p. 143)

That is, “they could see what is being ‘done’ with talk about ‘hidden, unconscious motives’” (1997; p. 143). The corpus of accounts in this study suggests that discourses of repression may be particularly useful in constructing accounts of conflict and managing dilemmas of identity in accounting. Thus *social* conflicts between the vegetarian/vegan identity and investments in relationships are *described as internal conflicts*. As argued, these repression narratives manage these conflicting identities and commitments to them, including a dilemma between criticism and tolerance.

The conflict between veganism and criticism of loved ones is clearly seen in Cathy's report, below, that she *represses or avoids talking about the topic of veganism and animals with her husband*:

It's better we don't talk about it [...] I don't like being disagreed with by Steve on this topic [...] It works up to a point. [...] I just have to not think about it really. [...] It's getting harder. I just have to get used to it.

(Cathy, interview 3; underscoring added).

Primarily, this is presented as a way for Cathy to deal with feeling bad about Steve's meat-eating. Cathy's strong feelings are heard in her finding it difficult when Steve disagrees with her on this topic. Singling out this topic underlines both her vegan identity and also suggests tolerance again, as it implies that she doesn't have a problem with being disagreed with on other topics. There is also an obvious reported reluctance to argue with her spouse.

The passive phrasing of "I don't like being disagreed with by Steve", may be significant also: Cathy does not say, "I don't like Steve disagreeing with me", which could sound too intolerant; nor, "I don't like disagreeing with Steve", which would focus on her opinion as potentially changeable; nor "I don't like us disagreeing with each other", for similar reasons. The construction, 'being disagreed with by--', foregrounds the importance of *the act of talking* – the *voicing* of differences rather than the holding of different beliefs – and so allows for the possibility of topic avoidance. 'Being disagreed with' by Steve in conversation is more avoidable than Steve being in a state of disagreement with her. This is something Steve or both of them together can realistically do, and in so doing demonstrate cooperation, and so it is more constructive as a strategy for managing the problem.

Repression in accounting

This last extract points to cooperative joint action which is involved in the conversational suppression of the topic of vegetarianism/veganism, particularly its moral aspects. As the extracts above suggest, however, the motivations for avoidance may not be the same for both parties, or for different vegetarians. Paul may be

reluctant to talk about his new identity socially. Cathy is more especially concerned with avoiding the issue with her husband and this has become a routinized and cooperative way of dealing with a problem (the couple's avoidance of the issue may also be seen in their no longer going food shopping together). But Cathy and Steve's mutual avoidance of the topic also reportedly helps Cathy to repress the topic in her own mind ("I just have to not think about it really"). The importance of relationships is again apparent in these accounts of conflicts, duties and ambivalences and cooperative strategies for managing them.

This reported cooperative topic-avoidance is reminiscent of Billig's discussion of joint action in the shared repression of a topic (Billig, 1998; and 1999b, p. 325). The above accounts of avoidance betray *awareness* of the topic and its avoidance, and so do not constitute true Freudian repression from conscious awareness.⁶ As Billig argues (e.g., 1997, 1999a), accounts can also be analysed from the point of view of repressive *activity* rather than the speakers' appeal to notions of repression. Language is seen as fundamentally repressive as well as expressive: as one thing is talked about other things are left unsaid, other topics neglected or closed down. Repression thus becomes not only a claim made by speakers but an accounting activity which discursive analysis may focus upon. Like *claims* of repression, the repressive *effects* of accounts also manage dilemmas of identity.

An important aspect of the shared avoidance noted above is that, "speakers can combine to chase it away by replacing the topic of their shared attention" (Billig, 1999b, p. 325). As Billig stresses, "[t]he successful act of repression needs a replacement act or thought: the censor's gaps must be replaced" (1999b, p. 325). The voids left by avoidances in conversation must be filled. Repression is accomplished not merely through silence but by changing the topic or discourse, as the extract

⁶ However, an absolute distinction between suppression of a topic and its repression from consciousness is difficult to maintain. Whilst accounts which explicitly mention repression or avoidance may be using the *idea* of repression in accounting, they may also describe the repressive effects of earlier conversational avoidances. Repression of vegetarianism, or anything else, may be conceived to have degrees of success. Also, the awareness of the topic, the need to repress and the success of repression it will depend upon the rhetorical context. Within the context of the interview or diary, topics are discussed which are more problematic in conversations with others. Whether those others are vegetarian, vegan or meat-eating will be one factor in that rhetorical context. The relationship with the other is also important and, as has been argued, motivates avoidance and repression of criticism.

below suggests (“...and the subject is changed”).

But it’s strange, overall you can see the shutters coming down at the point where they cease to agree with you (or possibly cease to care), the eye contact breaks and the subject is changed. (Cathy, diary, p. 38; underscoring added)

The repression of criticism of spouses through talking of other things is seen in accounts which either furnish excuses or which emphasise their positive qualities. Below, for example, Cathy describes her husband’s meat-eating in a way which differs from her descriptions of other meat-eaters:

He is a good man, but he had an upbringing which taught him that it’s OK to kill animals. That’s hard to undo. It’s also not easy to reconcile a philosophy one has fashioned for oneself of harmlessness at all costs whilst at the same time being in love with someone who only buys Freedom Food pork because he will be nagged if he doesn’t. But love him I do, and that will not change. It’s not his fault that his wife has turned into a militant freak.

(Cathy, diary; p. 33; underscoring added)

Here, Cathy’s tolerance and commitment to the relationship is again suggested but is not highlighted by an account of extreme conflict and criticism (as in her account of eating with in-laws) but by Cathy’s understanding and forgiveness of Steve’s differences. The potential problem of Steve’s meat-eating is still present but is explained, understood and thereby mitigated. Cathy is presented as understanding and Steve’s position is portrayed as understandable. In other accounts Cathy is not as understanding of other meat-eaters nor are they portrayed sympathetically.

Steve’s attitudes are described as determined by his upbringing, which is argued to be ‘hard to undo’. This backgrounds her spouse’s freedom and responsibility for his attitudes. Like the use of ideas of unconscious motives, this construction of attitudes as socially determined can be seen as drawing on common-sense folk psychological theory. But whilst a sort of social learning theory is applied to Steve, Cathy is heard as an independent thinker: “...a philosophy one has fashioned for oneself”. This works to

stress Cathy's personal investment and commitment to a morally superior veganism and backs up her account of being tolerant ("It's also not easy...").

The conflict is heard as, "It's also not easy to reconcile a philosophy [...] whilst at the same time being in love with someone who...". Cathy expresses her love for Steve (she does not say, "whilst being *married* to someone who..."), and though love is also the source of the conflict for Cathy, this represses criticism of Steve. The repeated stressing of her love for him displaces and wards off other, harsher words ("being in love with [...] but love him I do, and that will not change"; "He is a good man..."). Criticism is further backgrounded in that Steve is reported as buying the more ethical *Freedom Food* pork. Steve's own efforts at compromise and conciliation are thus foregrounded.

'Militant freak', like the term 'preaching' used in earlier extracts, also shows Cathy as able to see herself from the point of view of meat-eaters, and its ironic use presents her as neither defensive nor over-sensitive. "It's not his fault that his wife has turned into a militant freak", and the image of Cathy 'nagging' him, are self-deprecating but also paint Steve as a hapless, long-suffering figure less deserving of disapproval. The change from 'his wife' to 'militant freak' also alludes to the fact that it is she, not Steve, who has changed since they married and Steve is heard as tolerant of this. This is also true of, "It's not his fault...".

Concentrating on Steve's good points to the exclusion of differences can be seen as repressing conflict and criticism further, and is also seen in Cathy's diary:

You will note that Steve is continuing to be supportive - it was he who found the wholefood shop's ad in a magazine in Trogg's, and he who found it physically so we know where to go next time. He's my hero.

(Cathy, diary; p. 24; underscoring added)

Steve's otherness and his potential failings are not excused here but are absent altogether, with positive features being heard instead. "You will note that...", constructs the objectivity or 'facticity' of Steve's good behaviour. Also, "...is

continuing to be...” emphasises his past record of being supportive. Further, ‘we’ in “...so we know where to go...”, also backgrounds difference and emphasises their unity. “He’s my hero”, reifies his good deeds into a concrete noun, identity, and label, and suggests that Steve is fighting on her side, which again pushes away ideas of difference or conflict between them. Another respondent, Greg, also strongly praises his non-vegetarian wife:

For a few days now, Sharon has been compiling her own Vegetarian Cookery Book. She’s been borrowing recipe books from various friends and copying down her favourite ones and putting them in a four-ring binder. This is on top of buying new ‘Vege’ cook books herself. Could anyone ask for a more supportive partner?

(Greg, diary; p. 12; underscoring added)

As in the preceding extract, the good efforts of the partner are worked up: “For a few days now [...] This is on top of...”. The efforts themselves are not merely mentioned but are lingered over: “compiling” is broken down into “...borrowing [...] and copying down [...] and putting them in...”, and ‘various friends’ can also be heard as emphasising the scale of the operation. Significantly, that she has ‘favourite ones’ suggests her interest and enthusiasm for vegetarian cooking/food and that she is not doing all this reluctantly. Like ‘He’s my hero’, above, the list of supportive behaviour concludes with a superlative identity ascription in the closing rhetorical question, “Could anyone ask for a more supportive partner?”. Sharon’s meat-eating is not mentioned and, once more, the significant issue is her *support* and tolerance rather than similarity or solidarity. The many good things said about Sharon’s supportiveness repress accounts of difference and discord.

It has been argued that the self, others’ identities, and relationships are constructed in concert. Thus, these accounts of supportive partners also contribute to the narration of Cathy and Greg’s own vegan/vegetarian identities: their veganism and vegetarianism is seen as something which their spouses support; vegetarians and vegans are seen as able to have good relationships; and vegetarianism does not necessarily entail marital strife. They depict their relationships as generally healthy and supportive, and portray being vegetarian/vegan as respected by those that count.

Gergen's notion of *identity as relationship* (Gergen, 1994) can be used to emphasise the significance of relationships for identities and related conflicts. According to Gergen, self-narratives or identity claims require the affirmation and support of others. Consequently, there is "a delicate interdependence of constructed narratives [and a] *network of reciprocating identities*" (1994; p. 209, emphasis in original). "Constructions of the self require a supporting cast" (p. 208) inasmuch as accomplishing and maintaining an identity is a matter of negotiation with others. Self-narratives are, then, 'knitted into' the self-constructions of others. With relevance to identity-change such as becoming vegetarian or vegan:

Because one's identity can be maintained for only so long as others play their proper supporting role, and because one is required to play supporting roles in their constructions, *the moment any participant chooses to renege, he or she threatens the array of interdependent constructions.*

(Gergen, 1994; p. 209; emphasis added)

So, Cathy's becoming vegetarian and vegan 'reneges on' her and Steve's previous mutually supportive meat-eating identities, and places Steve in a new out-group of 'meat-eaters'. Her prior supporting role to his meat-eating identity is now replaced by implicit and potentially more explicit criticism ("...I am very aware that my new lifestyle is a direct criticism of his so I don't want to push it too far", Cathy, diary; p. 9). Equally, support is lost both ways – Steve's self-narrative and actions do not support Cathy's new vegan identity.

This chapter concurs with previous studies on vegetarianism and veganism, which have pointed to social conflicts and possible problems for close relationships (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; Maurer, 1989). However, this chapter has argued against taking at face value reports of experiences or consequences of becoming vegetarian or vegan. Attempting to look through reports of social problems onto the common experiences beyond is eschewed in favour of an analysis of accounting-practices themselves. It is contended that becoming vegetarian or vegan is understood and partly constituted through accounting practices which construct social identities and related versions of events. Accounting is a medium through which

vegetarian/vegan identities and experiences are understood, negotiated, contested and realised. Efforts to 'triangulate' the reality of vegetarian/vegan experiences to which reports refer, or a phenomenological or humanistic aim to convey participants' subjective experiences (described more or less accurately by reports), are replaced by a closer attention to the detail of accounts and their constructed, performative effects. Accounts of problems do not just report problems but are themselves a forum for justifying, criticising and constructing the self and others. Rather than any specific problems or patterns in experiences, becoming vegetarian or vegan is characterised by fundamental ambivalences and dilemmas of accounting. Accordingly, in order to go beyond an account of potential conflict (Maurer, 1989) or possible 'breakdown' in relationships (Amato & Partridge, 1989) it is necessary to consider the ways in which these potential problems are avoided and managed by accounting practices. This chapter has investigated the character of these dilemmas and ambivalences and their management in talk.

These dilemmas, it has been argued, arise, in large measure, out of the co-construction of identities of the self and other and the conflicts between them. A rhetorical-discursive psychological approach to identities emphasises social comparison and argumentation in accounts. Accounts of social conflict and problems can be seen to narrate vegetarian and vegan identities by comparison with, and implicit criticism of, meat-eating out-groups. However, criticism of meat-eaters courts the attribution of a 'preaching' or 'righteous' vegetarian/vegan stereotype which is to be avoided, and so, in fashioning a positive vegetarian/vegan identity for the self, criticism of others must be managed. This can be seen as a *dilemma of moral superiority*, made particularly salient by the moral motivations given by most participants seen previously in Chapter 5. Criticism is thus constrained, justified, and avoided. Whether conflict with others is celebrated or lamented, accounts of problems typically construct vegetarians/vegans as tolerant as well as committed. Accounts of suppressed or repressed criticism, for example, presented participants as harbouring moral motivations but tolerant, accommodating and appreciative of loved ones – as neither too moral nor too tolerant.

These dilemmas of identity around moral superiority might be further characterised as a conflict between everyday moralities (including politeness) on the one hand and

vegetarian/vegan moralities on the other. However, as is most clear in the accounts of loved ones, the dilemmas also concern a conflict between investments in the new vegetarian/vegan identity and in existing relationships. These relationships and commitment to them are constructed in accounts but they may also be conceptualised as providing a degree of rhetorical context. This biographical context for identity-construction may, in turn, be seen as merely part of wider webs of autobiography and self-narrative (Gergen's notions of 'nested narratives' may be useful here, though without a rigid hierarchy). It has been argued that relationships are crucial to understanding criticism of others (and its absence) in accounts: both in the sense of constructing accounts of the self in comparison with and in conjunction with others, and in the sense of established relationships such as the family. From an autobiographical perspective particularly, relationships are both a context within which the new identity is narrated and negotiated and, because they are themselves not 'givens', are also constructed by the accounts presented. The importance of relationship and Gergen's 'network of reciprocating identities' or supporting roles can be detected in the particular avoidance of criticism of loved ones. Criticism of participants' nearest and dearest was seen to be avoided most of all.

It was suggested that an important feature of ethical food avoidance is the avoidance of the topic in conversation, thus underlining the need to look at absences as well as presences in talk. As well as identifying claims to be suppressing or repressing criticism or feelings, it was argued that accounts themselves repress, most notably criticism of loved ones – for example, by excusing and praising as well as avoiding areas of moral difference. This discursive repression of criticism suggests one way of avoiding and managing potential problems. Close relations support each other's identities through the kind of repression and shared repression in conversation described by Billig. Once the interdependent identities are threatened through identity-change, such as becoming vegan, this joint repression may be an important means of co-operatively managing the conflicting identities, as indicated in the final accounts above which express support and repress difference. The discourse and activity of repression will be discussed further in Chapter 8. Chapter 7 will identify another dilemma of vegetarian and vegan identity in an examination of participants' accounts of lapsing and will further develop the issues of stereotypes and relationships as rhetorical contexts and resources.

7

Discourses of lapsing, temptation and desire

- I. The discourse of 'lapsing'
- II. Dilemmas of abstinence
- III. Discourses of desire and temptation
- IV. Being a food lover
- V. Desire, seduction and relationship

In, *'Bacon sandwiches got the better of me': Meat-eating and vegetarianism in South-East London*, Willetts (1997) makes much of instances of meat-eating by self-defined vegetarians. In a section headed, *'What is a Vegetarian?'*, which overviews patterns of avoidance in vegetarian diets, her answer to the question is built upon a discussion of vegetarian meat-eating. In common with other writers (see Chapter 2), she argues, "[i]n nutritional terms, the categories of vegetarian and vegan covered a varied set of dietary practices" (p. 115). Going much further, however, she continues,

Self-defined vegetarians did not confine themselves to a meat-free diet, but ate a wide variety of meats, most commonly chicken and fish, but also pork and beef. [...] In fact, only eight of the [nineteen] vegetarians in the study did not eat any meat [...] the fact that 66 per cent of the self-defined vegetarians incorporated meat into their diet should not go unnoticed. [...] for the majority of vegetarians meat was something prepared by them at home and was a regular part of their diet. Indeed, most people took it for granted that fish, at least, was part of the vegetarian repertoire. (Willetts, 1997, p. 115-6; emphasis added)

Stronger still, Willetts argues that, “there was little evidence of any patterning in the foods that were given up” (p. 117) and concludes:

Research in South-East London suggests that *vegetarianism does not necessarily involve abstaining from meat and eating meat does not place vegetarians in a precarious moral position, at least in their own eyes. Meat was consumed both as a momentary ‘lapse’ and also as a regular part of their diet.* While meat-eaters were less forgiving of such vegetarian ‘indiscretions’, the latter *readily expanded their definitions of vegetarianism to incorporate the consumption of meat.* Indeed, for most participants^[1] meat was seen as a central component of a proper meal and was endowed with beneficial properties, both physical and cultural. (p. 128; emphasis added)

This chapter will argue that the corpus of accounts in this study - both in the behaviours reported and the way the participants talk about them – seriously undermines Willetts’ emphasis on frequent, planned and unproblematic meat-eating. Willetts’ account of meat-eating among vegetarians may be seen as backgrounding ‘lapsing’ in two ways. Firstly, she concludes that vegetarian meat-eating is typically not a matter of momentary ‘lapses’ but is routinely and without problem incorporated into their diet. Secondly, she disregards the importance of the *discourse* of “lapsing” as a feature of accounting or a discursive resource for vegetarians. That is, Willetts rejects “lapsing” both as an analysts’ characterisation of ‘what really happens’, and as a participant’s way of accounting for what happens. A very different picture of both the reported behaviours and ways of talking about behaviours was found in the accounts of this study.

Looking first at the reported behaviours themselves, and summarizing across participants’ reports (see Appendix 4, Table 6):

4 participants (17%) report eating *red meat* at some time (Clare, Greg, Julii, Paul)

1 participant (4%) reports eating *bacon* (Julii)

¹ It is not clear whether ‘most participants’ here refers to self-defined vegetarians or the sample as a whole, but this ambiguity helps further Willetts’ project of “deconstructing” the boundaries between vegetarians and meat-eaters (see next chapter).

6 participants (26%) report eating *chicken/fowl*

8 participants (35%) report eating *fish*

3 participants (13%) report eating *shellfish*

This data contrasts sharply with Willetts' figure of 66% of vegetarians who "incorporated meat into their diet". Here, only 26% of participants report eating red or white meat (not including fish) even once during the period of their participation in the study. Only four participants (4/23, 17%) reported lapsing in their avoidance of red meat, meaning that 83% (19/23) report total abstinence from red meat. Further, 43% of participants (11/23) report no incidents of eating any flesh foods of any kind (meat, fowl, fish or seafood). This is even more impressive as it is over the initial period of transition – the participants are *new* vegetarians or vegans and only six of the new vegans were previously established vegetarians. Greg, for example, gave himself six months to become vegetarian but only reports eating red meat once after the first week. No vegetarians or vegans reported preparing meat at home for themselves in the way Willetts describes. Instances inside the home were reported very rarely and described as unplanned or as 'using up' food bought prior to becoming vegetarian. Moreover, in all these cases an *explanation* was given, as will be developed further later.

Willetts rejects the idea that vegetarian food-avoidance is informed by an 'inverted hierarchy', whereby red meat is avoided most, followed by white meat, then fowl, fish, dairy etc. The data above strongly suggest just such an inverted hierarchy to foods avoided: twice as many participants report lapsing with fish than with red meat (17% to 35%, see above). Moreover, all four of the participants who reported eating red meat also report eating other flesh foods as well, further reinforcing the hierarchical pattern.

Also, Willetts' finding that "bacon was a particular downfall for many vegetarians" (p. 116) may also be disputed from an overview of the reported eating-behaviour. Although five participants specifically mentioned bacon as particularly tempting (Jane, Jenny, Julii, Tamra, and Nicola) only one of these reported actually succumbing over the period of data-collection. Further, this individual (Julii) gave health rather than moral concerns as her motivation for vegetarianism and it is the

more typical moral motivation which would most support the inverted hierarchy. Only one of the eleven participants who reported eating flesh foods (meat, fowl or fish) ate bacon. Bacon is, then, only a particular *temptation* rather than a “downfall for many”. This reported temptation makes the *avoidance* of bacon yet *more* significant and noteworthy. In general then, participants’ reports conflict with Willetts and are much closer to the position of Beardsworth & Keil, who conclude that, “self-defined vegetarians eat meat rarely and it tends to be white meat and in particular circumstances” (1992a; p. 265).

But Willetts’ account of meat-eating among vegetarians may be challenged without attempting to reconstruct the details and frequencies of actual meat-eating, as there is an account of *attitudes and accõunting* as well as eating-habits:

[E]ating meat does not place vegetarians in a precarious moral position, at least in their own eyes, [...and they...] readily expanded their definitions of vegetarianism to incorporate the consumption of meat.

(Willetts, 1997; p. 128; emphasis added)

This, too, is at odds with the accounts of participants in this study, which can be seen to excuse, mitigate and justify instances of eating flesh-foods. Rather than “readily expanding their definitions”, accounts of guilt and of struggling with temptation are found. For example, Greg recounts eating a tin of steak and kidney pudding rather than let it go to waste:

30th January 2000

This evening I was looking through the cupboard for something for dinner and came across a tin of steak & kidney pudding. Sharon hasn’t eaten meat since the start of the ‘mad cow’ disease scare so I know that she won’t eat it. I don’t like to just throw things away so I decided to eat it. I always used to really enjoy these puddings, but I was unable to finish it as I found that I wasn’t enjoying it at all. Feelings of guilt were running through me and although I ate all the ‘pudding’ I threw away a lot of the meat. I hadn’t imagined before I started that I would feel this way so soon. (Greg, diary; p. 6-7; underscoring added)

Characteristic of the corpus of accounts, this displays various forms of identity-management. Mitigation is heard in the fact that Greg was not looking for meat but ‘came across’ it, and that he did not enjoy it, felt guilty and ‘threw away a lot of the meat’. Also, the justification is given that it would have gone to waste, which is backed up with an explanation of why his wife would not have eaten it, and by the description of a personal trait in “I don’t like to just throw things away”.

Ironically, the quotation in Willetts’ title, *‘Bacon sandwiches got the better of me’*, spotlights an *account* of eating meat which is typically argumentative and rhetorical. She reports, “One man shrugged apologetically as he said: ‘Bacon sandwiches got the better of me’...” (p. 116). Even without the apologetic shrug, this extract can be heard to manage responsibility for eating bacon. The trope, ‘got the better of’, suggests he put up a good fight. He also constructs his defeat as due to a specific special weakness or an especially irresistible opponent: he could not resist *bacon sandwiches*, not simply bacon, and certainly not all meat (“meat got the better of me”, would not have the same rhetorical effect). Such mitigation is the norm not the exception in accounts and it is to the importance of rhetorical analysis of accounts of ‘lapses’, and the identity work they do, that we now turn.

I. The discourse of ‘lapsing’

Billig argues that:

To have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood

(Billig, 1995; p. 8)

Similarly, to have, acquire and maintain a vegetarian identity is to possess ways of talking about eating meat. One of the most obvious and commonplace ways vegetarians and vegans talk about eating meat is the notion of “lapsing”. For example, as Nicola offers to tell her story of eating fish she sets it up as a ‘lapse’:

So it’s like I’ve kept this up for five months, I mean, do you want me to tell you about my lapse? (Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

This discourse of lapsing is almost invisible in its taken-for-grantedness, but, when ‘made strange’ from an analytic perspective, it can be seen as performing certain rhetorical functions crucial to defining and maintaining an identity as vegetarian.

Firstly, although the term ‘lapse’ may be used within various diets and contexts, generally a meat-eater does not describe eating meat as a ‘lapse’: to refer to something as ‘a lapse’ implies that it is *prohibited* for the person involved. For the new vegetarians and vegans this is a *new way of talking* that indicates a new prohibition for the participants. The discourse of ‘lapsing’, then, marks-out and flags a new vegetarian/vegan identity and is a reminder that flesh foods are proscribed.

Paradoxically, the more ‘lapses’ or lapse-stories, the greater the use of vegetarian ways of speaking and the more reminders there are of being vegetarian. In this way, flesh foods and meat-eating behaviours are re-categorised as forbidden or prohibited and a re-categorisation of the self is achieved. The old identity as a meat-eater is repressed in a manner of speaking that is by no means trivial. Such ways of speaking reveal the *means* by which identities are changed, maintained and managed, and which are lacking from non-discursive accounts of identity.

But this discourse of lapsing is more complex than being simply a new way of talking whose use flags a new identity. It also manages actions that are potentially problematic for the vegetarian identity. A vegetarian identity is not only claimed and flagged by emphasising a context of prohibition but is at the same time *protected* by the idea of a ‘lapse’ as a *temporary* and *occasional* failure, an aberration within a context of actual abstinence. Indeed, as some discourse analysts have noted, it is *unusual* events which merit explanation, and so offering any kind of attempted explanation indicates the event to be in some way remarkable, accountable and requiring explanation (e.g., Buttny, 1993). *The exception calls attention to the rule in place*, that is, the prohibition and the background of usual abstinence: ‘lapsing’ claims or flags, not only “I *shouldn’t*”, but also “...and, as a rule, I *don’t*”. Nicola prefixes her lapse-story with, “So it’s like I’ve kept this up for five months,...”, thereby presenting a context of sustained self-denial, and the lapse as a mere aberration from this vegan norm. A vegetarian/vegan identity, and commitment to it, is thereby flagged. In offering to tell the story of “my lapse”, the lapse is heard as singular – in the senses of being a one-off and also unusual. The notions of prohibition and abstinence within the

discourse of lapsing will be discussed in Chapter 8 in terms of desire, temptation and commitment, but its function of managing failure as temporary and limited will be developed first. Even without explicitly calling attention to and emphasising a specified period of abstinence, as Nicola does above, the effect of the term ‘lapse’ is to limit/contain the threat of failure and to keep the vegetarian identity ‘on track’: it was only a ‘lapse’ not a total *collapse* of the diet, and the identity is thereby salvaged.

The discourse of lapsing is also manifest in Clare’s preferred term, ‘blip’:

Next blip. Had a Big Mac on Sunday [...]

(Clare, diary, p. 19; underscoring added)

Still feel a bit ashamed that I nearly made it but then gave in. It may be harder in the future to abstain with Kevin around. I hope he hasn’t told many people. No-one understands these blips, not even me! Hormones I guess!

(Clare, diary, p. 22; underscoring added)

The plural, “blips” and “next blip”, effectively cast all of the numerous instances of her eating meat as mere aberrations, and allow for future ‘blips’. Again, her failure is played-down and her achievements are flagged-up: “Still feel a bit ashamed that I nearly made it but then gave in...” – she did, after all, ‘nearly make it’; feels only ‘a bit’ ashamed; and ‘gave in’ rather than gave up, suggesting a giving in to temptation or pressure which she otherwise generally resists. Her responsibility and accountability for the lapses are also mitigated: blame is deflected onto hormones and her boyfriend, Kevin. The confession of being ‘ashamed’ and, “I hope he hasn’t told many people”, point to possible criticism by others but also present her as having aspirations to be, and to be seen as, a good vegetarian who does not lapse.

The rhetorical effectiveness of the term ‘blip’ in conveying a momentary aberration is enhanced by its almost onomatopoeic abruptness. Nor, in its ambiguity, does it offer any causal or explanatory account, and so the aberration is heard as an agentless, mysterious and inexplicable event that just ‘happens’ (also, “No-one understands these blips, not even me!”). The claim to not understand her own behaviour lessens her responsibility (and might even be read as a plea for a sympathetic understanding

that she does not get from the non-vegetarians around her). As mentioned, voicing an inability to explain these mysterious ‘blips’ is enough to flag them as standing in need of explanation and, so, as unusual, isolated episodes rather than the norm. Claims of being unable to explain one’s behaviour are discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

These ‘lapses’ and ‘blips’ rhetorically pen-off, as atypical, exceptional and occasional, behaviour which would otherwise threaten the vegetarian/vegan identity. A similar effect can be seen more widely in other rhetorical features of lapse-stories. Behaviours threatening to the vegetarian/vegan identity are similarly localised and made temporary in Paul’s talk of “vegan days” and “cheese sandwich days”. Individual days are evaluated as self-contained units and a ‘cheese sandwich day’ does not mark an end to his veganism:

Well, bad news is that it was another cheese sandwich day. (Paul, diary; p. 9)

...an almost perfect vegan day... (p. 3).

Anyway, successful vegan day... (p. 7)

In the same way, one day’s lapses may be put behind by the beginning of a ‘new day’:

Then I made some strawberry shortcake with “real” whipped cream since my mother-in-law was visiting. I ate that too! Oh well, tomorrow is a new day.

(Tina, diary, p. 13; underscoring added)

The low-key logical connector, ‘since’, implicitly establishes the necessity of using “‘real’ whipped cream” and closes down the possibility of other courses of action. The implied renewing, cleansing effects of the ‘new day’, however, is applied selectively to lapsing but not to abstinence, which is heard as continuous/enduring and so acts to sustain a constant vegetarian identity. Changing, acquiring and maintaining an identity involves more than simple biographical accrual or accretion – dispreferred ways of narrating events are resisted and rejected and events counter-normative for the new identity are repaired. Of course, just as the discourse of lapsing may serve to salvage the vegetarian identity and keep it on track in the face of having eaten meat, this construction of events may also sabotage the new diet by its power to excuse

‘lapses’. It may, then, both protect and undermine being vegetarian, and may be used both by the vegetarian to excuse ‘indiscretions’ or by someone wishing to lead the vegetarian astray.

The discourse of lapsing is used argumentatively here to maintain an identity. What constitutes a ‘lapse’, and how that ‘lapse’ is understood and presented is not established by the objective measurement of diet. Willetts seizes upon the lack of objective criteria for vegetarian lapsing to argue against distinct vegetarian identities:

In the same way that some of the self-defined vegetarians ate the full complement of meats, conversely there were ‘meat-eaters’ who ate less meat than their vegetarian counterparts. (Willetts, p. 117)

But this ignores the role of rhetorical-discursive practices in the construction and maintenance of identity. This picture of frequent vegetarian meat-eating has already been disputed, but crucially, the ‘vegetarians’ would nevertheless be identified in contrast to the ‘meat-eaters’ by their own use of a discourse of lapsing. They are not only passively or objectively *identifiable* to the analyst by their use of the term ‘lapse’ but the discourse of lapsing may be seen as actively claiming identity; it is more than a sign of or criterion for an identity, but the identity is rhetorically and discursively constituted and accomplished.

The use of a discourse of lapsing by vegetarians has been contrasted with meat-eater/omnivore ways of talking about meat, but it is notable that it is not universally used to maintain all identities involving prohibition and abstinence. For example, being a virgin does not accommodate talk of ‘lapsing’, whereas being a vegetarian or vegan may. Just as a virgin identity does not admit to ‘lapses’, other identities may use the discourse of ‘lapsing’ but in ways which differ to vegetarian accounting. Lapsing in the context of being a Catholic, for example, might be used for ‘lapses’ in church attendance and confession of several years. One would have great difficulty in claiming to still be a vegetarian if one had ‘lapsed’ for even a few months. In both cases, however, the discourse of lapsing claims, protects, and maintains the identity in question (though it must attempt to do so within the understandings of that identity). These differences indicate differences between understandings of ‘virgins’,

‘vegetarians’ and ‘Catholics’ and how these identities are to be performed which have important consequences for how behaviours, public debates, and private ambivalences may be managed. Seen from this perspective, though the discourse of lapsing is far from being a uniquely vegetarian form of accounting, it is a central feature of the rhetorical resources commonly used to mark out and defend a vegetarian identity.

Instances of vegetarian meat-eating are not simply labelled as ‘lapses’ however. The *details* within accounts of lapses further support the construction of lapses as exceptions to a rule. For example, lapsing as a sort of special case may be associated with a *specific food*, as seen above in ‘Bacon sandwiches got the better of me’. Often this is combined with a discourse of ‘*craving*’ or having ‘*urges*’ for these foods, which, by acting at certain times and for certain foods only, ideally complements the discourse of lapsing as an exceptional event:

I succumbed at the weekend. Mum made one of her gorgeous meat pies and cruelly left it on the side. Came home from my split shift (I worked all weekend as a care assistant) on Sunday and BANG, had a craving. All the arguments meat-eaters give about meat being the most efficient way to feed your body came into their own, so I had two small slices, to satisfy my craving (while no-one was in).

(Clare, diary, p. 1; underscoring added)

A ‘craving’, coupled with nutritional beliefs, is given as the reason for Clare eating some of her Mum’s meat pie, but this is just part of numerous elements which excuse her meat-eating on this occasion. Her responsibility and blameworthiness is diminished by the details. The meat pie was not merely ‘gorgeous’ but was homemade too and was known to be gorgeous before she ate it (‘Mum made one of her gorgeous meat pies’). It was also “cruelly left on the side”, suggesting that it was unavoidable and that her mother was partly to blame as she should not have tempted Clare with it. She had also been working “all weekend as a care assistant” and had just come in from a split shift, which suggests that the lapse/indulgence was perhaps deserved, or at least understandable, given her arduous day. Her resistance is heard in that she ‘succumbed’, as if, finally, to a great temptation. One would not talk of

‘succumbing’ to something which is not prohibited or particularly tempting. The sense that she is subject to a sudden, powerful force, almost a helpless victim rather than an agent, is again present in “...and BANG, had a craving”.

Clare uses the group ‘meat-eaters’ to further off-load responsibility for her thinking about meat, and therefore her behaviour: she acts not on her own beliefs but on, “All the arguments meat-eaters give...”. Once again an element of compulsion is heard in, “came into their own”. Finally, there is mitigation in her report that she only had “two small slices”, and ate not to indulge in pleasure but merely “to satisfy [her] craving”. Lastly, “while no-one was in” suggests her continuing wish to be seen as vegetarian and perhaps some shame or expectancy of criticism. Like the discourse of lapsing, the discourse of ‘craving’ or ‘urges’ also invokes a context of abstinence and this will be brought out more fully later in the chapter in a discussion of desire.

From the foregoing it begins to emerge that vegetarian meat-eating is not as unproblematic as Willetts suggests. The ways of speaking about eating meat indicate a potential threat to the vegetarian identity as well as managing and mitigating it. This indicates both a context of criticism and the discursive accomplishment of vegetarian identities. A major way of doing this is to construct the meat-eating episode as an atypical and temporary slip, ‘blip’, or ‘lapse’. Accounts of ‘lapses’ further mitigate, excuse and justify by appeal to other notions such as craving or a need for politeness (see below). It is surprising that Willetts does not recognise such justification in accounts, as she notes that meat-eating in vegetarians may be seized upon by their critics and detractors:

While meat-eaters were less forgiving of such vegetarian ‘indiscretions’, the latter readily expanded their definitions of vegetarianism to incorporate the consumption of meat. (Willetts, p. 128; emphasis added)

Non-vegetarians, however, were not so lenient. They were more likely to see vegetarian meat-eating as hypocritical and worthy of derision and they enjoyed drawing attention to what they saw as the contradictory behaviour of vegetarians. As one 26-year-old woman said cuttingly: ‘My flat-mate calls

himself a vegetarian but I don't know. He eats fish and he's got a bloody fish tank!' (Willetts, p. 118)

But vegetarians' accounts do attend to and argumentatively engage with meat-eaters' actual and potential criticisms. This context of criticism is cited by participants and may also be inferred from the mitigation and justification in their accounts. Accounts and their rhetorical contexts must be understood together, and it will be argued that participants' accounts of meat-eating orient to more than just the threat to vegetarian identities that eating meat poses. The argumentative context for vegetarianism and accounts of it is far more complex, multi-faceted and dilemmatic than simply defending against criticisms for hypocritical, inconsistent, or 'contradictory' behaviour alone.

II. Dilemmas of abstinence

As argued in Chapter 2, being consistently vegetarian does not mark the end of food-related anxieties and ambivalence but potentially brings with it a new set of dilemmas to be managed. Although the discourse of lapsing functions to protect and maintain a vegetarian identity in the context of eating proscribed foods, this is not the only aspect of vegetarian identity managed in the accounts of lapsing. Eating meat may attract criticism for being hypocritical or contradictory but a vegetarian/vegan who does *not* lapse is also open to criticism. As seen in the previous chapter which focussed on problems and dilemmas around moral superiority, vegetarian accounts may be seen to balance conflicting demands and criticisms. Vegetarian meat-eating is open to contradictory constructions and managing these is two-sided and dilemmatic. Vegetarians and vegans' accounts may be seen as dealing with a contradictory rhetorical context in which they may be criticised for abstinence as well as indulgence.

Prohibition and abstinence may be criticised, for example, as austere or impolite. As was seen for reports of social problems in Chapter 6, accounts may aim to steer the speaker away from vegetarian stereotypes. The ambivalent discourse of lapsing invokes, protects and transgresses a context of prohibition and abstinence. In creating

a degree of latitude for the vegetarian/vegan, the discourse of ‘lapsing’ may manage contradictory demands. It may also render criticism of abstinence more acute: since occasional indulgence may be incorporated and mitigated as only ‘lapsing’, total abstinence from meat may consequently be seen negatively as even more extreme. The lapsing discourse also contains the seeds for the management of potentially problematic abstinence. This can be seen below in Clare’s account of the potentially positive aspects of lapsing, which not only excuses her lapse, or ‘blip’, but orients to criticism of vegetarian abstinence:

It is tempting to try to hide these lapses, but I reason that when a strong craving strikes, I should listen to my body or I would become ill/irritable. Also, it gives non-veggies a more identifiable image of me to relate to. I seem more human (and more believable) if these lapses are for all to see. I wouldn’t do it in a 100% vegetarian society. (Clare, diary, p. 1; underscoring added)

The flexible construction of lapsing is seen in the multiple perspectives Clare offers on her lapses. They are explained and *justified* (“I should listen to my body”) using the rhetoric of ‘craving’, and the power of the craving is stressed: it is ‘strong’ and ‘strikes’. Here, this is combined with the implication that she may ‘become ill/irritable’ without meat. This allows her to present her lapse as stemming from good reasoning/logic as well as sheer ‘craving’. The two meld together in the image of ‘listening to my body’, which sounds natural, physical and sensible; desire is presented as rooted in and backed up by health needs; health and desire are presented as one.

Yet further justifications for lapsing are added which are tied up with the account of its public perception. Clare shifts back and forth between lapsing itself and the issue of whether she should *hide* the lapses: “It is tempting to try to hide these lapses...” is immediately followed by “...but I reason that when a strong craving strikes, I should listen to my body” and then to “I wouldn’t do it in a 100% vegetarian society”, which suggests that it is the social pressure rather than the nutritional argument that is the main concern.

The public perception of lapsing is also presented as two-sided: a lapse is heard as being an *asset* to presenting herself as vegetarian as well as a liability. Lapses are both something to hide yet also improve her image in the eyes of non-vegetarians, making her seem “more human”. As in her earlier account of being persuaded by ‘all the arguments meat-eaters give’, the opinions of meat-eaters take some of the blame and allow Clare to retain some distance from “them” despite having eaten meat. This is seen again later after another ‘blip’:

However, at least I now seem human to them. (Clare, diary, p. 13)

Far from vegetarian meat-eating being ‘hypocritical and worthy of derision’ (Willetts, p. 118, above), this account uses the context of criticism to *defend* lapsing. ‘To err is human’ becomes ‘to be human is to err’ (but significantly, ‘human error’ in other contexts – even other contexts of abstinence – may not be presented as desirable, as it is here). Further, the added “...(and more believable)” lends extra weight to the suggestion that never eating meat lacks ‘human’ qualities. This inhumanness and implausibility implies and supposes an image of vegetarianism as extreme privation. Clare’s justification of her lapsing as being necessary to appear human or credible relies on the supposed currency of an ascetic, self-depriving vegetarian stereotype. In Chapter 6 it was seen that participants’ accounts of social problems showed a distancing from being seen as an over-critical and ‘righteous vegetarian’. Talk about problems with others was thus seen to manage a dilemma of moral superiority. As is clear from Clare’s accounts of lapsing, there is another dilemma of vegetarian identity - to maintain the vegetarian norm of abstinence whilst appearing ‘human’. There are two opposing vegetarian stereotypes to avoid or which may be cited as requiring avoidance.

Paul’s account of lapsing, below, attends to yet another dilemma which crops up for vegetarian guests – abstaining without being *rude*:

Girlfriend’s mother sees vegetarians as imposing their choices on others, which she regards as some unbearable rudeness. My own mother just did not like it when I became vegetarian the first time, and it’s easier (and I think nicer) to just

be grateful for the lovely things that she cooks me. I think that in both cases, I prefer the people to the principle. (Paul, diary; p.7; underscoring added)

Here, eating meat in this context is mitigated by being portrayed as morally motivated and morally justified: as ‘nicer’ and as being ‘grateful’. To refuse to eat meat would be ungrateful and not as nice. That his mother cooks ‘lovely’ things, and cooks them *for him* (“cooks me”) further hints that it would be ungrateful to refuse. Also, “to just be grateful for”, suggests that this concession is easy and straightforward and justifies the lapse further.² But “to just be grateful” is a euphemism for *eating* the non-vegetarian ‘lovely things’ which are cooked for him. Here, lapsing/eating meat is heard as not merely excusable but as morally justified and sanctioned – as the right thing to do. Here, being vegetarian and *not* eating meat is what is morally problematic, and so the lapse is excused.

Whilst for Clare an occasional lapse makes her seem more human, for Paul, lapsing is demanded by *particular* occasions, and it is the particular that is to the fore in the account - particular people, situations and relationships. The justification for appeasing his own mother rides on the back of the account of the alleged extreme offence vegetarianism causes his girlfriend’s mother (strongly expressed by ‘unbearable rudeness’). This rudeness is reported as being attributed to vegetarians *generally* (‘...sees vegetarians as...’) – she is not described as seeing Paul *himself* as imposing his choices on others. Paul is thereby heard as potentially tarred with the same brush as all vegetarians, and as less able to negotiate his own vegetarianism with her.³ Vegetarianism is not associated with individual people, only a rude group and an abstract principle. Paul’s final contrast between ‘the people’ and ‘the principle’ further suggests that politeness is a real, concrete matter involving and affecting

² ‘Just’ might here be understood as closing down or repressing the possibility of other ways of talking about a matter. Compare, ‘to just be grateful for’, with, ‘to be grateful for..’: ‘just’ constructs the options as more either/or and closes down rather than opens up discussion. There is also the suggestion of something easily done – though here, with ‘grateful’, this might be a trope of understatement and, here, modesty. Also, in this extract, ‘My own mother just did not like it when...’, could also be seen as closing down a topic which might easily be pursued – ‘Why didn’t she like it?’, or, ‘So what if she didn’t?’

³ The dissociation of Paul from ‘vegetarians’ in his mother-in-law’s reported account is helped by the fact that he eats her food and does not act like a vegetarian – thus suggesting the interdependence of behaviour and accounts of identity, and the linkage between ‘walking the walk’ and ‘talking the talk’: Paul cannot speak ‘as a vegetarian’ if he does not act and present himself as a vegetarian. She can

people he knows and cares about, whereas vegetarianism is only an abstract theory or rule in the context of actual day-to-day social life.⁴ He does not say that he prefers the people to animals, or even to vegetarianism - which would make moral arguments against meat-eating more concrete. Neither Paul's identity as vegetarian nor concern for animals are heard in the account. Vegetarianism is depicted as not supported by Paul's value as an individual person and is undermined by the threat of a group reputation or stereotype.

Thus, lapsing is presented as a middle way of managing the dilemma between, on the one hand being vegetarian and always abstaining, and on the other, being too accommodating to meat-eaters. Paul's lapsing is linked to particular, exceptional occasions involving particular people. This account of avoiding an 'unbearable rudeness' differs to Cathy's account in which avoiding rudeness meant suppressing anger at her in-laws (see Chapter 6). Cathy's account is one of not capitulating however, and so she can capitalise on being the odd-one-out to narrate commitment to her vegan identity. Here, Paul addresses a broadly similar rhetorical dilemma of being vegan without being rude, but does so from the position of having lapsed. In doing so a similar social dilemma is constructed differently.

Willetts' position – that “eating meat does not place vegetarians in a precarious moral position, at least in their own eyes”, may now be further challenged in light of the extracts above. It was argued that eating meat does potentially threaten the vegetarian identity. This is indicated by the discourse of lapsing, which maintains a vegetarian identity by flagging a background of prohibition and sustained abstinence. Not only is eating meat morally problematic, but *abstinence* too may be criticised on moral grounds – as ‘*rude*’ or not ‘*human*’, for example. The vegetarian is not free from moral precariousness, as Willetts invites us to believe, but is beset by potential moral criticism on several fronts. *The moral position of the vegetarian or vegan is not only*

criticise vegetarians easily as long as Paul does not present himself as one, but this group criticism deters him from doing so.

⁴ Here, ‘principle’, is heard as a dry, abstract thing rather than as honourable and unyielding, as in, for example, ‘it’s a matter of principle’. This difference in how vegetarianism and politeness are constructed suggests the prevalence of discourses of everyday morality (such as politeness and how guests are to act) over vegetarian moral discourses which may be seen as (or argued to be) more abstract. This may be seen as de-populating vegetarian identity in the sense that individuals are replaced by stereotypes.

precarious, it is dilemmatic. This rhetorical context of public debate is oriented to in account-giving but this is also the basis for personal understandings of meat-eating and inner debate and deliberation (Billig, 1996a).

Being dilemmatic, this precariousness is not ‘resolved’ but, rather, is played out and managed in accounting. The image of being ‘placed’ in a moral position by the act of meat-eating – especially one free from criticism – backgrounds the importance of accounting and arguing. The rhetorical context for vegetarian accounts is contradictory and accounting is necessarily flexible, both that of vegetarians and their detractors. As has begun to emerge, meat-eating, vegetarianism, abstinence and lapsing are open to multiple moral readings. It will be argued that to go beyond seeing abstinence as dilemmatic it is necessary to see how these dilemmas are managed through accounting-practices by particular individuals within particular contexts.

Accounts from one participant, Nicola, will be examined in detail to draw out further the complexity of accounting and the importance of the *context* within which dilemmas of abstinence are managed. This case study perspective will afford the opportunity to look at both the broad rhetorical context of cultural ambivalence and stereotyping but, also, the different *personal relationships* within which accounting is done and which the accounts draw upon, construct, and indeed manage. Various rhetorics or discourses within lapsing accounts may be discerned, some of which have already been introduced, such as ‘craving’ and ‘politeness’. In the following case study, talk of ‘craving’ (and ‘urges’) will be further explored in terms of *desire* and *temptation*.

III. Discourses of desire and temptation

Though the extracts in this chapter so far have reported lapsing, accounts of *not* lapsing or talk about food and eating generally may be equally revealing of the dilemmas of meat-eating and meat-avoidance. Similar to Clare’s accounts of ‘cravings’ above, Nicola speaks about having ‘urges’ without lapsing:

And I was saying like I'd had the fish urge and he was saying, 'yeah, it is a fight all the time and you do get these urges'. He says he still has urges to smoke.

(Nicola, interview 2, paragraph 5; underscoring added)

John's reported speech effectively establishes the concept of 'urges' as an objective accounting resource. Note the use of the generalizing 'you'; the validating 'yeah, it is a fight'; and John's reported own continuing urges to smoke. These all objectify and generalize urges and make it a more robust and persuasive account. Having urges is heard as an entirely normal, shared feature of giving things up, whether it is meat or cigarettes, and for both men and women. John is a strict vegan of longstanding and is therefore a better source or 'witness' for this account of urges than someone with less experience of, and success in being, vegan and with a more obvious self-interest or stake in the notion.⁵

The *shared* and universal features of the experience of being or going vegan are emphasised here. But these collective features of the account are complemented by *personal* elements - Nicola claims that she is especially vulnerable to such commonly experienced urges:

[S]o basically it's totally out of my character to be doing anything like this that I'm sticking to because I'm not really very good at sticking to things.

(Nicola, interview 2, paragraph 7; underscoring added)

Nicola is presented as having a personal character that is not naturally inclined towards 'sticking to things'. The effect of this is to flag both her personal commitment and effort in 'sticking to' her new diet. But this may also be heard to cast her as an *atypical* vegan and to distance her from a stereotype of a vegan who is strict by nature. This is developed further - the discipline and abstinence does not come naturally but requires effort:

⁵ Previous diary-entries and talk between Nicola and the researcher have already established John's reputation as a good vegan and the account here may be seen as drawing on this reputation (and earlier accounts).

So, it's like I'm really having to discipline myself to do it. Errm, but it doesn't seem- y' know with the eating- it doesn't seem that hard until I get a massive urge for something. Errm, I mean the urge has been for fish.

(Nicola, interview 2, paragraph 11; underscoring added)

This could sound like Wilde's, 'I can resist anything but temptation', but, crucially, temptation is constructed in a particular way – as a matter of Nicola having 'massive urges'. This discourse of urges manages responsibility for possible lapses and also presents a sense of *struggle* necessary for her good efforts and commitment to veganism to come through. The management of commitment to the diet is done in tandem with constructing Nicola as passionate. She appears in the accounts as *the sort of person* who has 'massive urges'. As with Clare's reported concern over appearing 'human' and Paul's account of the problems of appearing unbearably rude and ungrateful, Nicola might be seen as distancing herself from a stereotypical vegan reputation – in this case, as someone who lacks the capacity or taste for pleasure and desire. Thus a potential dilemma of identity to do with abstinence is managed: In 'sticking to' what does not come naturally to her she navigates past the Scylla of being a bad vegan whilst also avoiding the Charybdis of being stereotyped as a typical vegan. Behavioural norms of abstinence are observed but a stereotypical character is denied.

Rather than being an outside social force, urges are a part of her character. More so than the preceding accounts of politeness, this account of having 'urges' presents the dilemma of abstinence as an *internal* ambivalence – Nicola wants to abstain from fish and generally does, but also *desires* it. This internal struggle between abstinence and desire is crucial to the management of Nicola's vegan identity. *Like the discourse of 'lapsing', accounts of desire and temptation invoke and rely upon a context of abstinence and manage identity through the tension between desire and this abstinence.* This ambivalence within the self is taken up again in the following chapter in terms of prohibition and desire.

The construction of Nicola's desire for food runs through much of Nicola's accounts. As well as being 'shown' by/in her numerous descriptions of eating (see later this

chapter), it is explicitly reflected on and stated, for example, in her diary before her lapse:

[...] I have always liked my grub so I think my sister had difficulty coming to terms with the fact that I don't eat her out of house and home. Oh God, I've changed my dance, will she be able to change hers?! (Nicola, diary, 23.5.99)

The construction of Nicola's new vegan identity involves reference to Nicola's personal history, including her reputation, which is invoked via her sister's reaction to Nicola's new diet ("...so I think my sister had difficulty coming to terms with..."). Her reputation as seen by her sister externalises, objectifies and verifies Nicola's own self-characterization as a food-lover: she is *known* by others to be a food lover and is perhaps even notorious for it. Stressing a discontinuity between past and present behaviour can also be seen to flag the change Nicola has made in her behaviour and, thereby, her new identity as vegan: "Oh God, I've changed my dance,..".

Crucially for the discussion of lapsing, this change is heard as effortful and full of temptations through the construction of herself as 'always liking [her] grub'. Nicola's self-presentation as a food-lover is further developed in the interview extract below.

I really like food, and...I'm quite self-indulgent in food, it's like, I suppose y'could say it's a bit like a {*laughing*} hobby really, or it has been like a hobby to me. It's like eating, cos like, y' know, like food is just ...

(Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

Nicola implies that she gets a pleasure from eating which is beyond words: "It's like eating, cos like, y' know, like food is just...". But, significantly, she also goes on to define herself in terms of what she is *not*. Nicola contrasts herself with a stereotypical vegetarian Other, thereby illustrating the comparative, differentiating nature of identity and argumentative orientation to counter-positions:

[...] y'see some people just don't like food...I've got a friend who's a vegetarian.
 [...] He's a real skinny rake, and he's not interested really, in food, at all. It's just like he eats it cos he has to to live. [...] But me - I don't know, I just love tastes...
 (Nicola, interview 2)

Nicola's account of being a food lover explicitly, and through comparison, denies not enjoying the pleasures of food and, by implication, pleasure more generally. This denial suggests the currency of an image of vegans as ascetic, strict, and joyless. This discourse of craving, urges and desire, then, can be seen as managing *character* as well as managing *responsibility* for a meat-eating lapse: it addresses potential criticism for both *eating* meat and *abstaining* from meat. Nicola may, 'just love tastes', but food is about more than just tastes: talk about food and eating is also an argument for being a certain kind of person. The way this language of desire and temptation manages Nicola's vegan identity will be explored further below.

IV. Being a food lover

This theme of loving food is prominent in one form or another, but in Nicola's accounts being a food lover is more than simply a matter of Nicola 'liking her grub' (significant as that may be). Whilst 'urges' may also be presented as indicating nutritional need or hormonal cravings, here food is endowed with psychological and emotional significance and is linked to the experience of pleasure.

Nicola's previous personal investment in food, and perhaps dependency on food, is heard in the last extract: "I suppose y'could say it's a bit like a {laughing} hobby really, or it has been like a hobby to me". This biographical dimension adds to a picture of what food means to Nicola personally and heightens the sense of Nicola's efforts and change accomplished. This is further developed below with an account of childhood in which food appears as a substitute, surrogate, or ersatz form of love ("trying to fill a gap in my life"):

I have always had a great love affair with food. I was always hungry as a child, I took large portions, I would eat anything, except liver, gristle and that awful cornflake tart you used to get at school. Don't get me wrong I wasn't a fat kid, just a hungry one. I wonder if I was trying to fill a gap in my life, except it wasn't the stomach that really needed nourishing. Know wot I mean mate.

(Nicola, diary, 25.7.99; underscoring added)

As well as constructing Nicola as able to experience pleasure, these accounts offer a way of relating to food and a picture of food itself. *There is a nexus or tangle of associations between food, character, love, and also, it will be argued, relationships with others.* Nicola explicitly uses a metaphor of having a *relationship* with food: “I always had a great love affair with food”. It is significant that the metaphorical relationship used is a romantic one. There is a clear *sexual* element within Nicola's discourse of desire when talking about food and eating which may be understood in terms of vegetarian stereotypes and personal relationships.

The sexual meanings of meat eating and abstinence were discussed in Chapter 2. Both Twigg (1983) and Fiddes (1991) point, for instance, to the enduring association of meat with animal and sexual passion and vitality and the perception of those who abstain from meat as lacking in these qualities. Bodily, physical and perhaps sexual associations of desire can be heard in Nicola's accounts of being tempted, for example in:

[...] Guess what, I really fancy some fish.

(Nicola, diary; 15.05.99; underscoring added)

[...] I am still yearning after fish. (Nicola, diary; 17.05.99; underscoring added)

In the diary extract below, Nicola is not writing about the pleasures of *eating* but about another vegan proscription – leather. Even here, Nicola's talk is loaded with the kind of the sensuous, sensual and sexual language that runs through much of her talk about food and eating:

For years I have/had desired a leather suite. You know the type that you sink into, the leather envelopes you and smothers you with its divine smell(!) Well not anymore!! Thank heavens I don't have a leather fetish. I wonder where my loyalties would lie then?!

I suppose all that about leather shoes is totally flippin 2 faced.

{Drawing of two faces}

Totally selfish, as plastic hurts my darlin' tootsies!! I don't bloody know, I obviously ain't no saintly Vegan! But I'm doin' my best!

{Drawing of footwear surrounded by question marks}

[...] The smell of bacon is still a turn on.

(Nicola, diary, 01.05.99; underscoring added)

She had 'desired' (rather than, say, 'wanted') a leather suite, and the description of the object of desire is sensuous and lingering: "...the type that you sink into, the leather envelopes you and smothers you with its divine smell(!)". The effect of the smell of bacon ("a turn on") again recalls sex, and Nicola also imagines having a "leather fetish", hinting that she would be unable or unwilling to control such desires. Whether talking about food or leather, the accounts position Nicola as susceptible to temptation by at least some of the things she abstains from – in talking of food and leather she may be seen as talking about herself through them.

The idea, however, that food-talk is merely a 'vehicle' for doing self-presentation or character-work is an over-statement or over-simplification that ignores the connotations and associations that readily attach to food, eating and leather (rather than those which merely could be attached) and the complexities of how these cultural associations develop. In talk, sex may be more readily attached to food and leather than many other things, and there are also the related notions of abstinence and vegan identity to be oriented to and dealt with here. Indeed, the account suggests that the sexual theme here is prompted by cultural meanings of meat and the currency of vegan stereotypes. Such stereotypes are indicated by Nicola's explicit denial that they apply to *her*: "I obviously ain't no saintly Vegan" ('obviously', making this more categorical, as if attested to by observation rather than merely asserted). Religious associations of piety and chastity within the vegan identity can be heard within

‘saintly Vegan’, which echoes her denials of being a ‘preaching ‘ and ‘righteous’ vegan, seen in Chapter 6. These religious meanings recall Twigg’s analysis of the history of (UK) vegetarianism discussed in Chapter 2, which identifies a monastic, Manichean strand within its heritage that, it was argued, persists to some degree within current associations. These sexual associations of a vegan identity were oriented to by another participant, who notes rather coyly:

She [girlfriend] encouraged me to keep going until she sees me next in order to, ahem, test the theory of a friend of hers. I told her my experience was contrary to her friend’s theory. (Paul, diary; p. 4; underscoring added)

A flagging sex drive/potency/appetite/stamina is reportedly brought up by Paul’s girlfriend (and her friend) but is then denied by Paul with an appeal to his own contrary experience. Nicola’s account on another occasion again hints at an association between veganism and sex.

...and err, one of the kids said to him, ‘Ooh, Miss is a vegan!’ And he says ‘What’s a vegan?’ and he was like astounded, like, ‘Well, what do you eat then?’ [...] and the next day he said to me - what did he say, he said, ‘What are you Miss, are you a Virgo?’ {*laughing*} and I nearly said to him, ‘No I’m a virgin’. And I was- it was on the tip of my tongue to say- I don’t know why - I think it was the Virgo that is y’ know, Virgo is the virgin, isn’t it? [...] So, I was like, ‘Veergan’, sort of thing. (Nicola, interview 1; underscoring added)

This displays Nicola as having a mischievous sense of humour and/or as having perhaps unconscious associations between veganism and sexual abstinence, between the pleasures of eating and of sex. The reported reply (whether prompted by ‘Virgo’ or ‘vegan’) can be heard as all the more revealing for being an ostensibly spontaneous, impulsive response. As Fiddes (1991) discusses, meat advertising has traditionally exploited and employed the sexual meanings of meat. It is noticeable that Vegetarian food advertising has begun to ‘colonise’ meat’s sexual associations, and this too can be read rhetorically as the denial of vegetarian stereotypes (Carmichael,

1998): for example, a Vegetarian Society cinema commercial, ‘*Are you a Food Lover?*’ (alternative title, ‘*Hot Meal*’), is blatantly sexually connotative.

As argued, the construction of a vegan identity is dilemmatic and so there is an important ambivalence to the construction of desire (sexual or otherwise). The stereotype of a vegan lacking desire is denied by flagging personal desire, but commitment to vegan abstinence is also managed. As will be developed later, desire and abstinence can be seen as fundamentally predicated upon each other. For example, the extracts above report how bacon is desired but is not eaten. Nicola does not have or now want a leather sofa; however, this denial of desire is counter-balanced by the indulgent, vivid, sensual description of the ‘formerly’ coveted item, and the idea that if leather turned her on sexually she might not be able to resist (“Thank heavens I don’t have a leather fetish. I wonder where my loyalties would lie then?!”). ‘Loyalty’ again hints that there is a conflict and a need to discipline desire. There is an ambivalence and ambiguity to whether the desires are in the past or continue (“For years I have/had desired...”). *Past* desires (and the *imagined* fetish) may be safely conjured up to dispel stereotypes and, far from threatening her vegan identity, testify to change and her commitment and resolve. This ambiguous and ambivalent narrative of desire and change allows Nicola to abstain whilst flagging her passionate, sensuous character.

Nicola does not abstain from leather shoes, however, and so the opposite side of the dilemma is raised whereby her commitment to veganism is oriented to: “I suppose all that about leather shoes is totally flippin 2 faced {drawing of two faces}. Totally selfish, as plastic hurts my darlin’ tootsies!!”. However, the charge of being ‘selfish’ is undercut and effectively contradicted by both Nicola’s own self-chastisement and the fact that the shoes are reportedly painful – a good reason is given (and, better still, is understated). Nicola’s conscience is further dramatised by the drawing of shoes surrounded by question marks – although she wears leather she is presented as being uneasy about it. Nicola’s *habitual* use of leather is not linked to desire and indulgence but is presented as being inured through the avoidance of pain. Desire is not found in accounts of habitual behaviours/consumption, but in accounts of *lapses*: as suggested, desire is set within a context of abstinence and temptation. It is in Nicola’s reports of

actually eating fish that desire and sexual language reaches its peak or “moment of orgasm”:

You know wot, I have tasted the forbidden fruit. We took Jesse to Nottingham as she was bored shitless. After leaving my sister’s I said to Ian,

“Guess wot I want?”

“Curry?”

“Harry Ramsden’s.”

“You want some chips.”

“No, I want FISH!”

“Oh right, ok, how long have you been thinking about this?”

“I decided just before we dropped Jesse off.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yep, I don’t know wot I will do when I actually get it, but let’s just see wot happens.”

“Ok!”

So, all the way to Harry’s I’ve got a tight chest. I keep having to take big gulps of air. I feel quite nervous. Wot if I can’t face it when I get it? Don’t eat it then. Wot if I love it? Love it then. Wot if Ian holds it against me in the future? Let him. Follow your heart girl, fuck the rest of the world.

We order. It arrives. Ian sez, “I’m gonna watch you eat yours to see your reaction.”

“Here goes” I sez. I very carefully open up the batter, yep, I had it battered! The white flesh greets me. I place my nose near to it and breath in. Oh, the smell fills my head, it is delightful. I cut into the flesh, Ian is watching me with intent; I take some on my fork and slowly pop it into my mouth. It melts, I chew, my eyes roll in my head, the moment of orgasm. I love it, no guilt, just sheer joy. It tastes so fine. I work out how long I have gone without. Since March, wot, that’s 5 months, I can’t believe it’s been so long. It tastes just how it’s always tasted. But before I took it for granted, I ate it with little thought. Oh yeah, I used to think it tasted good, but this taste now was so divine, heavenly, amazing. I ate the fish. Ian didn’t really have to ask, he knows me well enough to know that I was on a

high plane of ecstasy. I even finished the piece he left behind! No regrets, no guilt, just a full stomach.

“Don’t tell anyone”, I said.

“Are you gonna write it in your diary?”

“Yeah, I’m honest in it.”

(Nicola, diary; 07.08.99; underscoring added)

The account is detailed and full of a language of the senses – sight, smell, hearing and taste are all mentioned in this account of the carnal pleasures of the “flesh”:

The white flesh greets me. I place my nose near to it and breath in. Oh, the smell fills my head, it is delightful. I cut into the flesh, [...]

In Clare’s account, to be human is to err but here to err is ‘divine’ (“so divine, heavenly, amazing”). The account of the lapse as ‘orgasmic’ portrays Nicola as orgasmic herself. Nicola is re-living the experience as she tells the lapse story - it is a pleasure even to revisit the event in her mind and the indulgence of the experience is recreated in the lingering account. The reader is drawn into empathizing with her experience. Like sexual foreplay, the ‘moment of orgasm’ is built up to with tantalizing suspense and anticipation.

It arrives. Ian sez, “I’m gonna watch you eat yours to see your reaction”. “Here goes”, I sez. I very carefully open up the batter, yep, I had it battered! The white flesh greets me. I place my nose near to it and breathe in. Oh, the smell fills my head, it is delightful. I cut into the flesh, Ian is watching me with intent; I take some on my fork and slowly pop it into my mouth. It melts, I chew, my eyes roll in my head, the moment of orgasm.

The emotional-romantic element is also heard in interview when she gives a very similar account of the lapse:

It just came and I looked at it and it was like slow motion, it was like a love scene {laughing}. (Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

The cinematic simile, 'like a love scene', is a strong image with important elements of fantasy and unreality, though it also has a knowingly 'over-the-top', humorous, self-parodying quality.

But there is an additional element to Nicola's construction of desire and temptation in terms of sex and romance which highlights personal relationships within the management of vegan dilemmas of identity. Though the 'love scene' is with the fish, it is more of a *ménage à trois*, as the relationship with Ian is also an important part of this sexual, romantic understanding of the lapse.

V. Desire, seduction and relationship

Significantly, Nicola's partner, Ian, features heavily in her diary account of the lapse, above. Jesse has been dropped off at the sister's and Nicola and Ian are alone together. The secret pleasure is witnessed by and shared with Ian alone. Their conversation is reported and there is a note of voyeurism and/or exhibitionism in "Ian sez, 'I'm gonna watch you eat yours to see your reaction'. [...] Ian is watching me with intent". More than Ian's presence is flagged; there is a sense of complicity, a shared secret, and Ian is attentive to Nicola's desires. This is seen again in, "Ian didn't really have to ask, he knows me well enough to know that I was on a high plane of ecstasy". In almost all of the occasions where desire and pleasure are most clearly evoked, Ian is mentioned in some way - either as present ("Wont some?" [...] 'Have some', sez Ian") or his absent voice ("He's of the vein, a bit of wot you fancy don't hurt!", see below). In the extract below, Ian, romance, and nostalgic memories⁶ of their holidays together are highlighted:

⁶ Barthes (1997 [1975]) identifies three themes that stand out in food advertising - *eroticism*, *health* and the *commemorative*. Nostalgia is also a popular theme in meat advertising: in a recent study of contemporary British TV commercials, Carmichael concludes:

Nostalgia was strongly connoted less than expected (the New Zealand Lamb and the Danepak Classic ads only). However, two recent ads which time prevented from being included in the sample do strongly connote nostalgia: a Quick Lamb Cuts ad, which uses the song 'Memories' and the tag-line "*The taste you remember without the hassle*" (Sept. 98, Granada); and a Safeway Pork Sausages ad that depicts a family on Guy Fawkes' Night talking about bangers 'n' mash (26/10/97, LWT) - obviously this was timed to coincide with that holiday, but not all products would use the occasion). (Carmichael, 1998; p. 91)

Well, here I am, only yesterday saying about T.V. cookery and I walk into the living room to be confronted by shell fish, can't think wot they are called right now. White things, round, with a bright orange leg bit. Oh, wot are they called?? Oh yeah, scallops, god, they look gorgeous. Oh no, not the fish thing, I have not had the fish urge for ages now. Yeah, it's been a long time. Maybe even so far as last month, can't remember, so it must have been. Anyway, these two geezers have to cook these scallops, in a sauce etc, by following step by step instructions from some top chef's glossy hardback. So, I sit down and watch it. Ian sez "Wot do you think, darlin?" He knows full well that I think "cor!!". He continues, "Would that sway ya if I cooked that for ya?" "Yeah" I respond. I'm so weak when it comes down to seafood. Thoughts of lobster in Kenya fill my mouth, gorgeous cooked salmon. Oh, I spoke too soon yesterday. "I'll have to take you to Portofina, there is a great seafood restaurant on the front." He certainly knows the way to my heart!! (Nicola, diary, 26.07.99; underscoring added)

Their relationship may be seen even more clearly here as Ian is heard taking an active role in *seducing* Nicola through food. A combination of Nicola's own weakness and Ian playing on that weakness is heard, with Ian reported as doing most of the talking (persuading/seducing).

Nicola confesses to finding the scallops 'gorgeous' and having 'the fish urge', and this leads her to 'sit down and watch it'. This is done in full view of Ian, who tries to draw out some show of desire from Nicola. That he 'knows full well' the answer corroborates both Nicola's desire and Ian's motive. He 'continues' to secure an admission that she would be 'swayed' (another euphemism, suggesting feelings and being 'moved' rather than corruption, immorality or rule-breaking). Having secured a 'yeah', Ian finishes with a promise of taking her to a romantic restaurant.

The language throughout is seductive: Ian is heard to call her "darlin'", and at first offers to cook for her himself. Eating is coupled with romance and the 'way to [Nicola's] heart', and it is *Ian*, not just anyone, who knows the way. Crucially, lapsing is heard here as a matter of being seduced – and of being seducible – by her partner. For Nicola to reply that she would be *unswayed* by Ian cooking scallops for her could

be something of a personal rebuff and would also reflect on her as being a bit of a cold fish herself. Indulgence in fish/seafood – or just talking and fantasising about it – becomes understood as having positive meanings of romance and nostalgia in the context of a romantic relationship.

This talk about food and seduction points not only to how sexual and romantic identities impinge upon and may be brought into talk about food and vegan identities but also reflects the importance of food, and especially flesh foods, in gender identities and romantic relationships generally. As well as food drawing on sexual meanings, in day-to-day life, sexual and romantic identities are lived or expressed through food behaviours. As Chapter 3 argued, identities (including desire and relationships such as romance and seduction) must be seen as being lived social practices or ‘forms of life’ rather than inner matters of imagination or categorisation. The upshot is that changing food behaviours (especially giving up animal-based foods with their sexual, romantic associations) potentially has an impact on the forms of life within romantic partnerships.⁷

This relationship of seducer and seduced is a recurring, if often implicit, motif in Nicola’s accounts not only of lapsing but also of being tempted generally. The account below concerns Nicola’s Birthday, when the family is deciding on a restaurant. The evening’s theatre isn’t confined to Jesse’s drama class, as Ian is again in the role of tempter, here a cartoon devil:

[...] Had a good day until it came to going out in the evening. “Where shall we go?” “Rusholme?” “No, Jesse has drama”. Hmm Fish, oh Haddock, yum, yum. Arrah! “Have some”, sez Ian. A cartoon figure of the devil comes to mind. “Eat fish Nick, you know you want it...”. Yeah I also fancy some coke, but I ain’t gonna do that either. [...] (Nicola, diary; 18.05.99; underscoring added)

Ian’s reported speech is embroidered with the added image of a devil and the devil’s imagined words. The voice of temptation is first heard then rebutted, thereby flagging

⁷ This potential restriction on romantic indulgence and traditional sexual, romantic identities which becoming vegetarian/vegan may bring about is compounded by potential problems in eating out.

both Nicola's desire and her commitment to her diet. The rhetorical effects of these accounts of being seduced are numerous and include the sharing or distribution of responsibility for any lapses or weaknesses. But whilst Ian's role helps flag desire and commitment he is only a naughty *cartoon* imp, not genuinely wicked, and the account of Ian tempting Nicola reflects well on their relationship, unlike the conflict between Nicola and her sister, below.

The main point to note here is that Nicola's understandings and accounts of lapsing are not just tied in with desire but are wrapped up with seduction and relationships more generally. This becomes clearer by comparing accounts involving different personal relationships. Nicola's accounts of veganism and lapsing which feature her sister and her daughter will also be looked at. These three different personal relationships (partner, daughter and sister) can be seen to support contrasting accounts and understandings of lapsing. Both Ian and Nicola's sister, Angela, tempt her with non-vegan food, but the accounts of each are very different.

Mushroom cobs for breakfast. Mine were cooked before Ian's as his went in with the bacon. Bacon smells even better in the open air. "Smells good, doesn't it?" he says. "Yes", I smile back. "Wont some?" He's a cheeky git!! [...]

(Nicola, diary; 10.08.99)

Here, Nicola acknowledges her desire ('Bacon smells even better in the open air') and smiles back to Ian an admission of being tempted. When it is Ian who is tempting/teasing her he is "a cheeky git". This affectionate portrayal of Ian as being familiar, playful and 'cheeky' is seen again elsewhere: "...a cheeky smile fills his face, 'I've got fish'. The swine!!..." (Nicola, diary; 05.06.99). The cheekiness can be seen as a form of intimacy which is returned in Nicola's insults ('git', 'swine'). Her unrequited desire and Ian's teasing are heard as humorous. In the account below, however, Nicola is not heard as being tempted, seduced or amused:

[...] A few weeks later I was at my sister's when the family across the road came over with gifts of curry, samosas, yoghurt dips etc. They were celebrating Ede. On opening this dish my sister laughs "Ha, chicken, unlucky". My sister and bro-

in-law gorged themselves on curry to the point of explosion. “Just look what you missed out on”, said my sister. “Wot the opportunity to eat so much that I would feel sick?” I replied. (Nicola, diary; 25.04.99; underscoring added)

Angela is presented as trying to construct Nicola’s veganism as ‘missing out on’ food, and Nicola as resisting this versioning. Telfer, in her book on philosophy and food (under a section, *Food and Moral Virtues*), discusses “two moral virtues which relate particularly to food”:

The first, *hospitableness*, is mainly concerned with ways in which its possessors treat other people; the second, *temperance*, with ways in which its possessors behave with regard to their own eating (though it also has a bearing on the treatment of others). (Telfer, 1996, p.82; emphasis added)

Both these virtues feature in Nicola’s description above. She constructs her sister’s behaviour as *intemperate* or gluttonous: “gorged themselves on curry to the point of explosion”, and, “eat so much that I would feel sick?”. The sister is also heard as maintaining only a *token hospitableness*: food is offered but it is unsuitable, for which she might be excused. This is seen again clearly when Nicola is talking in interview and in a later diary entry:

It’s funny cos when I go round there it’s like, “Oh we’re having dinner- you can have some”, and it’s kind of like - it’s almost like she has to offer because it’s being hospitable and she knows that I’m not eating it.

(Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

I shall let her delight in offering me biscuits, cakes, etc and then her remembering, “Oh you can’t eat them, can you, oh well”. Smug smile.

(Nicola, diary, 23.05.99; underscoring added)

As seen in Nicola’s accounts of the significance of food in her childhood, food can be loaded with social meanings. It is both a discursive topic and a more concrete and physical rhetorical resource itself, though it is a currency of flexible, contested meanings. Angela’s reported performance of a version of ‘hospitableness’ is more

than just talk; it is a social practice which involves dealing in more than words alone. In argumentatively offering the ‘wrong’ foods to Nicola and eating them herself, her sister is seen as managing multiple rhetorical concerns: portraying Nicola as missing out; undermining Nicola’s efforts to be vegan; and being inhospitably hospitable.

For her part in the interaction, Nicola is heard to challenge her sister’s attempts to position her as missing out – though not on the grounds of inhospitableness but of intemperance: “Wot the opportunity to eat so much that I would feel sick?”, I replied”. She might have reproached her sister’s behaviour as a hostess, but instead the charge of gluttony and over-indulgence is made, thereby *supplanting desire with its antithesis, nausea*. Thus, desire – or her sister’s attempts to turn Nicola’s desire against her – is powerfully denied and face is saved: she is not missing out and is not the victim. Claiming disgust rather than mistreatment chastises her sister but avoids an open or full-scale argument and so manages the sisters’ antagonism, again indicating relationship.

Crucially, Nicola’s construction of food and abstinence is fundamentally informed by her antagonistic relationship with her sister and differs qualitatively to the accounts involving Ian. Here, Nicola is not heard as being tempted. The focus of the account is not on Nicola’s inner conflict with temptation (whether inflamed by Ian or not) but is on the *outer conflict* and argument with her sister. The relationship of conflict between Nicola and her sister can be seen, therefore, as turning the topic away from desire and temptation, and so, may be viewed as a resource in the management of desire and diet.

But the accounts involving this relationship of conflict have another argumentative upshot which can be seen as managing potential criticism for lapsing. The idea that eating non-vegan food is a ‘failure’ is rebutted by discrediting its source, Nicola’s sister:

Nicola: Yeah. And like my sister’d just be like, ‘Ha ha! You failure! You didn’t do it!’

Interviewer: {Laughter}

Nicola: -which err..would delight her. (Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

The sister's attitude is seen as fleering and as taking great *pleasure* in judging and criticising Nicola. As also in the preceding extract, "...I shall let her delight in offering me [...] Smug smile...", and "would relish" in the extract below:

Ah a weekend at my sister's house. Didn't mention my fish fascination. My sister would relish the idea of me faltering, she would be sure to encourage me, then mock me for my failings, unlike the man of my life. He's of the vein, a bit of wot you fancy don't hurt! (Nicola, diary, 23.05.99; underscoring added)

Sister and partner are explicitly contrasted: Ian's attitude is once again mischievous and hints at sexual desires and appetites, "...a bit of wot you fancy don't hurt!". The charge of failure, then, is heard as motivated by spite and perversity, or as a criticism made only by spiteful, perverse people, rather than as a valid criticism. To criticise Nicola for her lapse is to risk placing oneself in the camp of those who want to see her as a failure and would get pleasure out of it.

The accusation of 'failure' is further heard as unreasonable by use of an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) by which the alternatives open to Nicola are polarized into self-torture and self-crucifixion for her 'misdemeanours' or, alternatively, "...that was it and carry on":

No, cos, something, I dunno, something I learned a while back was - y' know if you err - don't crucify yourself over it. Y'know like everyday it is like a new day and don't like torture yourself for, like, your misdemeanours the day before. Sort of thing. So no, it's like, 'I'm a vegan.....sort of' {laughing} and I err had a lapse and that was it and carry on erm ...

(Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

The discourse of lapsing is evident once again in the way failures are depicted as minor and consigned to the past ("...like everyday it is like a new day and don't like torture yourself for, like, your misdemeanours the day before. [...] I err had a lapse and that was it and carry on..."). But, as well as being extreme, criticism is again

heard as giving satisfaction to not only her sister but also “people” *in general*. Nicola continues:

...but I haven't told people, I haven't told anybody. Cos, y' know this thing about people being so happy to see you fail. (Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

Interviewer: Oh, so does your sister know?

Nicola: Oh no, bloody hell her, oh God, I've not told anybody else - people love to see you fail don't they? (Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

This justifies Nicola keeping her lapse a secret from her sister and the wider world. Again, not telling anyone (except Ian and the researcher) about eating the fish is justified by the prevalence and intensity of this attitude among ‘people’. ‘They’/ ‘people’ are ‘so happy’ and, ‘love to see you fail’ and a perversity, previously hinted at in the ‘relish’ and ‘delight’ her sister takes, is more forcefully attributed in “...a lot of people get off on that”:

It's like, I suppose I don't want people to be scoring Brownie points off my failure - cos a lot of people get off on that, don't they? Someone else's failure. Hmmm, “she couldn't stick to it, she couldn't do it”, sort of thing.

(Nicola, Interview 2; underscoring added)

Nicola's secrecy is thereby justified and this secrecy can be imagined as in turn allowing criticisms of ‘failure’ to be avoided in everyday life. Abstinence and lapsing, it can be seen, are accounted for within the context of relationships with others. Relationships may also be seen as rhetorical resources for repelling criticism, as above, where potential criticism for failure is deflected by being presented as perverse. Bad relations, to whom criticisms may be attributed or through whom they may be caricatured and or ventriloquized, can be rhetorically useful.⁸ Such poor relationships also throw good relationships into relief: Nicola's secretiveness heightens the intimacy and trust of her openness with Ian.

⁸ Thus both sides of a dialogue/argument/dilemma may then be presented, with the voice of criticism (or desire, as is the case with Ian) being spoken by another.

Nicola's daughter, Jesse, is reportedly also kept in the dark about the lapse but this betokens further differences rather than similarities with the accounts of not telling her sister. Nicola defends her secrecy and lapsing without derogating her daughter. And whilst the lapse is also kept secret from Jesse, Nicola's *temptation* is not, which allows the relationship to be heard as being one of support rather than antagonism. Speaking after the incident with the fish, Nicola explains why 'Jesse doesn't know':

Nicola: [...] Jesse doesn't know though. Cos when I've like had my fish urges and I've been talking about them she's like, {childish voice:} "Oh don't Mummy, don't do it!". She'll feel awfully let down.

Interviewer: Do you think she says that to- cos she thinks she's helping you? Or because she wants to make sense...that if you do- if you say that you're not going to then you do, it'd be like puzzling and kind of-

Nicola: Yeah, I think it's that sort of thing. The fact that I've chosen not to and then I'm going and doing it and changing it. Because like we've had to explain this thing of, like, life is not black and white; it's a grey shaded area, which is what children tend err...to see. There was a very good program about puberty actually on Sunday that we watched and it was saying about this black and white thing-

Interviewer: Oh yeah, I caught bits of that.

Nicola: Yeah, it was good actually. So err...yeah, I think it's that and I- I dunno, I think she'd feel awfully let down that her Mummy ...like said she was going to do something and then didn't, basically. Err, but it's such a major thing, the eating thing is. Because like, going out, it has to be thought about, where can we go out to eat, basically. Oh we can't go here because of what Mummy eats, basically.

(Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

Her young daughter would reportedly 'feel awfully let down', which Nicola explains in terms of Jesse being a *child*:

[...] Because like we've had to explain this thing of, like, life is not black and white; it's a grey shaded area, which is what children tend err...to see. There

was a very good program about puberty actually on Sunday that we watched and it was saying about this black and white thing- [...]

This account of the ‘black and white’ way Jesse sees things is supported by the fact that it was on television and also by including Ian in “...we’ve had to explain...”. Jesse’s child status is also reinforced by the repeated use of ‘Mummy’ and the childish voice. But, though Jesse’s understanding of lapsing is heard as unreasonable and secrecy is justified, Nicola does not derogate Jesse as she does her sister and ‘people’ elsewhere. This is a gentle criticism of childish innocence or naïveté. Jesse is not to be blamed and “she’d feel awfully let down” presents the secrecy as protecting Jesse more than Nicola. Nicola’s identity as a mother/Mummy also supports this secrecy – for her daughter to feel let down by Nicola could be seen as Nicola’s failure as a mother.

But Jesse is also heard as acting as the voice of vegan conscience for Nicola:

Cos when I’ve like had my fish urges and I’ve been talking about them she’s like, {*childish voice*:} “Oh don’t Mummy, don’t do it!”. She’ll feel awfully let down.

This raises the important point of others’ investments in Nicola’s veganism and the ‘network of reciprocating identities’ discussed by Gergen (1994). As discussed in Chapter 6, the new identity may cause conflict and disruption within “an array of precariously situated relationships” (Gergen, 1994, p. 209) with partners and other loved ones. Here, however, it is seen that there is investment in Nicola’s new vegan identity as well as her old non-vegan identity (seen above in the romantic, nostalgic accounts involving Ian). If Nicola reneges on her veganism she might be seen as not appreciating her family’s support and investment and as letting Jesse down; in some respects it has become a collaborative effort, a joint identity project. The biographical and relational aspects of identity are brought out by the fact that Nicola’s veganism is relatively new and has required her family-members to adapt their ‘supporting roles’, and so sensitivity to this is shown. This sense of reciprocated commitment and responsibilities regarding Nicola’s veganism is seen in the preceding extracts in:

I think she'd feel awfully let down that her Mummy ...like said she was going to do something and then didn't, basically. Err, but it's such a major thing, the eating thing is. Because like, going out, it has to be thought about, where can we go out to eat, basically. Oh we can't go here because of what Mummy eats, basically.

And also in,

Yeah, I did think like, ooh, could be like y' know err ... recriminations of like, 'Well, you ate fish before so why can't you eat it again? [...] When you're having to do something like .. this - it does affect other people, not just yourself ... it's erm, I suppose it's always open to a bit of abuse in a moment of err, in a moment of weakness, that weakness being your own initially and then somebody else's in an argument. (Nicola, interview 2, underscoring added)

Now that Ian and Jesse have committed to Nicola's new identity there is a need to honour that support – or to at least *appear* to for Jesse's sake.

This chapter has challenged Willetts' assertion that eating meat does not place vegetarians in a 'morally precarious' position. It was argued that *vegetarian and vegan identities are not only moral precarious but abstinence involves a dilemma*. Both eating meat and not eating meat are open to potential criticism. The *discourse of 'lapsing'* may be used to keep the vegetarian or vegan identity on track in the face of counter-normative behaviour. But further, *discourses of desire and temptation* are also used to deny vegetarian stereotypes of a strict and/or passionless character. Chapters 6 and 7 have also argued that identity is constituted in or through a network of supporting roles and that the dilemmas of vegetarian and vegan identity must be managed within the context of *relationships*. The last analytic chapter will explore further the ambivalence within accounts of desire and temptation.

8

Prohibition, desire and repression

- I. Accountability and ambivalence
- II. The divided and dialogic self
- III. Prohibition creating desire
- IV. 'Big words', small words, and changing the subject
- V. Prohibitions, transgressions and identities
- VI. Accounts of revulsion and repression
- VII. Meat, revulsion and transgression

Nothing divides one so much as thought. R. H. Blyth

[O]nly in conflict with itself can the human heart (as Faulkner said)
or the human soul (as Freud would have said) attain what is best in life.

Bruno Bettelheim (*Freud and Man's Soul*)

Taking issue with some post-modernist feminist analysts, who she contends have written-off autobiographical accounts as 'naively referential', Stanley (1994) argues that diary data shows an 'awareness of ontological complexity' (p. 133) and of, "the 'inner' fragmentations of self":

The life of the self, and thus the writing self also, is constructed by means of strong referential claims. But - and what an important 'but' it is - *they do so in*

awareness of the 'inner' fragmentations of self as also expressed in outward behavioural and interactional form, positioning the writing of a narrative of a life as a means - one means - of constructing coherence and identity for self; *they also inscribe something of the distinction and tension between versions of the 'I', the self, [...]* (Stanley, 1994; p. 135; emphasis added)

Her favourable assessment of diary data stresses its amenability to narrative analysis and its potential value for 'experientially derived theory', and so has much in common with Craib's (1998) and Cohen's (1992, 1994) interest in experiential accounts of identity. This experientialist account of "awareness of 'inner' fragmentations of self" can, however, be seen from a discursive-rhetorical perspective: inner fragmentations can be seen as *created by*, rather than reflected in, ways of talking. Diary accounts can be seen as revealing *rhetorical* complexity rather than ontological complexity.

These fragmentations of self and the dilemmas involved in, "inscrib[ing] something of the distinction and tension between versions of the 'I', the self", underscore once more the sort of ambivalence within self-construction seen in Nicola's accounts in the preceding chapter. This ambivalence is, once more, a note of caution to monological and categorical analyses of self and subject positionings. Like an extreme 'multiple selves' position (e.g. Rowan & Cooper, 1999), Self-categorisation theory sees identity and variation in identity in categorical terms rather than seeing a self as a discussant able to adopt various positions and mobilise an array of resources. Both are in danger of assuming that a 'self', or a self-categorisation, is at any one time a single consistent monologue.

Prevailing theoretical assumptions of a unitary, consistent self-concept can be seen as merely reflecting *rhetorics* of individuality. But individuality or consistency is not the only rhetorical commonplace for thinking about the self. As Battaglia's 'critical anthropology of selfhood' argues:

For the ethnography makes it apparent that alternative constructs exist--different premises of self-experience--as practices that in-scribe *dividuality* (Strathern's important insight) as a culturally valued capacity of persons.

(Battaglia, 1995; p. 3)

The contradictory demands of culture and rhetorical contexts means that speakers construct themselves as flexible, divisible and ambivalent as well as consistent, unchanging and indivisible. SCT presents the self as flexible but not divisible and so it neglects important tensions and ambivalences. Billig (1992, p. 71) draws attention to the negations that are built into roles. In their essay, *Sociological Ambivalence*, Merton and Barber (1976, [1963]) argue convincingly for ambivalence as being built into role-performances. They give the example of the doctor needing to be human, approachable and friendly as well as professional if he/she is to be a good doctor. Long before this, Adam Smith (1892 [1759]) also argued for the importance of *temperance* rather than extreme conformity to role expectations: for example, the elderly are better liked when their behaviour retains a little youthfulness.¹ The contradictory demands upon role-performance described by Smith and by Merton & Barber are similar to the persistent dilemma of abstaining without appearing stereotypical. Vegans and vegetarians may be better liked by non-vegans/vegetarians (and by themselves) when adherence to their group norms is tempered by complexity and contradiction.

Such ambivalence and temperance may be subtly managed in accounts and role performances, but autobiographical accounts may also explicitly construct inner tensions and fragmentations through *rhetorics of 'dividuality'* that present the self as complex and divided. Accounts of inner tension and struggle with desire will be explored to draw out a number of features regarding the rhetorical management of character, agency and commitment to a vegan identity. Within these rhetorics of ambivalence and dividuality, talk of unconscious feelings and of repression will be seen to be a commonly used resource for account-giving. Drawing upon recent work by Billig (e.g., Billig 1997; 1999a), repression will also be discussed as a discursive *activity* as well as a discourse within account-giving.

¹ It may be noted that for different groups, identities and contexts, temperance may be valued to varying degrees and may also be constructed in different ways.

I. Accountability and ambivalence

Pleasure needs to be seen in relation to absence and denial. Desire must be seen along with abstinence and prohibition. Nicola's accounts of desire can be seen to work by simultaneously and implicitly flagging a context of abstinence with which there is an essential tension. Self-denial is the essential backdrop within her accounts of indulging desire seen at the end of the last chapter. The intensity of her pleasure and sense of release on eating fish draws on her former period of abstinence and self-discipline:

[...] I love it, no guilt, just sheer joy. It tastes so fine. I work out how long I have gone without. Since March, wot, that's 5 months, I can't believe it's been so long. It tastes just how it's always tasted. But before I took it for granted, I ate it with little thought. Oh yeah, I used to think it tasted good, but this taste now was so divine, heavenly, amazing. I ate the fish. Ian didn't really have to ask, he knows me well enough to know that I was on a high plane of ecstasy. I even finished the piece he left behind! No regrets, no guilt, just a full stomach.

(Nicola, diary; 07.08.99; underscoring added)

Abstinence is also portrayed as *heightening* the pleasure: "this taste now was so divine, heavenly, amazing". Also, "[b]ut before I took it for granted, I ate it with little thought", suggests that abstinence has given her a new level of appreciation as well as pleasure. In contrast to routine consumption with little thought or pleasure, an occasional indulgence may be heard as warranted by her not taking it for granted. Also, the extreme pleasure and indulgence in "I even finished the piece he left behind!", suggests that the self-restraint which preceded it was also extreme. Similarly, the interview extract below suggests that it is *abstinence* that 'magnifies' pleasure to this all-consuming degree:

[...] Errm...and the taste was just how I remembered it. It was kind of like er ... magnified to like err, a plateau of ecstasy like, 'Mmmm baby!', sort of thing.

(Nicola, interview 2; underscoring added)

Crucially, an agony of abstinence can be inferred as lying behind the ‘ecstasy’ of indulgence. It is this *tension* between abstinence and desire, restraint and indulgence, which makes the indulgence sound more passionate and her vegan abstinence more commendable. Accountability for the lapse is thus managed by the depiction of both great pleasure and prior self-discipline. The rhetorical tension between indulgence and abstinence is crucial to: “I love it, no guilt, just sheer joy [...] No regrets, no guilt, just a full stomach”, which would not work for indulgence on a daily basis. Thus desire and abstinence are reverse sides of the same rhetorical coinage, neither is tendered in isolation. Desire and temptation have no currency without abstinence, nor is abstinence noteworthy if there is no underlying desire. The argumentative meaning of one is grasped in relation to the other. Each provides the context and the means for flagging the other and they are narrated together in an ambivalent discourse of *temptation*.

Nicola’s talk of desire, then, is also talk of abstinence, temptation and struggle. The accounts of desire include not only an account of the agony of abstinence but also the agony of freedom and a context of inner personal struggle. Both sides of the outer dilemma between abstinence and desire are preserved and thereby managed by the discourse of temptation *as an internal ambivalence. This agonistic ambivalence is key to the management of the dilemmas of consistency and inconsistency.* Nicola the vegan is not reduced to abstinence alone, she retains her desire. Nor is vegan abstinence entirely lost when she lapses. This inner struggle is articulated in the dramatic sense of uncertainty and unpredictability over whether or not she will eat the fish:

I don’t know wot I will do when I actually get it, but let’s just see wot happens.

[...] So, all the way to Harry’s I’ve got a tight chest. I keep having to take big gulps of air. I feel quite nervous. Wot if I can’t face it when I get it? Don’t eat it then. Wot if I love it? Love it then.

(Nicola, diary; 07.08.99; underscoring added)

Although writing after eating the fish, Nicola recounts not knowing how she was going to react, feel and behave: “let’s just see wot happens”. She is presented as

having limited self-knowledge and self-control, thus partly denying her agency and responsibility. Her self-interrogation presents her feelings as unpredictable and, thereby, as uncontrollable/not chosen: “Wot if I can’t face it when I get it? [...] Wot if I love it?”. Nicola is heard to answer her own questions stoically: “Don’t eat it then [...] love it then” –she appears to struggle with her feelings but also to resign herself to them, again backgrounding agency. Her account of nervousness (stressed and corroborated by its reported physical manifestation) offsets any sense that she is *too* resigned or relaxed however. *The discourse of struggling with temptation is a discourse of ambivalence that both asserts and denies agency and freedom.* This follows from the tension at the heart of temptation: if there were no possibility of failure it would not be a genuine struggle at all. But there is also a further layer of ambivalence – between whether emotions and feelings are to be *fought* or are to be instead acknowledged, valued and *followed*. As Chapter 7 discussed, desires and attitudes towards them are tied up with vegan/vegetarian stereotypes but may also be flexibly constructed. These dilemmas of vegetarian/vegan identity are managed through the construction of the self as ambivalent and torn.

II. The divided and dialogic self

In Nicola’s account of indulging in fish, accountability for the lapse is managed through her apparent struggle with desire and abstinence. Equally, when Nicola reports *resisting* desire, flagging her commitment to veganism once again depends on the construction of her struggle with temptation and a tension within the self.

Guess what, I really fancy some fish. [...] Oh, scary, is this wot happens, do you start craving food. Is it like giving up smoking? [...] I am not gonna have some cos I will feel bad about it. The selfish desire is one I shall fight. It is an awful death, gasping, suffocating, how inhumane. I shall ride the storm, hope it blows itself out!! (Nicola, diary; 15.05.99; underscoring added)

Strong desire is heard in the term ‘craving’ and in, “I really fancy...”. The questioning, “...is this what happens [...]?”, implies things *happening to* Nicola rather than

emphasising her own actions and self-determination. Agency is again backgrounded as desire is heard as imperative ('craving') and as a recognised pattern of events and experience shared with others: "...do you start craving [...] Is it like giving up smoking?".

But the term 'scary' also suggests an ambivalent orientation to her desire, heard as neither chosen nor wanted. 'Scary' implies that desire is uncontrollable or in some way 'other' to or outside of Nicola. These issues of control of the self and division within the self are also caught up in Nicola's use of metaphor in the above account – desire can again be heard as external in, "I shall ride the storm, hope it blows itself out!!". This can itself be seen as having ambivalent effects. Externalising desire denies and pushes it away (from her self) allowing a dramatic struggle to be set up. But it also denies and pushes away *responsibility* for 'the storm' and its possible consequences. Moreover, her desire is accorded the status of an elemental force that cannot be fought, only ridden out. Riding a storm and hoping it 'blows itself out' is a more passive image than fighting "the selfish desire" (though even here, desire is not claimed as '*my* selfish desire'). As a rhetorical strategy, pushing away parts of the self is a double-edged sword: accounts may persuade the speaker as well as the hearer and so, as responsibility for desire is abdicated, so, potentially, is control also. Externalising or 'othering' desire may manage accountability for desire more than it manages desire itself.

But the two –accountability and self-management– are not entirely divorced from each other. Nicola is accountable for her desire but is also accountable *for the accounts of desire she offers*. Yet another dilemma is indicated: to construct the self and desire as opposed and yet not be heard as dodging responsibility for what are one's own feelings and actions. This is managed by ambivalently and ambiguously claiming and also disclaiming desire as self and not self – Nicola does not *entirely* deny desire but only *metaphorically* claims to be 'riding the storm'. The storm, and the struggle, are *within her* and involve constructing a divided self.

One way in which this is done is through *voicing both sides of a dialogue* between desire and abstinence. In the extract above, Nicola answers desire with a moral voice. Desire is branded 'selfish' and something to be fought, which she goes on to do in "It

is an awful death, gasping, suffocating, how inhumane”. Nicola’s commitment is again flagged through her determination to fight the good fight (“The selfish desire is one I shall fight”). This flags her desire but also resists it, drawing attention to Nicola’s efforts of resistance. Her ambivalence is again played out argumentatively as an inner dialogue in the extract below:

Bacon for family, bacon butties. Oh, they are scary! The smell of bacon is still a turn on. But then I think of the little piggies in the muddy fields in Nottingham, snorting about in the mud, eating turnips, all pink and free range? But wot about the hormones, antibiotics and the rest that those piggies are pumped full of. Ah, you eat the crap, I’ll ~~eat~~ whoops, Freudian slip there!! I’ll love the view. That’s wot I was trying to say!

{*Cartoon drawing of a pig saying:*} “Did you know, we are more intelligent than man’s best friend?”

(Nicola, diary, 01.05.99; underscoring added)

The term ‘scary’ is used again – here describing bacon butties themselves, which bring Nicola face-to-face with her passionate desires. This flags the strength of her desire and her commitment to resisting it. It also constructs Nicola as divided and ambivalent: she both wants to eat bacon and wants to *not* eat it. As before, agency is simultaneously flagged and undermined, is asserted and denied; or rather, effort is flagged in terms of the limits and struggle of self-control. Desire and temptation threaten to undermine her vegan identity but are also a means for underlining her commitment to it.

Nicola is heard as *talking* herself out of her temptation (in a broad sense - the drawing is also significant). The inner struggle is heard clearly as the voice of desire is countered by other voices: “But then I think of the little piggies in the muddy fields”. A variety of arguments are mobilised, particularly moral concern, which shifts attention to the pigs. The more endearing term ‘little piggies’ is used, and an idyllic image of the piggies’ lives on the farm further cultivates sympathetic concern (“snorting about in the mud, eating turnips, all pink and free range”). This pastoral idyll is then redeveloped as Nicola adds factory farming and health concerns, re-

evaluating eating bacon as “eat[ing] crap”, thereby arguing against desire on gustatory grounds too. Her cartoon talking pig not only brings pigs to life but also gives them a voice (and, thereby, mind/consciousness/intelligence) which directly addresses, engages and enrolls the reader (and writer) with a rhetorical question (“Did you know...?”). The issue, and the level, of pig intelligence are raised and the comparison with ‘man’s best friend’ advocates similar, friendly, treatment. This animated pig again reasserts the attractiveness and value of *pigs* over that of bacon, thereby opposing the voice of desire. In “But then I think...” and “But wot about...”, ‘but’ is the sign of crucial arguments. *Not only is there ambivalence and the voicing of different opinions, but these voices clash and argue.* The self is not only heard as divided but is actively in dispute.

Billig (1996a) and Billig *et al.* (1988) present the case that thinking is fundamentally dialogic and argumentative.

Social argumentation can be seen as providing the model for social thinking.

(Billig *et al.*, 1988; p. 17)

The internalisation of positions and arguments within public debates makes possible inner dialogue and self-talk even when alone. Indeed *thinking* requires that:

...both sides are given a hearing in the debating chamber of the single mind.

This sort of deliberation is, of course, possible only if the individual possesses the dilemmatic aspects of social belief.

(Billig *et al.*, 1988; p. 17; emphasis added)

Thinking is viewed as fundamentally linguistic and dilemmatic and this is reflected in the accounts of temptation and resistance above. Nicola’s struggle with desire is conceived and fought discursively. But this idea of inner debate is also a commonplace of everyday thinking, a rhetoric of ‘dividuality’ by which commitment may be articulated and managed. Billig (1999a) observes:

Wittgenstein, in describing the emotion of love, [...] made a distinction between ‘love’ and ‘pain’, suggesting that ‘love is not a feeling’ because love, unlike pain, ‘is put to the test’. [Wittgenstein, 1975; remark 504; p. 88]

(Billig, 1999a; p. 191)

Like love, commitment to veganism, or having an identity as a committed vegan, is also not just an emotion but is put to the test. It can be conceived as being tested through practices of social accounting and the negotiated accomplishment of identity. But as the foregoing suggests, commitment is a private concern too, however, and such testing and accounting are internalised. Further, these *inner* debates may be seen to be the subject of *public* debate and argument: the social accomplishment of commitment to veganism may be promoted by being seen to be wrestling inwardly with temptation or with failure. *The social construction of inner struggle is important – ‘inner’ debate may have its origins in public argumentation but it may re-enter public argument from which it sprang.*

The last extract also indicates another feature of common-sense ways of talking about inner ambivalence that again manages commitment. Nicola hints that her ‘Freudian slip’ indicates an *unconscious* wish to eat meat:

Ah, you eat the crap, I’ll -eat- whoops, Freudian slip there!! I’ll love the view.

That’s wot I was trying to say! (Nicola, diary; 01.05.99; underscoring added)

Later the same month, another ‘Freudian slip’ is made, recorded or claimed in Nicola’s diary:

Still feel like ~~m~~ fish, oops, was that another Freudian slip, as the ‘m’ was in my mind, meat. Holy shit!! Is it all gonna end? Wait for the next exciting instalment.

{line of hearts and stars} (Nicola, diary; 16.05.99; underscoring added)

Freud’s psychopathology of everyday life has long since entered into the lexicon of everyday conversation, albeit in popular form. Moscovici (1961) and Parker (1998)

trace the uptake of psychoanalytic ideas into Western culture and discourse, and Billig writes, “psychoanalytic thinking [...] is *a habit of language*, which has affected Western culture generally” (1999a, p. 216; emphasis added).

Nicola implies that her slips of the pen hint at the possibility of other slips, or worse: “Holy shit!! Is it all gonna end?”. Bettelheim (1983, p. 84) suggests ‘*lapse*’ to be a better translation of Freud’s original German ‘*Versprechen*’ than ‘*slip of the tongue*’ (which implies the tongue itself is physically to blame).² These written *lapsūs linguae* (rather than ‘slips of the pen’), then, are offered by Nicola as foreboding a possible dietary lapse; as an unconscious orthographic error warning of possible *moral* error. Nicola is hinting that should desire overcome her vegan intentions it will be her unconscious prevailing over her conscious wishes – an unconscious lapse, or a sort of dietary lapse into unconsciousness. As Nicola does acknowledge her ‘unconscious’ desire, it is perhaps more correctly the hidden *strength* or *extent* of her desire or wish which is being implied.³ Whether conscious, preconscious or unconscious in a Freudian sense, desire is being flagged in a way that disclaims conscious control. This is a *claim* of unconscious desire.

But, as is typical, ‘Freudian slip’ is used here in a jocular, tongue-in-cheek manner. Accountability for the account Nicola offers is managed by the ambiguous commitment to her Freudian explanation (as before, with the metaphorical externalisation of desire). So, this account manages Nicola’s commitment to veganism and also manages her commitment to this account – there is ambivalence and

² Though he usually used the term *Versprechen*, “Freud himself used *lapsus*, the Latin word from which lapse is derived, as the term for some of his examples” (Bettelheim, 1983; p. 84).

³ By consciously attending to the supposedly unconscious desire in her account it is not an *unconscious* desire – at least not after she ‘recognises’ it in her slip of the pen. However, it may be argued that conscious awareness of a desire etc. is a matter of degrees, particularly as repression and expression follow or unfold in the flux of conversation. Also, the recognition (and therefore collapse) of repression may be implicated in the popularisation of Freud: the rhetorical context for repression may be seen as being altered by the popular notion of ‘Freudian slips’. In this context, unconscious desires may be more readily seen/recognised/betrayed by parapraxis. Such slips may always have required accounting for at times and Freudian ideas may be an aid to accounting. But, given this popular vigilance with regard to parapraxis, the unconscious may be more commonly identified or invoked (correctly or incorrectly). Alternatively, parapraxes may be less commonly made than they were with the conscious mind’s increased awareness of these sorts of errors. This could be seen in terms of Gergen’s (1973) ‘psychology of enlightenment effects’, whereby social psychological theory is taken up by its reflexive object of study thereby changing the subject and partly invalidating the theory. As Billig notes, “Freudian repression is an idea that has become public property” but this is “as Freud always intended it to be” (Billig, 1999a; p. 253).

ambiguity in both. The idea of unconscious desire and antagonism within the self is suggested rather than claimed. But even the light-hearted reference to having a repressed desire for meat can be heard as dispelling a vegan stereotype of being serious, solemn and/or defensive. Even more simply, it makes a more interesting, dramatic and entertaining story.

A ‘Freudian slip’ is not just a simple mistake but is simultaneously both an unintentional and an *intentional* action.⁴ It is both understood and is used to indicate a wish at another, deeper level to do something that we deny wishing to do or are prohibited from doing. In the accounts above, it calls attention to, and perhaps celebrates in a safe way, a part of Nicola that wants to eat meat or to indulge generally. This spirit of contradiction and self-contradiction will be seen to run through another aspect of temptation which again draws on the idea of unconscious desire.

III. Prohibition creating desire

It has been argued that talk of desire is intimately related to a context of and a tension with abstinence. In Nicola’s account of her indulgent and passionate lapse, desire was heard as being heightened by abstinence. As will be recalled from Chapter 7 however, lapsing is a discourse of *prohibition* as well as abstinence. There is a *rule* of abstinence that proscribes against eating certain things and this proscription can be seen as inciting, arousing or provoking desire. The common-sense discourses of temptation and desire include the notion of the attractiveness of forbidden or illicit pleasures and of *rule-breaking*. Nicola’s account of her lapse, above, for example, is introduced by:

<p>You know wot, I have tasted the forbidden fruit. [...] (Nicola, diary; 07.08.99)</p>

Referring to fish as ‘the forbidden fruit’ focuses on the forbidden aspects of fish and casts her indulgence as a forbidden act. Among other effects, this flags Nicola’s vegan

⁴ Bettelheim calls it, “a real achievement and a howling mistake” (Bettelheim, 1983; p. 84).

identity – fish is forbidden for her *as a vegan*. But the pleasure of wicked indulgence and the desire for rule-breaking is also heard. A commonplace notion of ‘naughty-but-nice’ is associated with Nicola’s use of the term ‘forbidden fruit’, which is also seen in:

[...] Oh heaven on a spoon. [...] Ian asks, “Are you gonna have some Rasmali?”
 “No, darling, not this time.” (Leave your options open, naughty. naughty, naughty
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!) (Nicola, diary, 13.05.99; underscoring added)

[Nicola:] “Does this have cream in it?”

[Ian:] “Erm, I think it might”.

[Nicola:] “No wonder it tastes so good!”

(Nicola, diary, 03.06.99; underscoring added)

The term ‘forbidden fruit’ also connotes Christian notions of sin and loss of innocence. Religious, and specifically Christian, associations have already been noted, e.g., Nicola’s denials of being a ‘righteous/ preaching/ saintly vegan’, as in, “I obviously ain’t no saintly Vegan! But I’m doin’ my best!” (Nicola, diary; 01.05.99). Chapter 7 also found Nicola’s talk of desire to contain strong *sexual* allusions and these accounts can at times be heard to cast temptation as deliciously wicked and sinful. Talk of illicit pleasures is a notable and powerful current within sexual discourses and the related theme of *seduction*, prominent within Nicola’s accounts of temptation, has already been discussed. Seduction by her partner again draw on and points to a potentially fatal attraction to forbidden pleasures and an ambiguous resistance to and celebration of them, especially, perhaps, when the pleasures (and the blame) are shared.

“Have some”, sez Ian. A cartoon figure of the devil comes to mind. “Eat fish Nick, you know you want it...”. Yeah I also fancy some coke, but I ain’t gonna do that either. Oh my god I have categorized the two in the same league. [...]

(Nicola, diary, 18.05.99; underscoring added)

The cartoon devil indicates Nicola's sympathetic portrayal of her partner but it is also a sympathetic image of naughty indulgence. According to this particular construction of lapsing and morality⁵ (and of indulgence, food, and sex), wickedness and sinfulness is not pernicious but is venial⁶ and enticing. This account of being seduced therefore involves a seductive image of seduction itself and, so, of lapsing too.

Finally, categorising haddock in "the same league" as an illegal recreational drug again signals an orientation to fish as a forbidden object of desire rather than, say, as nutritionally valued or tasty. Nicola's temptation to break her vegan diet is not just a matter of gustatory desire; the forbidden is heard as having a certain attraction too.

The desire to break prohibitions is far from being confined to sexual talk. The following diary extract places food within a wider context of desires to break other prohibitions – whether against fish, meat, alcohol, cigarettes, or violence:

Thursday 27th May

Well out of sorts. Feel aggressive, feel like smacking someone in the face, feel like eating fish, feel like eating meat, big juicy steak, feel like getting pissed, feel like smokin (gave up in January).

Did smoke, 2 fags, good job the person I scrounged them off wasn't carrying any haddock. Oh bollocks.

Ya know what this feels like, P.M.S., why? Well it's my friend's Birthday tomorrow. She died on 14th March 98, same age as me. Life's a fuckin bitch.

Times like these make me think "Fuck it, do wot ya like, you may not be around tomorrow."

Rationale: Everything in moderation girl. Take care of ya body, it will last ya much longer. OK, I'm off, going to find someone's head to kick in not really!

28th May

[...] Oh I bought some fags. Could not smoke at the party, daughter thinks I gave up smoking a few years ago. Naughty, Naughty.

Fish desire seems to have subsided since I've been smoking, strange.

(Nicola, diary, 25.05.99; underscoring added)

⁵ Here, the rule-following or rule-based aspects of morality are to the fore and it is seen in contrast with, or as opposing, pleasure and desire rather than suffering or selfishness, as elsewhere.

⁶ 'Venial' is apt as it means easily forgiven but also denotes an association with Venus and love.

Although there is no suggestion of sex in these desires to indulge, desire is again about more than taste alone: there is an appetite for defiance and sins of commission, and a wider taste for transgression. Nicola not only ‘feels like’ eating fish and meat but also “feels like”⁷ drinking, smoking (which she had also given up) and being violent. The rule-breaking is characterised by immoderation, indulgence and excess: Nicola does not just want to have some meat but wants a “big juicy steak”; she does not want a drink but wants to “get pissed” and to “smack someone in the face”. There is a strong element of prohibition-breaking here, made more explicit by “do wot ya like...”. Nicola reports actually smoking and, though she does not report eating fish, there is the threat or claim that she could and would have done: “Did smoke, 2 fags, good job the person I scrounged them off wasn’t carrying any haddock. Oh bollocks”. Even the language is improper or impolite: “...getting pissed [...] smokin...”; and, “Life’s a fuckin bitch [...] Fuck it”. Though not confined to this extract, the strong language may also be seen as being in keeping with the theme of transgression. A hormonal explanation of desire is considered/offered in Nicola’s account (“Well out of sorts [...] Ya know what this feels like, P.M.S....”). Also seen at other times, this complements the feelings-based accounts and helps to excuse the reported violent desires.

These accounts, then, point to the need to understand accounts of desire and temptation partly in terms of notions of prohibition-breaking. This is further supported by the report that Nicola’s ‘fish desire’ is sated by breaking another rule: “...fish desire seems to have subsided since I’ve been smoking”. A desire to indulge or give vent to a rebellious urge is suggested rather than an urge for any food itself. Here, the prohibited foods are as much prohibitions as they are foods, thus allowing a cigarette to act as fish-substitute although, unlike meat-substitutes, it is not the gustatory but the social psychological qualities of fish which are being replaced. However, the pleasure of prohibition-breaking and the pleasure of eating feed into each other and are not entirely inseparable.

⁷ Unsurprisingly, these accounts of prohibition creating desire are supported by many statements of *feeling* rather than morality or logic – *pathos*, rather than *ethos* or *logos*, to use Aristotle’s terms for styles of rhetoric (e.g., ‘Feel aggressive, feel like smacking someone in the face, feel like eating fish, feel like eating meat, big juicy steak, feel like getting pissed, feel like smokin’). In this respect the accounts promote, presuppose and draw on a certain attitude towards and way of talking about feelings as powerful or valuable.

These temptations to indulge and rebel may be conceived as being *created* by prohibitions – as exemplified in the demands of politeness and the temptations of rudeness. Billig (1999a) discusses the delights of being rude, which is seen as made possible, and also tempting, by the prohibitions of politeness:

Dunn reports that at the age of two children regularly laugh as social and linguistic rules are broken, especially by themselves. Dunn points to ‘the pleasure and excitement the children show as they deliberately repeat the forbidden act’ [Dunn, (1988), p. 18]. [...] What has been forbidden has become an object of desire and pleasure. (Billig, 1999a; p. 96)

Both for vegan rules of abstinence and generally:

Temptation is created, for, as Freud recognised, prohibitions create their own desires. (Billig, 1999a; p. 97)

Leaving Nicola now, this theme of prohibition creating desire and temptation is most clearly and explicitly heard in the accounts of another aspiring vegan, Paul. His account of his limited success in becoming vegan backgrounds responsibility for desire more than does Nicola and is a more developed account of personal ambivalence and unconscious desire:

232 Paul: [...] It just, it reflects my aversion to hard and fast, like, sort of changes in
 233 my life because it never works. I thought if I load it all from the start with
 234 words like “commit” and y’know “change”, and big, kind of, something,
 235 major difference words then I find these things rarely work, y’know. I often
 236 sort of sit down and plan my life out and very often I’ve decided right I’m
 237 stopping doing this, this is the major cause of all my problems and I’m not
 238 going to do it any more. And it’s in that act of saying, “Right I’m stopping”,
 239 means that I have to immediately do it, I mean as soon as I’ve put the pen
 240 down I have to go out and do whatever it is I’ve decided to– not to do
 241 anymore. I mean almost, it’s that kind of– sort of self-sabotage seems to start
 242 with the big decision. So I thought okay this time I will say I’m not doing it

243 for– I’m not doing it solely because I want to, I’m doing it because it will be
 244 interesting for me and I can see that it would be interesting for you to have this
 245 sort of record to see exactly how people found it and what have you. And that
 246 actually, looking back on it now seems to be the most success– I mean that
 247 really was. I know it doesn’t sound like much but I think I had two or three
 248 weeks of more or less five or six days of sort of no cheese, no milk, no eggs
 249 kind of thing and that is the most successful I’ve been. Yeah, so, that was why
 250 I didn’t like the word “commit” and y’know, those sorts of words seem to– it
 251 seems to almost immediately follow that I for some reason decide to abandon
 252 my big lifestyle change.

253 Interviewer: Right.

253. Paul: That’s not a very clear answer but that’s generally the way it works,
 254. y’know, I’ve tried very often to sort of [*unclear*] and I’ll decide okay I can’t
 255. and, y’know, I can’t go out on a Thursday or something like that, I’ll go out
 256. every Thursday for about three weeks.

(Paul, interview 1; underscoring added)

For Paul, to prohibit is to “load it from the start” with temptation - or *compulsion*, as he describes it. Like Nicola’s account above, Paul sets his desire to break vegan rules within a wider pattern of resisting the imposition of new rules (“...it reflects my aversion to hard and fast, like, sort of changes in my life”). Paul’s “self-sabotage” of his attempts to change are presented as a general character trait not specific to veganism or diet. This generalising of the pattern of ‘self-sabotage’ across food, going out on a Thursday night, or “whatever it is that I’ve decided not to do anymore”, underlines prohibition as the common factor and source of temptation. An account of Paul’s nature is being offered which can be seen as an account of prohibition creating desire. This appeal to a wider tendency – backed-up by more evidence over a longer period – strengthens Paul’s explanation for his lack of success with veganism. It is heard as a robust description of how Paul is, rather than as a tenuous *ad hoc* excuse covering a lack of motivation. Also, as this pattern is applied to any kind of ‘hard and fast’ change, he is not heard as being uncommitted to veganism in particular.

As Paul is only talking about himself, and is heard as speaking from experience, his

account is heard as more reasonable. But his account is one of *observing* rather than understanding himself. This may help to rhetorically dispose of accountability for his lapses, but itself needs careful management. The account of *observing* his behaviour is married to a passive construction of agency – this is typified by the agentless “it never works”:

...because it never works... (line 233)

...then I find these things rarely work, y’know... (line 235)

...that’s generally the way it works, y’know... (line 254)

“I find...” and “it seems [...] to follow that” (below) cast Paul as a spectator to his own actions. And a fairly puzzled observer at that:

...it seems to almost immediately follow that I for some reason decide to
abandon my big lifestyle change... (line 250-52; underscoring added)

Agency is heard when talking about his decision to abstain in “...I’ll decide okay I can’t...” (line 254), but is obscured in the passive, mystified self-observation, “...it seems to follow that I for some reason” (line 250-1). This suggests agency without responsibility by invoking notions of unconscious motivation, decision-making and action. This ambivalent assertion and denial of agency and a lack of self-knowledge or self-understanding is also heard in the term ‘self-sabotage’ and becomes explicit in the talk that immediately follows the extract above:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 257. | Interviewer: That sort of leads to the question of how much do you |
| 258. | think you understand what you do, ‘cos it sounds as if sometimes you sort |
| 259. | of catch yourself and think– |
| 260. | Paul: – <u>‘Why am I doing that? Why am I going out every Thursday when I</u> |
| 261. | <u>said I wouldn’t?’ Yeah, why am I buying this cheese sandwich when I’m</u> |
| 262. | <u>consciously trying not to?</u> |
| 263. | Interviewer: Yeah. And also, you have a theory as to why you <i>do</i> , but |
| 264. | how much do you think you– How confident are you in– |
| 265. | Paul: – <u>Not very. No, no, I wouldn’t say that I feel that I really know what</u> |

266. I'm doing {Laughing}. I don't know what it is, I just think that especially
 267. with food, I mean I wouldn't say that I have unresolved issues with food,
 268. or anything so dramatic, but I do have times when I am just extremely
 269. hungry, I have to have what I fancy, and sometimes, y'know, I think that's
 270. where a lot of the err sabotage comes from. It's just, y'know, it's conflict, I
 271. mean, I really want to do it for a reason that I don't understand, I don't
 272. know where it's come from but it's there and it's immediate and it's
 273. pressing and that's it, I'm satisfied, in some respects, I think, err yeah. I
 274. mean, from that you can conclude that I really don't know what I'm doing
 275. because I can't even talk about it in a intelligent way.

(Paul, Interview 1; underscoring added)

Paul's motivations are again presented as mysterious in the questioning, "Why am I doing [...] Why am I going out [...] why am I buying...". Self-interrogation and self-examination is heard as well as lack of self-insight. Further, "...when I'm consciously trying not to?" (line 262) constructs an inner struggle and implies that the answer to his questions must lie in his *unconscious*, onto which responsibility – both causal and moral – is shifted. An unconscious source of desire is again suggested in:

It's just, y'know, it's conflict, I mean, I really want to do it for a reason that I don't understand, I don't know where it's come from but it's there,...

(line 270-273)

The mysterious nature of his desire allows it to be heard as mysteriously *compelling*: "...but it's there and it's immediate and it's pressing and that's it, I'm satisfied, in some respects..." (line 271-3). Liberation from unconscious desires through self-understanding and insight is a basic premise of psychoanalysis ('the talking cure'). Similarly here, Paul is portrayed as a victim of lack of self-knowledge. Paul's self-control and agency are presented as limited by his lack of insight into his motivations and behaviour. Interestingly, Paul's accountability is inoculated against in this way by the irrational, unconscious determinants of his behaviour: *he does not even have to furnish an "intelligent" account, as his reported inability to do so is evidence for not*

being responsible (though this ‘non-account’ is, of course, also an account). Like repression, the defence hinges on *not* knowing something:

[...] I mean, from that you can conclude that I really don’t know what I’m doing because I can’t even talk about it in a intelligent way.

(lines 273-5; underscoring added)

However, as well as the advantages mentioned, there is considerable potential difficulty with failing to account for one’s behaviour or offering an account which denies conscious knowledge of motivations and reasons. Being able to give an account of one’s actions has been offered by some in the social sciences as the basic criterion for ‘personhood’. Social accountability – at least for certain actions – is routinely expected (Buttny, 1993) and being able to furnish such accounts is a powerful norm of being accepted as rational. And so, “I really don’t know what I’m doing”, is substantiated with, or rather is heard as following from, empirical evidence (“...from that you can conclude that...”, and, ‘...because I can’t even talk about it in an intelligent way”). Also, it is not Paul himself who is presented as drawing this conclusion (‘...you can conclude that...’). The abdication of accountability is further facilitated by the self-critical and self-deprecatory nature of the account (‘I really don’t know what I’m doing [...] I can’t even talk about it in a intelligent way’). Culpability is defended against at a cost to articulacy and rationality, and blame is shifted to the unconscious. Disclaiming understanding of and responsibility for one’s own behaviour is not to be done lightly and at its most blunt is done light-heartedly and with laughter:

I wouldn’t say that I feel that I really know what I’m doing {*Laughing*}. I don’t know what it is, [...] (line 265-6).

The laughter indicates the violation of norms (of accountability) in Paul’s statement but it also manages this by ambiguous commitment to the claim and comic self-presentation. A further suggestion of unconscious irrationality, in the form of “unresolved issues”, is again tentatively introduced using the standard disclaimer form, “I wouldn’t say that I [...], but...”:

[...] I mean I wouldn't say that I have unresolved issues with food, or anything so dramatic, but I do have times when I am just extremely hungry, I have to have what I fancy, [...] (lines 267-9; underscoring added)

Echoing the sort of disclaimers discussed by Hewitt & Stokes (1975) as 'credentialing',⁸ Paul is heading off an interpretation of what follows as being overly "dramatic" or as making excuses which may be heard in his following statement. Desire is nonetheless presented as an ungovernable compulsion in "...but I do have times when [...] I have to have what I fancy". This is another strong denial of self-determination, freedom, self-control and responsibility that goes beyond simply being "extremely hungry" (which could be satiated with vegan food). In this account, "I have to have what I fancy" combines the discourses of craving and unconscious desire.

A final indication of the careful, managed use of ideas of unconscious motivations is suggested by what is *absent* from the account: Paul uses neither the words 'unconscious' nor 'repression' – they are to be inferred from his mention of the *conscious* in "why am I [...] why am I [...] why am I [...] when I'm consciously trying not to?" (line 260-2). The issue of unconscious desires is strongly implied without being fully spelt out in potentially hackneyed, clichéd, and/or apparently self-serving, Freudian terms.

As was seen with Nicola's accounts of her "Freudian slips", the idea of the unconscious is a notable resource within talk about desire, temptation and ambivalence. Notions of unconscious desires to break prohibitions, though subtly mobilised, play a significant role in managing agency and the dilemmas of identity. The ambivalence between abstinence and indulgence, and between rule-following and rule-breaking, are reproduced and represented as a conflict between conscious and unconscious motivations.⁹ At the heart of such a conflict between the conscious and

⁸ For example, "I'm not prejudiced – some of my best friends are Jews, but..." (Hewitt & Stokes, p. 4)

⁹ To give one other clear example from many, Alyson T gives this account of occasionally eating dairy food:

"I think what's holding me back is the subconscious thought that if we were to finish, then I'd probably want to slip back into being more vegetarian than vegan and that would be easier if I was still technically vegetarian rather than having to undo being vegan again."

(Alyson T, diary; p. 9; underscoring added)

the unconscious is the profound ambivalence and self-contradiction of *the process of repression*. Within these accounts of prohibition-creating-desire repression may be seen as an *activity* as well as a discourse.

IV. ‘Big words’, small words, and changing the subject

Paul’s account above suggests a further point to make concerning prohibition creating desire. Prohibition is a *discursive activity*. Interdiction reflects an *act* of proscription that is a discursive act:

...it’s in that act of saying, “Right I’m stopping”...

(line 237; underscoring added)

...so I thought okay this time I will say,... (line 241; underscoring added)

...as soon as I’ve put the pen down I have to go out and do whatever it is I’ve decided to not to do any more... (line 238; underscoring added)

The importance of language is again clear in Paul’s talk about the effect of *words* like “commit”, “change” and other “big [...] words”:

...if I load it all from the start with words like “commit” and, y’know, “change”, and big, kind of, something major difference words then I find these things rarely work, y’know’; I didn’t like the word “commit” and y’know, those sorts of words... (line 233-5; underscoring added)

Paul’s “big, kind of, something major difference words”, which effectively prohibit, are less than successful in repressing his desires:

...I mean almost, it’s that kind of- sort of self-sabotage seems to start with the big decision,... (line 240-1)

Yeah, so, that was why I didn't like the word "commit" and y'know, those sorts of words seem to—it seems to almost immediately follow that I for some reason decide to abandon my big lifestyle change. (line 247-50)

Desire for meat must be repressed if a vegan diet is to be successfully maintained.¹⁰ But in saying/ writing/ deciding that he will 'commit' to a vegan diet, desire is not being repressed but *created* by these big words or decisions. Paul's big words like 'commit' and 'change' are heard as well-intentioned but *self-defeating* because they are heard and reacted to by Paul *as prohibitions*. For Paul, to prohibit by talking of 'committing' is to sow the seeds of temptation. The double-edged sword of 'committing' is reflected in its double meaning as either a binding pledge or an act of perpetration. Explicit discoursēs of committing do not repress desire but may incite it. The greater the statement to commit, the more "loaded" it is, and the greater may be the rebellious counter-urge for indulgence. There is a dilemma of abstaining without prohibiting, of committing without speaking of 'committing'.¹¹

Paul's accounts of self-sabotage draw upon notions of repressed unconscious desires, as argued, but the repressed unconscious is not only a discourse or story told in accounts. If repression is viewed as a discursive *activity* accounts can themselves be seen as repressing. The above extracts may be approached from the perspective of recent work by Billig that combines Freudian repression with an interest in language. Billig (1997, 1999a) draws attention to the rhetorical-discursive *means* and the dialogic *activity* of repression rather than the unconscious contents or objects of repression that have been the traditional focus of attention. In a reformulation of Freudian repression from a discursive psychological perspective, Billig discusses the accomplishment of repression through language use. The unconscious is the product of repression and is sustained or maintained by repressive activity. Unconscious

¹⁰ This is a simplification: sometimes desire for meat is flagged with the effect of highlighting commitment and effort, or denying stereotype, for example, as seen in Nicola's accounts in Chapter 6. However, if being vegan/vegetarian is to become a matter of habit and routine and not a constant struggle with temptation, pushing former pleasures from conscious awareness is required. This assumes, however, that desire is still present rather than being abandoned, left behind or replaced - see later this chapter.

¹¹ 'Committing' and 'commitment' are not necessarily always interpreted as proscriptive and inciting. They may also be seen positively, as an answer to criticism of "playing at being vegetarian" (Tamra). Richard too talks of wanting to "get real" and welcomes the "strength" of a consistent, committed vegan position, which he contrasts with the inconsistencies of vegetarianism.

desires are clarified as originating in social practice and in conversation rather than instinct. Language is argued to be fundamentally repressive as well as expressive; topics are closed down as other topics are opened up. Successful repression, however, involves more than censorship, omissions, and absences: “Other words must fill the space of silence” (Billig, 1999a, p. 103). Specifically, Billig draws attention to shifts in topic through ‘small words’ such as discontinuity markers like ‘...Anyway...’ and ‘...But...’.

Constraint and desire are to be found in the details of language, in the small words and micro-pauses of conversation. (Billig, 1999a; p. 81)

In contrast to the conspicuous failures of Paul’s ‘big words’, inconspicuous small words divert attention to other topics. Paul’s report of his greatest success in going vegan can be seen to involve changing the subject away from a discourse of committing:

[...] So I thought okay this time I will say I’m not doing it for– I’m not doing it solely because I want to I’m doing it because it will be interesting for me and I can see that it would be interesting for you to have this sort of record to see exactly how people found it and what have you. And that actually, looking back on it now seems to be the most success–I mean that really was [...] that is the most successful I’ve been [...] (lines 241-247)

Here, there is less prohibition, and therefore less pressure under this different construction of what Paul is doing and why. His behaviour is still under scrutiny – but not because there is something that he simply *must not* do and therefore *wants* to do, but because it will be “interesting” to see what happens, lapses and all (“...to see exactly how people found it and what have you”). The focus is on *recording* the behaviour rather than on the behaviour itself (“...interesting for you to have this sort of record”). A lapse is not simply a failure (and a temptingly indulgent or rebellious act) but ‘interesting’. Thus Paul’s diet is observed rather than policed and so less temptation is created.

But in saying that it would be ‘interesting’, a sense of narrative tension or drama is

being suggested. If everyone found it easy or were successful it would not be interesting. This may be heard as setting up the process/experience of going vegan as complex, challenging and difficult but not morally loaded. Like the earlier suggestions of unconscious motivation, the account above once more backgrounds agency and responsibility. In taking an 'interest' in his new diet Paul is not fully taking responsibility and can be heard as a partly detached and *disinterested* observer of the success or failure of his diet. There is the suggestion that his progress is an unknown, and will unfold and reveal itself to Paul rather than be decided and realized by him. Again, "...to see [...] how people found it", backgrounds both agency ('*found*', not 'do') and assessment (not 'to see if people succeed or fail'). Paul elsewhere refers to his efforts towards adopting a vegan diet as an "experiment"¹², another low commitment, low-agency term, which again backgrounds issues of prohibition as well as commitment (or the act of committing).

Participation in the study also offers Paul an identity of 'vegan research participant' or 'diarist-interviewee' in place of the transitional, liminal, ambiguous and potentially problematic status of 'aspiring vegan'.¹³ It is also noticeable that this alternative, non-prohibitive construction of going vegan is supported by the activities of diary-keeping and interviewing to occupy and distract Paul, and these involve the researcher as well as himself. His ongoing participation in the study, then, supports his "attempt" to become vegan with: activities; a shared, less precarious identity; and an alternative way of framing his new diet which backgrounds proscription. His construction of his

¹² Paul uses the term experiment on numerous occasions, for example:

...have told Abdon, in one sense, I am going to try an experiment,... (diary, p. 14)

...Abdon asked how 'my experiment' was going,... (diary, p. 18)

...I had not really felt this way until vegan experiment of this year... (diary, p. 30)

Paul's career as a research scientist in the physical sciences (which largely involves running laboratory experiments) may be relevant to his use of the term 'experiment'. It could be argued that he is drawing on a vocabulary and an identity from his work, so demonstrating once more idiographic and autobiographical aspects to vegan self-narratives. This 'empirical scientist' identity could be heard as presenting Paul's approach as a rational and perhaps initially sceptical one, rather than emotional, sentimental or fanatical. Observation and waiting for the results rather than commitment and agency are again foregrounded. Paul's work may also allow the idea of him also 'experimenting' with his diet to be used jokingly. Paul would then not appear genuinely committed to this low-commitment construction of his veganism should this criticism be made (he was only joking), though the rhetorical effects outlined above stand. This might also be seen in terms of Goffman's (1959) 'role distance', though a specific work identity and/or work humour is being used to gain distance from vegan norm-requirements.

¹³ Depending upon the participant, after a certain point participation may also be felt/described as holding them back within a new/fledgling vegan/vegetarian identity. As discussed at the end of this chapter, *ceasing* participation/diary-keeping may be another resource for constructing identity-change.

dietary behaviour, warts-n-all, as “interesting” for himself and others, diverts attention away from notions of prohibition and ‘failing’ and is also connected to and supported by the research project activities and his research participant status. This use of ‘interesting’ can, then, be seen in terms of an identity claim – Paul becomes the *student* as well as the *object* of study; the *observer/co-researcher* as well as the researched. In so doing, other issues of potential rhetorical interest are backgrounded and managed, notably agency and prohibition. By constructing his own dietary behaviour as an object of interest, prohibitions and desires are repressed.¹⁴

The topic is changed, the account moves away from the new vegan prohibitions and the desire to break them. In this way, becoming vegan is more successfully done (as Paul reports) by changing the topic away from ‘big words’ like ‘commit’. The self or the psychological subject, then, can be seen as changed by means of the repressive activity of topic-changing. *‘Changing the subject’, then, refers to both identity change and the shifts in talk by which it is accomplished.* In this case, the topic is shifted away from prohibition and desire towards an account of observation – and from Paul as agent to a more passive conception of the subject, thereby adding a third sense to ‘changing the subject’.

But the desire to indulge in food is not the only desire, and vegan prohibitions are not the only prohibitions. There are other rules (and therefore other temptations) and this greatly opens up the possibilities for changing the topic and for changing identities.

¹⁴ Academics can also be commonly heard to find topics or data ‘very interesting’, and there are some similarities in the rhetorical effects achieved: the topic is distanced and an identity is claimed. Though, unlike Paul, they themselves are rarely the objects of their study, an academic enthusing about how interesting a/her/his topic is may be heard as *claiming some special perspective* on the subject not widely held. But this claim to a new/expert perspective is also *setting the phenomena at a distance*, as Paul does with his eating. For instance, less academic, more emotionally, politically or morally engaged perspectives on the phenomenon of interest may be repressed by this trope or claim in academic talk. The potential danger is that there is distancing and detachment from the subject without the implied insight into it.

Even more striking than Paul’s construction of his eating-habits as interesting, academics’ claims of finding something ‘interesting’ are *claims of academic identities* – even if nothing concrete can yet be said, it is enough to be ‘interested’. ...Of course, my own suggestion/claim that there is something *interesting* about some academic claims of finding things ‘interesting’ can also be seen as claiming an academic identity – one which claims some insight and also distances myself from some academic uses of the word.

V. Prohibitions, transgressions and identities

Vegetarianism and veganism prohibit meat, but society as a whole approves of meat-eating and *disapproves* of meat-free diets and vegetarian lifestyles. This rhetorical context may be seen as reflected in Paul being able to claim that:

[...] whilst I'd like to eat vegetarian food when a guest at someone's house, do not feel that can do this, that it is not really socially acceptable.

(Paul, diary; 18.8.99)

If a vegetarian/vegan prohibition *against meat-eating* creates the desire to indulge, so a powerful norm *against meat-avoidance* may provoke a desire to *abstain*. Pro meat-eating conventions suggest the temptation to buck these traditional, accepted diets, behaviours, and beliefs and to indulge in a contrary and contravening abstinence.

Myerson (1994, p. 140-1) suggests supplementing 'contradiction' (from *contra*, against + *dicere*, to say) with 'contraversion', which, he argues, retains a focus on *action* as well as argument and utterances.¹⁵ This perspective underlines the rhetorical nature of dietary *behaviour* (in a non-linguistic sense) and, for example, the argumentative meanings (in terms of prohibition-breaking) of refusing to eat meat. Abstaining from meat in a social situation rejects more than the food and the host's hospitality – it may also be seen as a rejection and implicit criticism of the meat-eaters present and so may be seen as infringing further prohibitions against being critical as well as different and awkward. From this perspective, to abstain may also be, paradoxically, to *indulge* ...in the pleasures of being contumacious, rebellious, wilful, rude, critical, or just freethinking or different. *There are other prohibitions besides the vegetarian proscription against eating meat, and these too may incite the desire to transgress.*

The avoidance, suppression and repression of the subject of meat-eating in talk

¹⁵ Myerson gives the OED as listing the following meanings:

Contraversion. rare n. of action. A turning in the opposite direction. [...]

Controvert. vb. 1. To oppose by argument or action; [...] (Myerson, p. 140)

(especially moral discussions) has been discussed elsewhere in terms of avoiding criticism and managing relationships (see Chapter 6), but forms of argument may also be seen as possible without talk – even, or especially, if it is calling attention to a topic that will not be discussed.¹⁶ Vegetarians and vegans may, then, typically stop *contradicting* meat-eating norms but continue to *contravene* (‘to come into conflict with or infringe’, OED) norms and to *controvert* (‘to turn in an opposite direction’, OED). The possibility within non-verbal behaviour for more implicit or ambiguous forms of criticism is a potentially important aspect of contraversion. Also, vegetarianism and veganism are recognised diets and so provide a warrant for refusing food. Just as Nicola’s sister in offering the wrong foods performs inhospitable hospitableness, the vegetarian guest – or better still, the vegan guest – may be ‘unavoidably’ rude or ‘politely impolite’ while perhaps consciously or unconsciously enjoying their act of contravention. The multiple cultural and social significances of meat and food provide for a layering of interpretations, readings, and argumentative meanings of its commensal avoidance.

But the vegetarian may find pleasure in verbal transgressions also. As discussed already, the desire to be rude springs from rules of politeness. In Chapter 6 the vegetarian guest was heard as having to avoid being critical or rude, e.g., in the accounts of Cathy and of Paul (“some unbearable rudeness”). *An accompanying contradictory desire to be rude, critical, contrary or defiant can now be added.* Cathy’s acerbic account of her fellow diners and of “smiling sweetly” while “wanting to scream at them” also emphasises the prohibition against voicing her criticism and her increased desire do so in this context.

In Chapter 7 the vegetarian or vegan was presented as caught between two potential criticisms or prohibitions: one against lapsing, the other against abstinence. But within this dilemma there is a contrary one. The vegetarian or vegan may be seen as also caught between two opposing desires to transgress these contradictory prohibitions,

¹⁶ Myerson notes that:

...contraversion may also express a refusal to engage with the other side, the ‘no’ which establishes an impasse between two alien sets of criteria, on the model of dialogic relativism.

(Myerson, 1994; p. 141)

Acts of contraversion may be intended or taken as setting up divisions and barriers to communication between individuals, or, conversely, as being communicative in the sense of attracting or inviting comment and the possibility of discussion.

thereby turning the dilemma inside-out: within the dilemma of avoiding criticism are the opposing desires to either break vegetarian rules and indulge in meat or, alternatively, to make a stand against orthodoxy, spurn politeness, and give the host's shoulder of beef the cold shoulder. *The dilemmas of moral superiority and of abstinence, seen in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, also contain forbidden pleasures and desires: there is a dialectic of forbidden pleasure as well as a dialectic of censure.* The sources of vegan anxiety offer verbal and non-verbal sources of pleasure: the sins of being judgemental become temptations, and abstinence contains wicked pleasures. This potential for critical pleasure is supported by the accounts of vegetarian diets as unavoidably critical of others. For example, Paul says:

...because, I mean, however non-confrontationally you put it, people will always take it as a (?) attack on their way of doing things, and I suppose it is, when you come down to it, you are rejecting what they do and saying that I regard it as ethically unacceptable [...] (Paul, interview 1).

In Chapter 6 it was argued that accounts of suppressing criticism of others indicated the avoidance of vegetarian/vegan stereotypes of intolerance. In light of the above discussion, mischievous temptations to criticise might be seen as working to repress or replace alternative desires to indulge in food. For example, in an extract from Carol's diary seen in Chapter 6, she can be heard to enjoy the pleasures of gentle provocation and difference which being vegetarian provides:

I rather like being labelled as a vegetarian – the sort of people I like approve, and the sort of people I don't like see it almost as a threat, which I find amusing – so far! (Carol, diary; p. 4; underscoring added)

Resistance to, and defiance of, the pressure to eat meat can be seen in Nicola's reported antagonism with her sister. Nicola's focus on the outer conflict with her sister can be seen as shifting attention from, and thereby repressing for the moment, her inner conflict and desire for fish. She wants to abstain –or to appear to abstain– because her sister opposes her. Similarly, another new vegan participant mentions being 'bloody-minded' (Cathy, interview 2).

We might offer the image of culture and social situations as potentially laminated with numerous conflicting prohibitions. Multiple, contradictory prohibitions may be predicted from the multiple meanings of meat but it is also consistent with dilemmas of common sense thinking and the complex, contested, and argumentative nature of social reality (Billig, 1996a; Billig *et al.*, 1988). With this proliferation of prohibitions comes the possibility of changing the subject (in both senses outlined in the preceding section) – away from the prohibitions against meat-eating to the prohibitions *against* vegetarianism. Attention may be shifted from the temptations of meat-eating to the temptations of non-conformity and the desire to break the prevailing cultural rules of diet, lifestyle or politeness. *Prohibitions create desires, but an array of conflicting prohibitions offers the possibility of managing desires.* Freedom from prohibitions and the desires they create may be found in other prohibitions and other desires. If prohibition sparks and fans the flames of desire, fire can be fought with fire and temptation buried beneath a different temptation – *like* is fought with *like* (in both senses of the word). *These various prohibitions (and desires) may be seen as resources available to the individual in the repression and management of desires.*

With numerous contradictory prohibitions, not all are obeyed, not all broken: some desires are indulged, some repressed. The question, ‘*Whose prohibition?*’, becomes fundamental to potential transgressors as *identities* are asserted, constructed, and invested in. As is evident from the vegetarian/vegan norms of abstinence and wider society’s meat-eating norms, prohibitions must be seen within the context of social identities. Rorty’s conception of ‘immoral action’ as “the sort of thing we don’t do” (1989, p. 58-59; emphasis added) again draws a link between proscriptions/prohibitions and identities, between norms and in-grouping, and between transgression and out-grouping.¹⁷ To conform to or to go against a prohibition is to conform to or go against a *group* and to make a statement of *identity* – solidarity, difference or defiance. Temptations to transgress are largely a matter of who disapproves, who is being defied, and in relation to whom identity is being defined.

¹⁷ Advertising for ‘British Meat’ which stresses the *Britishness* of the meat may be heard as implying and appealing to a national norm and identity of the quintessential meat-eating Briton. The ‘*normality*’ of meat-eating, and of meat-eaters, is a noticeable theme within commercials for meat: meat-eaters are depicted as ‘down-to-earth’ and ‘one-of-us’ even when national identity is not explicit (Carmichael, 1998). These constructions of the normality of meat-eating can be read as the censure and prohibition of vegetarianism linked to in-grouping and backed up by a threat of out-grouping: eat meat and desire meat or you are not British/normal/part of the community etc.

Prohibitions and desires are wrapped up with identities and relationships, both social and personal. So, if prohibitions and desires are resources for repressing other prohibitions and desires, they are also resources for directly claiming and constructing identities and identity change.

Accounts of prohibition, desire and transgression not only manage desire but claim, deny and manage identities. For example, Carol's diary-extract, above, was discussed in Chapter 6 as constructing identity - for herself, vegetarians and others. Her identity as vegetarian is developed and flagged by offending a disapproving out-group. In this respect, anti-vegetarians can be seen as a foil for vegetarian narratives of the pleasures of difference, defiance and deviance. Prohibitions against vegetarianism play a *supporting* role in the construction of a vegetarian identity.

Less obviously, *ingroup* prohibitions may be bent or even broken by members, and *outgroup* prohibitions conformed to with the effect of nuancing group identities (avoiding group stereotypes, developing personal identities, or negotiating dilemmas and relationships). For example, Nicola's accounts of lapsing and cooking meat for her family present her as a non-stereotypical and tolerant vegan. Cooking bacon for her family appears noteworthy because she does it *despite* vegan norms, and appears worthy because she bends these rules for her family.

As well as constructing vegetarianism as enjoyably different and provocative, Carol's account constructs a *personal* identity - someone who enjoys being different and provocative (and some of this may be read as transferring onto vegetarians generally). There was considerable variation in participants' constructions of their personality as regards conformity or transgression of social norms. Paul's rude and aggressive language presents him as having an underlying desire but not the nature/capacity to be rebellious:

[...] I would like to have the force of personality just to carry this through and fuck you Dutch person if you don't like it, [...] (Paul, interview 1, line 335-7)

The claim that Paul "would like to" defy prohibitions against vegan diets, and also the forceful language used, present Paul as possessing motivation and at least some "force

of personality” (and this therefore supports the idea that in his situation a genuinely forceful personality is required to ‘carry this through’). As seen earlier in this chapter, Nicola’s and Paul’s accounts of prohibition-creating-desire are bound up with the construction of both social identities and individual personalities. *In Paul’s case he presents himself as haplessly compelled by self-sabotage to break self-imposed (including vegan) prohibitions but unable to defy those of society.* In a context of multiple prohibitions, the discourse of prohibition-creating-desire is selectively invoked with obvious effects for changing or conserving identities.

VI. Accounts of revulsion and repression

It has been argued that if a prohibition creates desire then other prohibitions create other conflicting desires, and that if desire for meat is to be repressed rather than created these other prohibitions and desires are potential resources for this repression. The discussion has focussed on vegetarians’ and vegans’ accounts of *desire* and the repression of desire. However, reports of *revulsion* for meat and of efforts to repress it were far more common and explicit in participants’ accounts than the accounts of desire for meat discussed thus far. This raises two points: Desire for meat may be, and is, contradicted not only by opposing desires to defy the meat-eating majority (or particular individuals) but also by the antithesis of desire – *revulsion*. Also, just as accounts of desire have been discussed as claiming and managing identity, reports of revulsion may be seen to have certain rhetorical effects for identities.

Accounts of revulsion and disgust for meat may be taken as functioning in a number of ways. For example, Chapter 6 touched on accounts of revulsion for meat in the context of cooking it for partners and they were argued to be managing a dilemma between being tolerant but not being *too* tolerant or lacking in vegetarian identity. This was seen in Jenny’s, “If I stop and think about what I’ve got cooking up I’ll--it’ll do my head in {laughing}” (Jenny; interview 1). Jenny’s account of cooking meat for her husband and family can be seen as protecting/supporting her vegetarian identity by flagging her compassion for the animals she cooks: she may cook meat but if she thought about what she was doing it would “do [her] head in”. Her tolerance and her

efforts to accommodate her husband's diet are also heard. Her account of needing to "put it out of [her] mind" as she bends vegetarian rules flexes her identity as both vegetarian and tolerant.

When not couched in explicitly moral terms, statements of revulsion claim vegetarian identity and deny desire whilst avoiding proscription and 'righteous' moralizing. As argued earlier, the moral, spiritual, gustatory and aesthetic aspects of revulsion are blurred, and discourses of disgust can emphasise physical reactions rather than moral judgements whilst also *implying* moral criticism. And so claiming or showing revulsion for meat might be seen as an ambiguous and permissible way of performing criticism or moral superiority – as long as it falls short of saying that meat-eaters or the *practice* of meat-eating are revolting. When mainstream meat-eating desires and tastes are rejected a meat-eating identity is also denied. Whether couched in moral, spiritual, gustatory or aesthetic terms (or expressed non-verbally through sound or gesture), reports and claims of revulsion (like accounts of desire) may act as strong claims of vegetarian/vegan identity.

Greg's account of pushing feelings of disgust from his mind also has the effect of stressing his new vegetarianism:

It was during this period in America, now that I had 'gone public', that I really began to be revolted by the thought of eating meat. I found that I was having to think or talk about something totally different to get through the food in front of me. The sight of raw meat being prepared began to make me feel nauseous. I hadn't anticipated this and was a little surprised by it.

(Greg, diary; p. 3-4; underscoring added)

Like Jenny's account of handling meat, Greg's report of actually eating meat threatens his identity as a budding vegetarian but it is also an *opportunity* for an account of revulsion – a foil against which his vegetarian sensibilities can be shown. Although he ate meat the effect is to only confirm his vegetarian credentials.¹⁸ Also like Jenny,

¹⁸ In Claire's diary-account, eating a burger is an *opportunity* for an account of disgust – this is capitalized on in an account which construes visiting McDonalds as "revisiting her reasons". Her disgust is heard to extend beyond the food to the interior and clientele (especially "greasy young

Greg reports attempting to repress his revulsion. This need to talk about something else in order to, “get through the food in front of me”, portrays intense revulsion. This reported *need* to push it from consciousness is also heard in Jenny’s, “it’ll do my head in”, above. Their reports of repressed revulsion allow them to claim powerful feelings although they were not acted upon at the time: they are able to retain vegetarian sensibilities and identities despite having also cooked or eaten meat.

Significantly, most of the participants’ reports of revulsion occur as accounts of *developing a new or increasing* sense of disgust or horror which they did not have before giving up meat. In all, 8 out of 23 participants (35%) report an emerging or increasing sense of revulsion. These accounts of developing revulsion are strong narratives of identity change. This is seen in the excerpt from Greg’s diary, above: “I really began to be revolted [...] I found that [...] began to make me [...] I hadn’t anticipated this and was a little surprised by it.” A great many participants also report changes in their palate, no longer liking the taste or smell of foods they previously liked. This again portrays identity change as a process of perceptual-physical transformation. A *bodily* response can be seen in Greg’s account (‘The sight of raw meat being prepared began to make me feel nauseous’) and in Nicola’s reported change in how she perceives the odour of cheese (see Chapter 5). Thus identity –and morality to a degree– is made a bodily matter of perception and visceral feeling. The strength of the revulsion, its physical/embodied aspect, and the reported surprise, all add to the construction of disgust as a spontaneous transformation that is *noticed* rather than chosen. This involuntariness is seen again below in “I am beginning to find [...] which is a bit of a nuisance”:

I personally am beginning to find that I can detect the taste of meat in a takeaway and dislike it, which is a bit of a nuisance in this area where variety in vegetarian food is difficult to find in restaurants or (especially) takeaways. It is particularly disconcerting when you begin to retch as you pass the local chippy (they fry in lard!). (Carol, diary, p. 3; underscoring added)

vagabonds”), thereby dissociating herself from meat-eaters:

Going into McDonalds is an experience. Greasy young vagabonds seemed to cast a slimy film over the interior. The staff are rude and the whole place just seethes angst. Horrible. Sometimes I need to revisit my reasons for doing things. (Claire, diary; p. 19; underscoring added)

The physical emergence of disgust is underlined both by “begin to retch” and by the reported change in palate, above. It is striking that eight participants give accounts of developing revulsion and ten participants (43%) describe changes to their sense of taste or gustatory preferences (see Appendix 4, Table 4).

Like all accounts of revulsion for meat, these most physical narrations of distaste can be seen as strongly denying and repressing accounts of desire. Also, claiming disgust represents meat as undesirable rather than a forbidden object of desire. By claiming to be following a gut feeling rather than *resisting* one, temptation is not created by prohibition. Further, vegetarian stereotypes of privation and restraint are also avoided. In both accounts of repressing revulsion and of developing feelings of physical revulsion, *agency* is also being denied or managed: in both cases revulsion is heard as not chosen and as powerful (stressed by the reported need to repress the feelings/thoughts from awareness rather than merely not act upon them).

In Elizabeth’s diary account, changes are heard as physical/gustatory again (‘makes me feel nauseous’) but also as psychological and internal: “The thought, let alone remembering the taste”:

...now that I’ve been vegetarian for a while, I know there’s no possible way I could ever stomach meat again. The thought, let alone remembering the taste, of eating meat makes me feel nauseous.

(Elizabeth, diary, p. 4; underscoring added)

The inner transformation is also portrayed as following from the new diet and, further, is heard as a new state from which there is no going back. There is a mind and body holism again, with links both ways: the mere thought of meat is enough to provoke physical nausea; but also, these new sensibilities were precipitated by her new diet. These accounts of revulsion as physical nausea, as unexpectedly emerging, as accompanied by changes in sense of taste, and as previously repressed, all imply *natural* changes which may be more effective in repressing desire and more socially accepted.

Such accounts of spontaneously-occurring changes are progressive narratives of positive inner change. Unlike Nicola's account of 'selfish desire', emotions here are presented as valued, instructive and sincere. Greg and Lisa are heard as becoming vegetarian at a profound level. These accounts of identity change can be heard as drawing upon a rhetoric of feelings as sincere and or authentic. This authenticity is also hearable below in Lisa's account of identity-change as becoming 'more in touch with [her] feelings':

Monday, April 5th: Made chicken soup from scratch for my mom. She had a bad cold and asked me to make it for her - not realizing that the thought of buying and handling a dead chicken is not appealing to me. I never enjoyed handling meat, but now I am more in touch with my feelings of repulsion.

(Lisa, diary, p. 1; underscoring added)

This suggests that she had feelings of repulsion ('my feelings') even *before* she 'got in touch with them', and draws implicitly once again on popular notions of the unconscious and of repressed feelings (though not desire in this case). Nicola and Paul's accounts of unconscious desires, seen earlier, managed responsibility for lapsing by casting unconscious emotions as Other/not-self. Here, in contrast, the unconscious confers an aura of sincerity and/or authenticity onto the emerging feelings of revulsion and onto the vegetarian/vegan identity. *The idea of the unconscious, then, may be used either to distance emotions and reject accountability for them, or may claim them as a source of a truer, more genuine self and identity.*

It is unsurprising that the revulsion is reported as *developing* as meat has been eaten previously. Accounts of developing disgust for meat (etc.) can be seen as accounting for previous meat-eating as well as underlining and reinforcing the new vegetarian identity. Their former meat-eating self is excused as having previously repressed their sensibilities and the new vegetarian self is represented positively. The ambivalence of repression also allows the simultaneous construction of change and continuity of identity.

This self-narrative of getting in touch with one's feelings is *an account of moving out of a state of repressed feelings and realising a truer, less conflicted/repressed self*.

This is implicit in accounts of emerging feelings and can again be clearly discerned below in Jacqui's report of previously 'pushing away' feelings of disgust and guilt as a meat-eater:

[...] but it was always in the back of my head - sometimes in the front of my head - but I kind of tried to push it away- I felt really guilty but I couldn't really- I wasn't really ready to do anything about it. (Jacqui, interview 1; underscoring added)

I always wanted to go uurrgh! when I walked past a butchers.

(Jacqui, interview 1)

Beardsworth & Keil report that the phrase, 'peace of mind' was "used repeatedly by respondents describing the personal benefits of vegetarianism" (1992a; p. 287). These accounts may also be read as claiming a less conflicted mental state. Another powerful narration of becoming vegetarian/vegan as inner transformation that ends inner conflict can be seen in the extract from Nicola below:

...being a vegan is like 'the new Nicola', as it were. It's like--I see it as like just such a part of me that it almost isn't an issue.

(Nicola, interview 1; underscoring added)

Rhetorically, this contains a number of interesting features. This too may be heard as a claim that a former identity and desire for meat has been left behind; that there is no conflict with desire or a need for its repression. Although it precedes her later accounts of temptation and seduction already discussed, this earlier confident claim that veganism is "just such a part of me that it almost isn't an issue" denies the ambivalence and conflict between the parts of the self which feature in those later accounts.

It has been argued in this chapter that prohibition is a discursive act and that prohibition-creating-desire may be viewed as a dialogic exchange. "[I]t almost isn't

an issue”, then, is interesting as it casts attaining the new identity as a matter of no longer consciously thinking about it and as an end to internal conflict, debate and argument. As with accounts of revulsion, desire and ambivalence are denied but not in the language of prohibition, which is also absent. This breaks the cycle of self-contradiction and prohibition-creating-desire, and allows vegetarianism to become habitual. Rather than the ascendancy of one voice –which may always invite contradiction– there is silence. But controversy, argument and repression are not so easily ended or wholly avoided. As argued, talking *about* repression or the end of it, is not the same as repression *in* talk (the discourse of repression is not the same as discursive repression). *These claims of an end to conflict and repression might themselves be seen as discursively repressing.* The transformation to the new identity is described and heard as change coming from deep within, but change may be viewed as working in the opposite direction and constituted through narrative and accounting practices. The “almost” perhaps signals that this is not quite the end of debate: Nicola’s construction of her veganism as “almost [not] an issue” is still an account, and as an account it may be viewed as *argumentatively* closing down conflict and ambivalence. Similarly, when the participants cease to keep their diary and/or claim to have little or nothing more to say, this may signal or be a way of marking the participant’s arrival at a more established identity. (Becoming an established vegan/vegetarian may also be the account/interpretation offered to the researcher, and themselves, to explain an abandoned diary.)

And so even claims of an end to inner debate and repression may be seen as dialogic and as voices in continuing debate. The claim that being vegan is “the new Nicola” is particularly interesting from the point of view of repressing an old identity, as it rhetorically kills off and buries the old Nicola beneath a rhetoric of rebirth (also, “...so like a–like a rebirth almost”, Nicola, interview 1). Nicola’s and Lisa’s accounts of *formerly*-repressed revulsion can be seen as discursively closing down desire, inner conflict, and the old meat-eating identity.

From a discursive-psychological perspective, argumentation and repression are fundamentally involved in identity-construction and maintenance. Identity is not constructed once and only but is ongoing and involves negotiating various dilemmas in account-giving. These dilemmas and ambivalences are never fully resolved but are

played out in potentially limitless criticism and justification (Billig, 1996a). Nicola's diet is '*almost*' not an issue – hinting at the enduring possibilities for ambivalence and argument. Both meat-eaters and vegetarians/vegans must deal with cultural ambivalence. Vegetarians may be both revolted by meat *and* attracted to it, and meat-eaters share to some degree the same anxieties and dilemmas, albeit from different camps or with opposite 'commitments to advocacy' (Billig, 1996a, p. 284). This pervasive ambivalence also raises the issue of repression in meat-eaters.

VII. Meat, revulsion and transgression

Thus far, repression has been discussed in terms of desire, and this focus may appear to reproduce the dominant cultural assumptions of the desirability of meat and the need for vegetarians to control or repress it.¹⁹ The issue of vegetarianism and meat-consumption is two-sided, however, and it would be a mistake to assume that abstinence always involves the repression of a desire to eat meat whilst meat-eating does not involve any repressive activity. The many accounts of revulsion and of repressing revulsion seen above suggest the repression of *displeasure* as well as pleasure – it may be argued that if meat-avoidance involves the repression of desire for meat, *then meat-eating may involve routinely repressing disgust*. This may be considered in terms of society's mechanisms for the repression of the origins of meat. Also, just as vegetarians' accounts of revulsion may be viewed as repressing pleasure, meat-eaters' accounts of desire and pleasure in meat-eating may be imagined as repressing distasteful aspects of meat. Both will be briefly considered with reference to ideas of discursive repression.

It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that dominant meat-eating ideology contains contradictory strands. Beardsworth & Keil (1992a), Twigg (1983), and others, stress our deep-seated ambivalences towards food, especially meat, and its capacity to provoke disgust and nausea as well as pleasure and desire.²⁰ The accounts of revulsion

¹⁹ This finds a strong expression in the idea of 'meat hunger' (Harris, 1986) – the hypothesis that meat has a universal appeal because of its nutritional qualities.

²⁰ Spencer stresses this ambivalence throughout the history of vegetarianism and concludes:

We do not adequately realize today how very deep within our psyche is the reverence for the consumption of meat *or how ancient in our history is the ideological abstention from the*

and repulsion seen in the preceding section both reflect and trade upon these feelings. Beardsworth & Keil also found that there was,

[A] strong sense of revulsion towards meat reported by many respondents, a revulsion which appears to confirm the arguments put forward by Twigg (1983; p. 22) concerning the latent disgust associated with certain animal products (see also Murcott 1986; p. 114-17 and Gofton 1986; p. 130-1)

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 273)

Chapter 5 argued that disgust should be seen as a moral/spiritual and health issue as well as an aesthetic/gustatory one (also see extracts below). Beardsworth & Keil discuss the 'protective mechanisms' which culture provides against all kinds of nutritional anxieties but particularly against seeing meat as '*flesh*'. Beardsworth & Keil point out that an increasing level of concealment of the origins and production of meat in modern society has been associated with the:

'advance in the threshold of repugnance brought about by the civilizing process' [Elias 1978: 120], an advance which Fieldhouse (1986: 142) suggests may entail the rejection of meat as a foodstuff as its next logical step.

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1992a; p. 286)

The suppression of repugnant aspects of meat and accounts in these terms, then, may be of increasing interest and relevance. But the consumer is not only protected from confronting the origins of meat by 'institutional [and] physical shields' (1992a, p. 286) but also by the more psychological and discursive shields of repression in discourse and conversation. Adams calls attention to linguistic features such as 'the structure of the absent referent': "this conceptual process [or 'ideological mechanism'] by which the animal disappears" (in Walters and Portmess, eds., 1999; p. 248).²¹ But it may be stressed that the animal referent and human agency are absent

slaughter of animals for food. (Spencer, 2000; p. 331; emphasis added)

²¹ Adams also describes the way in which the construction of the animal's body as edible removes the agency of humans. Drawing upon Hoagland's analysis of 'battered women', Adams argues:

"Someone kills animals so that I can eat their corpses as meat", becomes "animals are killed to be eaten as meat", then "animals are meat", and finally "meat animals", thus "meat". Something that we do to animals has become instead something that is part of animals' nature, and we lose consideration of our role entirely. (Adams, 1999; p. 251)

Whether couched in terms of reification or the backgrounding of agency, these discursive practices can

not only through ‘conceptual processes and ideological mechanisms’ but through the repressive effects of discursive activities of individuals in conversation. Although repression can be built into the routines of social life, and some of these routines are deeply embedded in language, it is *speakers* who combine to chase away the unwanted topic and keep it away. Other ways of talking do exist and are being routinely repressed.

Beardsworth & Keil note that some individuals find that the ‘institutional and physical shields’ “...are all too easy to circumvent or are torn down by some unwelcome glimpse of one of the ‘back regions’ (Goffman, 1969) of animal husbandry” (1992a, p. 286). Even after glimpsing the *flesh*, the animal, the human agency, and the repugnance that lie behind these physical and linguistic shields, *prohibitions against talking about it remain* which also have to be broken and new/other ways of talking used. Revulsion is kept off the menu by accounting practices too. It is not only invisible but also unmentionable. *These social prohibitions against talking about the origins and production of meat, as well as the cooperative practices of repressing the topic in conversation, need to be added to an account of physical and institutional or even ideological shields.*

Earlier, abstaining from meat was considered as a pleasurable act of transgressing convention and affirming vegetarian identity. Following the discussion of prohibition-creating-desire, eating meat, too, may be more tempting for some because it is proscribed by vegetarians and may offend them.

However, society’s ambivalence about meat may be seen not only in terms of revulsion. Chapter 2 saw the uneasy/ambivalent valuation of meat due to the ‘darker regions of meat symbolism’ (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; p. 213). Following the idea of multiple laminations of prohibitions (and desires), it can be seen that not only abstinence but meat-eating, too, has a partial but important element of transgression. These dark regions can now be seen to incite desire *because* they are in part prohibited/forbidden by society at large. *Society’s unease towards eating the flesh of*

be seen as discursive repression in action. To the degree that her analysis of talk offers something that was not previously obvious, the account of repression is supported.

another animal makes it more, not less, desirable. Thus the meat-eater is conforming to the norms of meat-eating society but also, to a degree and in an ambivalent manner, breaking prohibitions, especially, say, with a particularly bloody steak. Meat is made attractive as much by the limits to society's approval of meat as by its valuation of it, although within the profound ambivalence of attitudes the two are far from being entirely separable. *Fiddes and Twigg stress the dark and violent side to the valuation of meat but do not couch this in social psychological terms of transgression, social confrontation and social identities.*

Thus, with reference to the issue of culture's 'protective mechanisms' for concealing the origins and production of meat, it would, perhaps, be naïve to ignore the fact that the darker regions of meat symbolism also indicate darker regions of identity which are not simply perceived as a threat but may be actively embraced. A 'civilising process' may not lead to a corresponding advance in the rejection of meat but to an active dissociation from and reaction to what some might deem 'over-civilisation'. This chapter has pointed to the importance of rhetorics of a divided self; such images of the person may play a role in making room for, containing, and excusing such a 'darker side' to identity, especially, though not uniquely, masculine ones.

9

Conclusion

The major points within each of the analytic chapters will be summarised before a general discussion in terms of previous studies and theoretical issues.

In Chapter 5 the important but problematic matter of defining types of diets was approached by following participants' stated dietary goals/transitions. Reports about motivations were not taken as face value indications of inner states. Analysis instead brought out the complex rhetorical construction of accounts of motivations as justifications and criticisms. Previous work has noted reports of 'conversion experiences', but such 'storying' of accounts was argued to be a common feature of motivation reports more widely which narrate the process of becoming personally motivated and making changes to diet. These autobiographical narratives were found to be rich in significant personal details and diachronic perspectives. The material was consistent with some of the major findings of previous studies of vegetarian motivations; for example, the predominance of moral concern for animals and its link with conversion experiences. Without denying the usefulness of motivational categories, motivations were found to be bound up with the details and complexities of account-giving which make simple categories, content analysis and comparisons problematic. As well as the personal, autobiographical aspects of account-giving, there was also much discrimination among animal-products avoided. This variation and interaction of motivations with products is seen in moral hierarchies and in conflicts between motivations. These aspects, then, cause problems for quantitative approaches that seek to standardise, rank and compare motivations across participants and products. Motivation accounts were argued to be more complex, discriminating and argumentative than motivational categories convey.

The importance of personal details and particular foods was illustrated by accounts that cited particular health problems as a reason for dietary change (e.g. IBS). Another new feature within stories/narratives of conversion was suggested by the accounts of being converted or beginning the new diet on special days or dates (such as anniversaries or New Year). These special occasions were argued to be rhetorical resources used by the individuals with the effects of ‘firming up’ transitions and narrating heterodox dietary change in orthodox terms. These accounts were seen as publicly and privately narrating, warranting and establishing new vegetarian or vegan identities, and to be actively involved in accomplishing identity change. This identity re-construction is clearly seen in accounts that narrated becoming vegetarian or vegan through progressive narratives of inner change - visible, for example, in accounts of developing revulsion.

These accounts also introduced the dilemmatic nature of giving accounts of motivation – illustrated, for example, by accounts of moral concern, which may be seen negatively as either selective, sentimental or extreme. Accounts of motivation were also found to position the speaker relative to other individuals and groups, thus highlighting social identities, criticism and argument. Criticism and comparison with others was found in the accounts both of those allying and contrasting themselves with animal rights advocates.

Chapter 6 pursued talk of moral motivations and the potentially problematic argumentative and critical aspects of vegetarian/vegan account-giving. The importance of social identities in such accounting was also further brought out, seen in the comparison with outgroups (e.g., ‘farmers’, ‘right wing’) and in vegetarian stereotypes. Instead of viewing social problems as lying ‘behind’ and ‘reported’ in accounts, conflict with others was demonstrated to be flexibly constructed by accounts with important rhetorical effects. Comparison with outgroups and accounts of conflict with them were shown to flag vegetarian identities and commitments. Conflict was portrayed variously -for example, as enjoyable or intimidating- and accounts were also shown to construct the identities of vegetarians/vegans and Others in particular ways.

What is perhaps the major tension within vegetarian/vegan accounting was delineated

in the form of a *dilemma of moral superiority*. This was seen in a conflict between constructing and presenting a positive self-image as vegetarian or vegan versus avoiding criticising meat-eating others. This dilemma is made acute by the moral basis of most vegetarians' and vegans' motivations (as claimed and as perceived by others) and is reflected in participants' mention of stereotypical 'righteous', 'preaching' and moralising vegetarians. It was suggested that this dilemma of moral superiority was indicated by and gives rise to some notable rhetorical strategies which presented the vegetarian/vegan as ambivalent: Claims to avoid, suppress or repress moral discussion and criticism were shown to present the speaker as being a tolerant vegetarian whilst also retaining a claim of moral motivation.

Avoidance of criticism was also discussed as being accomplished by the participants' accounts and by the wider accounting practices these reflect. This dilemma around moral superiority and criticism was shown to be of particular significance with regard to the vegetarian or vegans' loved ones who eat meat. In accounts that dealt with partners, for example, criticism was absent or replaced by praise. The dilemma of moral superiority and criticism was thus argued to be tied up with relationship management in which strategies of topic-avoidance may be jointly and cooperatively accomplished. In this way, the analyses can be seen as going beyond previous studies that have noted that vegetarian diets have the potential for problems within close relationships. The discursive, often co-operative, avoidance of moral issues and of critical judgements offers an account of *how* potential problems are managed day-to-day where they are most threatening. Also, Willetts' position that vegetarians are not judgemental or critical of others neglects vegetarian motivations and contexts of relationships: Tolerance is only half the story. The issue of criticism is a dilemma of identity that involves ongoing, everyday management.

While Chapter 6 outlined a dilemma of moral superiority and drew attention to its management through the discourses and activities of suppression and repression, Chapter 7 analysed accounts in terms of a *dilemma of abstinence* and the related discourses of lapsing and desire. Exploring further the idea that to have an identity is to possess a way of talking, accounts of lapsing and temptation were shown to manage vegetarian identities in a number of ways. Contrary to Willetts' suggestion that meat-eating does not threaten vegetarian identities, the way accounts treated

meat-eating as requiring explanation was argued to indicate its counter-normative and identity-threatening nature. A *discourse of 'lapsing'* was highlighted which functions to flag vegetarian identity by drawing attention to a background norm of prohibition and abstinence and by constructing departure from this norm as an isolated and exceptional event.

Crucially though, analyses aimed to show the contradictory context for lapsing and that vegetarian or vegan abstinence, as well lapses, may be seen negatively. As with the dilemma of moral superiority, the dilemma of abstinence, it was claimed, is underpinned by another vegetarian/vegan stereotype. Here the red-blooded and passionate connotations of flesh foods help raise the spectre of a self-denying, ascetic and abstemious type of character. Again, participants' accounts were seen as distancing them from such an image. For example, Nicola's lingering accounts of desire and temptation construct her as a sensuous food lover.

Like criticism, constructions of lapsing and temptation were argued to be tied up with *relationships* and a case study perspective pursued this further by comparing Nicola's accounts featuring her partner, her sister, and her daughter. Nicola's partner is an integral and intimate part of the presentation of lapsing as a matter of shared confidences and romantic seduction. In a contrasting account, her sister attempts to cast Nicola's abstinence as 'missing out' and this prompts a denial of desire by Nicola. Seeing lapsing as 'failure' is discredited as spiteful and perverse through association with her sibling, thus justifying Nicola's secrecy and deflecting any charges of failure. In the context of Nicola's relationship with her daughter, Jesse, 'failure' is again dismissed but although this is achieved by reference to Jesse being a child Jesse is not derogated.

Chapter 7 stressed a tension between abstinence and desire which lay at the heart of the accounts of temptation and lapsing. This tension was argued to manage the conflicting demands of abstaining without appearing abstemious. In Chapter 8 the ambivalence of temptation was further explored in terms of inner conflict and struggle and two main points were developed. In contrast to a Self-Categorisation theory account of identity as flexible but categorical and monological, attention was drawn to the contradictions of cultural ambivalence and the dilemmas of identity which

encourage the construction of the self as divisible, fragmented, ambivalent, and conflicted as well as indivisible and consistent. Firstly, such *rhetorics of 'dividuality'* were unpacked within participants' ambivalent accounts of temptation, desire and repression and were shown to manage responsibility and the dilemmas of identity by representing cultural ambivalence as psychological conflict. This tension and ambivalence was seen as being played out argumentatively as an inner dialogue, at both the level of account-giving and of thinking. This capacity for ambivalence, inner tension and self-contradiction was most vividly illustrated by the way the discursive act of prohibiting may provoke the contrary desire to transgress. Recent work in discursive psychology by Billig (e.g. 1997, 1999a) was drawn upon which argues that the idea of repression can be re-conceptualised as discursively achieved. Repression, therefore, is both done by accounting and is also an idea that is referred to and drawn on in accounting. Secondly then, the role of *argument and language* in creating, managing and changing desire and identity was stressed.

The analyses may now be cashed in and discussed with reference to previous studies of vegetarianism and accounts of identity.

Regarding the social psychological theories of identity discussed in Chapter 3, the accounts and analyses can be seen to amply illustrate Tajfel's emphasis on social comparison and the relative valuation of social identities (that 'no group lives alone'). This is seen in the co-construction of identities which was argued to underlie the dilemma of moral superiority and in the construction of outgroups to act as a foil for positive vegetarian identities in accounts (e.g., Carol's comparison with "right-wing" types; Nicola's "they love to see you fail, don't they"; and Clare's accounts of "meaties"). However, though there was a tendency for criticism of meat-eating others which supports this positively valued distinctiveness from other groups, Self-Categorisation theory's assumption that this is always linked to *outgroup derogation* is rejected. The active avoidance and repression of criticism is explored in Chapter 6 in terms of stereotype-avoidance and relationship-management. Further, Nicola's contrasting accounts of the (potentially identity-threatening) issue of lapsing in Chapter 7 again show flexibility and complexity in accounts and underline relationships once more. She derogates her sister but her meat-eating partner and daughter are not disparaged. Tajfel's argument that, "the 'positive aspects of social

identity' and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action *only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparisons with, other groups*" (Tajfel, 1981; p. 256; emphasis added), might be restated with still greater emphasis on 'in relation to' but rather less on 'group', so that attention is given to personal relationships and 'micro-social' practices. The idea of identity as relationship was argued to illuminate numerous aspects of 'identity', including the interknitted and mutually supportive nature of identities seen as self-narratives and/or lived social practices. Relationships may also be seen as contexts within which conflicts and dilemmas of identity emerge and are managed, and also as rhetorical constructions and resources themselves.

Secondly, this study of becoming vegetarian and vegan does not support SCT's characterisation of *identity change* as processes of *conformity and self-stereotyping*. Ambivalence has been a recurrent, almost constant, theme throughout the analyses and especially so in Chapter 7 and 8. Self-stereotyping is most obviously undermined by participants' accounts which denied and distanced the speaker from stereotypical images of vegetarians/vegans. The dilemma of moral superiority and the dilemma of abstinence both visibly hinge on the avoidance of negative stereotypes. More precisely, these accounting dilemmas arise from the (potential) mobilisation of stereotypes in argument and criticism, and it is this *rhetorical* conception of stereotyping which is given support (as features of the cultural/rhetorical context and as accounting resources). Chapter 7 and 8 highlighted the construction of the self not as simply consistent with and conforming to group norms but as ambivalent, fragmented and conflicted. The conflicting demands of sociological ambivalence, temperance, and dilemmas of identity were argued to be managed by rhetorics or discourses of 'dividuality' such as temptation and repression. Making the transition to a new identity involves more than conforming to a newly-adopted set of norms, but is, rather, a matter of narrating autobiographical change and negotiating a new set of accounting dilemmas. The analyses have stressed the personal, relational and rhetorical rather than the universal and cognitive nature of this 'process'.

This discursive-rhetorical perspective also raises some objections to previous accounts of becoming vegetarian. McDonald's (2000) approach to becoming vegan as a universal psychological process may be criticised for lacking attention to the narration of autobiographical change and to the on-going discursive management of the new

vegan identity. In terms of previous studies' substantive or realist claims about UK vegetarianism, the corpus of material suggests patterns of food avoidance and lapsing which are much closer to Beardsworth & Keil (1992a) than the picture offered by Willetts (1997). That is, lapsing was relatively rare, unplanned and 'down the hierarchy', rather than being unproblematic and routinely done. It was also argued that not only does meat-eating 'place vegetarians in a precarious moral position' (as Willetts denies) but meat-*avoidance*, too, brings with it potential censure fuelled by vegetarian stereotypes. Just as vegetarian lapsing was argued to be doubly precarious, Willetts' assertion that vegetarians and vegans are not critical of meat-eaters is charged with taking accounts of tolerance at face value and missing the problematic nature of criticism in terms of interaction and identities. The dilemma of moral superiority foregrounds the importance of criticism and argumentation in vegetarian identities (the dilemma is not only *about* criticism/argument but is also *driven by* intergroup criticism).

This issue of argument raises a cluster of critical perspectives on previous work. Chapter 2 argued against the idea that vegetarian diets and identities should be understood as anxious attempts to find structure amid modern food practices characterised by 'gastroanomy' or 'gastro-anomie'.¹ This can now be reaffirmed drawing on the analyses.

The accounts do not bear out an image of meat-eating and meat-avoidance taking place in an anomic context - "a condition bereft of rules" (Warde, 1997, p. 31) or "a mire of personal uncertainty" (p. 32). Willetts also sees only a lack of structure and meaning (although does not even pose this as a problem), asserting that:

What is clear is that *there are no set of rules for being a vegetarian*, rather individuals define and enact this identity each in their own way.

(Willetts, 1997; p. 128; emphasis added)

¹ This position is clearly made in:

Other substitutes for traditional gastronomies arise from individuals particularly anxious to find and cling to valid criteria for food selection. Food fads, fad diets, food sectarianisms [...] may be better understood in the light of the aspiration for new individual dietary goals and norms.

(Fischler, 1980: 949-50; in Warde, 1997; p. 32)

Vegetarianism then, is not a food practice that is rigorously defined, but is a fluid and permeable category embracing a wide range of food practices. *It is also an identity that one can dip in and out of.* (p.117; emphasis added)

In addition to the strong claims of moral motivation typically given, Chapter 7 underlined how accounts attend to lapsing as an accountable, counter-normative action. Further, the discourses of lapsing and desire were argued to operate against and to point up a backdrop of *prohibition* as well as abstinence. The rhetorical management of ‘lapses’ or ‘blips’ indicates that potential critics as well as the vegetarians themselves orientate to norms of vegetarian behaviour.

But the social practices of criticism and justification which make vegetarian/vegan identities dilemmatic suggest that not only are there rules but there are conflicting sets of contradictory rules. Having a vegetarian identity is not the same as eating a vegetarian meal: it cannot be dipped in and out of but must be accomplished socially. This thesis has explored what this entails in terms of the dilemmatic rhetorical contexts, the discursive resources, and their use in negotiating these identities. It has also been argued that having, maintaining and changing identities is tied up with relationships with others, and these ‘precarious networks’ of inter-dependent self-constructions entail further negotiation and management. Accounts of vegetarian identities such as Willetts’ – and similar-sounding postmodern accounts – neglect argument and commitment. A context of multiple conflicting rules does not mean no rules. Moreover, the notion of a free subject, which Willetts’ account appeals to, may be –arguably, *must* be– recast according to this context of rules. Eagleton writes:

A self-determining subject is not one who miraculously conjures up him- or herself out of nothing, [...] [f]or the autonomy of the human subject simply means [...] to be able to react back upon those determinations and make something new and unpredictable out of its encounter with them.

(Eagleton, 1997; p. 269; emphasis added)

Or, in more social psychological terms: self-determination and creation/narration are seen in the *use* of rhetorical-ideological resources - the selective splicing of self to and dissociation from ways of seeing the world and the actors in it. Vegetarian and vegan

identities are not ‘miraculously conjured up out of nothing’, as Willetts implies. Nor, in the style of superficial Postmodern pastiche-personality, is there a buffet of identities to be freely grazed over. As the analyses have attempted to show, the issue of commitment and investment is an accountable issue and a private concern and is inextricably bound up with norms, accounting and ambivalence.

There can be no liberty without constraint, no subject without some robust object against which to bounce off. (Eagleton, p. 267)

[O]ur freedom and our constraint are given together. (p. 269)

The stereotypes and prohibitions above could be conceptualised as just such ‘robust objects’ which the empty but resourceful (and, so, ‘resource-full’) subject requires to bounce itself off. Chapter 8 discussed how identity may be claimed, inscribed or enacted through the transgression of prohibitions – for example, flagging a vegan identity by rejecting orthodoxy, or, by the meat-eater’s transgression of vegetarian prohibitions. *With respect to Self-Categorisation theory, identities may be seen as much in terms of transgression as in terms of conformity. Not only are there rules – and indeed multiple, contradictory rules and ambivalences – but these rules are also there to be broken.*

The significance of this difference is further underlined by a discussion of the way prohibitions create contrary desires which stressed the importance of argumentation, contradiction and contraversion in identity. Imposing a constraint, or uttering a prohibition allows and invites a liberty to be taken. The liberty which constraint presents is also illustrated in Chapter 8’s discussion of how multiple prohibitions incite multiple desires and, so, furnish the means for greater degrees of freedom in repressing specific desires and associated identities – for example, the pleasures of indulging in flesh-foods may be replaced with the pleasures of being rude or critical. This suggests that not only does freedom require robust objects for the subject to ‘bounce off’ but also that the free subject needs to use these robust objects *against each other* to change the subject (in the sense of topics, desires and identities). Prohibition creating desire also introduces the capacity for *self*-contradiction. This is seen in Paul’s account of ‘self-sabotage’, which illustrates again the use of a rhetoric

of unconscious drives. As a rhetorical claim, this particular type of rhetoric of dividuality ambivalently denies and manages agency as well as character. Such denial of agency may in some sense be seen as a paradoxical exercise of freedom. Something of this contradiction may be seen in the way accounts which claim unconscious origins for behaviour also manage commitment to the account offered.

If stereotypes and prohibitions provide the robust objects needed for self-construction then the 'robustness' of these 'objects' is limited however, and subjects do not only 'bounce off' them. It would still be overstating structural constraints and consensus not to acknowledge the discursively contested and flexible nature of stereotypes, prohibitions and other resources. Walkover (1992) expresses too passive an image of the individual under the burden of cultural ambivalence concerning family life. She argues that:

[P]rospective parents are invited to explore ambivalence. Once the choice is made, however, the ambivalence is to be forgotten, and one is invited to repress one's knowledge of the disvalues of children. (Walkover, 1992; p. 184)

Following the discussions of sociological ambivalence, however, it can be added that the dilemma of parental identities are not even resolvable *in principle* – a 'perfect parent', too, would not be immune from criticism. Part of the dilemmatic aspects of identities is that inconsistency, dividuality and self-contradiction are demanded as well as consistency. Moreover, Walkover "has a phenomenological and conceptual aim – to display the structural conflict of values regarding reproduction" (p. 180). A discursive perspective on managing dilemmas which spring from the conflict of values is missing.

The inescapability of the charges combined with their moral weight is a sure sign that these people labor under cultural conditions that effectively occlude self-understanding and self-development [...they...] become victims of cultural rhetoric [...] if the *choice* of parenting implies a pledge to resolve and surmount all contradictions through strength of character and careful planning.

(Walkover, 1992; p. 190; emphasis in orig.; underscoring added)

The issue of being seen as having *chosen* to become a parent is analogous to the situation of vegetarians and vegans who, as converts, may typically be expected to have all the answers and be more consistent than are meat-eaters. But though neither parents nor vegetarians/vegans are able to ‘resolve and surmount’ the cultural contradictions they are able to *manage* them in some sense through accounting practices. They are, then, not quite the helpless victims that parents appear to be above. In contrast to the ‘occlusion of self-understanding and self-development’, Chapter 6 saw Nicola’s self-narrative of no longer being vulnerable, defensive and hostile to potential critics: “Hey, this is great, not only am I cleaning out my body, but also my mind”. This progressive narrative springs from the context of criticism. Self-understanding and self-development may be expressly concerned with claiming to surmount precisely the cultural attitudes under which they are supposed to labour/be labouring.

This thesis has also pointed to more interactionally-oriented discursive practices by which dilemmas of identity may be managed. In this respect the present study may be contrasted with Maurer’s (1995) work on the vegetarian vocabularies of motive. Maurer is concerned, here, with the process of becoming vegetarian and points to similarities between motivations reported by vegetarians and ‘rhetorical idioms’ within the vegetarian literature: “...vegetarians learn a “vocabulary of motives” (Mills, 1940) that they can then apply to their own experience” (Maurer, 1995; p. 144, emphasis added). The analytic chapters here have hopefully demonstrated that in addition to learning a vocabulary of vegetarian motives (or a vegetarian vocabulary of motives) there is much to the accounting practices of vegetarians to distinguish them from the accounts and practices of ‘claimsmakers’ in the vegetarian literature. In Chapter 2 the importance of motivations was stressed, but motivation accounting must also be seen as a complex lived social practice that involves argument and dilemmas of identity which must be managed ‘on the ground’ and in context by means of various discursive practices. As well as vocabularies of motive, vegetarian vocabularies include vocabularies and rhetorics of tolerance, avoidance, repression, and of ambivalence and dividuality.

The issue of avoidance is perhaps the most striking difference between vegetarian/vegan practices of accounting for motivation and those within the

vegetarian literature. Chapter 6 found that nearly half the participants reported avoiding mentioning or discussing their diet, especially moral reasons for it.² Because vegetarianism is usually not played out as a series of moral discussions, or even arguments, a social psychological and discursive analysis of vegetarian and vegan identities is even more apposite. As argued, the reasons for avoidance can also be understood in social psychological terms of the anxieties about, for example, positive self-image, social difference, out-group criticism, social conflict, and relationship management. Just as it was suggested that the dilemma of moral superiority may be the most acute difficulty managed by vegetarian accounting, the closing down of the topic is perhaps a central feature of ethical vegetarianism in the UK. *This suggests that the academic study of ethical food avoidances should include the avoidance of the topic itself in conversation.* In Myerson's (1994) terms, this suggests an alignment with dialogic relativism rather than faith in rational dialogue (dialogic rationalism). The topic of ethical food avoidance has itself been largely avoided by social scientists, perhaps for the same reasons of investments in moralities and identities that account for its avoidance in everyday conversation.

But, avoiding the topic and avoiding arguments may be further explored in terms of *how* avoidance is actually achieved through the repressive effects of language. This suggests that the topic may be particularly promising for discursive social psychologists who, through studies of naturally-occurring talk-in-interaction, could explore the interactional problems these aspects throw up. There are, perhaps, few topics that, on a daily basis, contain such differences of moral opinion and actual behaviour and such potential for moral criticism of the habits of others as that found between ethical food avoiders and meat-eaters. Billig's (1997, 1999a) recent call for discursive psychology to turn its attention to absences and avoidances in conversation could be pursued with such data. With the traditional agnostic, person-centred stance attributable to much of discursive psychology, it could also provide moral distance – lack of which, it has been suggested, may be problematic for more realist studies of this controversial topic.

² This contrast between 'vegetarian literature' and the accounting practices of vegetarian individuals is a slight simplification: some vegetarian publications (which may be targeted at specific populations or age-brackets) might seek, for example, to avoid moral debates or at least avoid graphic or overly distressing content, but they do not have to manage personal identity, interactions and relationships in the same way as individuals.

This study has empirically explored and illustrated the kind of discursive repression discussed by Billig (e.g., 1999a) and has used both written and spoken accounts of identity. The thesis can also be seen as following Moscovici's interest in the everyday use of psychoanalytic concepts, which clearly emerged within the accounts of becoming vegetarian and vegan. Both discursive repression and discourses about the unconscious are suggested to play a key role in the narration of identity change and the management of the accounting dilemmas of identity. Combining the two perspectives, it has also been argued that *talk of repression also represses: citing the unconscious has been seen to repress agency in the management of accountability and identity*.

Studying a suppressed or repressed topic also poses potential problems however. This study did not use naturally occurring talk-in-interaction but, rather, diary and interview materials. This thesis is a rare instance of close discursive analysis of diary material (in conjunction with diary-based interviewing). Along with a case-study approach, this material proved fruitful in producing reflective accounts of various contexts. Both these aspects enabled the importance of relationships and of avoidances (as both explicit topic and accounting activity) to stand out. The case-study approach using diaries and serial interviewing can also be seen as taking up Beardsworth and Keil's (1992a) suggestion to pursue vegetarian biographies and Gergen and Gergen's (1988) call for '*in vivo* analyses' of identity, and this too has proved a valuable analytic perspective.

If more naturally-occurring conversations were to be used in future studies of discursive avoidance regarding vegetarianism and veganism, family dinner table conversations in households with both meat-eaters and ethical food avoiders might be recorded. Another possible strategy would be for a researcher/confederate to deliberately raise the topic, either with individuals or in group situations, in the manner of Garfinkel's (1967) norm-violation studies. The discursive activity of avoiding, closing down, or redirecting/redefining moral debate might then be explored.

BECOMING VEGETARIAN?

VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR RESEARCH

A University research project into individuals' experiences of becoming vegetarian (or vegan) is looking for volunteers.

People of potential interest to the study are those who are...

- a) ... in the process of becoming, or who have recently become, vegetarian or vegan;
- b) ... struggling or lapsed vegetarians/vegans;
- c) ... thinking about, intending to or aspiring to be vegetarian/ vegan.

The aim of this Research Council funded study is to understand becoming vegetarian (or vegan) *as it is happening* and requires participants to keep a diary, and/or be interviewed periodically, about their behaviour, thoughts and feelings to do with their recent, attempted or intended change in diet.

The anonymity of all participants will be strictly maintained. Notebooks can be supplied upon request. If you have any queries/questions about participating please contact Richard Carmichael by mail, 'phone or e-mail (see below). If you know of anyone else who is or may be interested in taking part please pass on the contact details below.

If you think you are suitable for the study please call / e-mail / or reply to the address below for more information. Thank you.

[Contact details...]

APPENDIX 2: *Information and guidelines for diarists*

VEGETARIAN DIARY STUDY:

The aim of this study is to understand individuals' experiences of becoming vegetarian (or vegan) *as it is happening*. People of potential interest to the study are those who are...

- a) ... in the process of becoming, or who have recently become, vegetarian or vegan;
- b) ... struggling or lapsed vegetarians/vegans;
- c) ... thinking about, intending to or aspiring to be vegetarian/vegan.

By keeping a diary about your thoughts and feelings to do with your recent or intended dietary change you are a valuable part of the study. Your participation is appreciated.

You should write as much or as little as you want, in whatever format. The diary is supposed to reflect your state(s) of mind rather than require a minimum to be written each day/week. You can write it whenever, wherever and however often you want (but generally the more regularly the better). Your diary-entries could include the following:

1. *Your motivations*, sense of *commitment(s)*, and *decision-making*;
2. The difference between *public and private* versions of your vegetarianism/veganism, i.e. between what you say to others and what you think;
3. *Situations which made you think/talk about* your diet/meat-eating (e.g. conversations, eating out, TV);
4. *Reactions* of friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances; how it affects relationships;
5. How a *stable/consistent position* is reached, e.g. vis-à-vis dairy and leather products;
6. What is *supportive/positive* and what is *undermining/negative* about the changes;
7. Your *sense of identity*: e.g. as changing; as "Vegetarian" or "Vegan"; as same/different to others, as varying with situation/ people you are with/ moods;
8. Which *sources of information* you use/trust;
9. *The degree of success/lapsing* in keeping to your intentions;
10. *The experience of keeping the diary* and if it affects the way you're thinking;
11. *Anything else* you are thinking about/feeling connected to changing your diet.

The anonymity of all participants will be strictly maintained. Notebooks can be supplied upon request. If you have any queries/questions about participating please contact Richard Carmichael by mail, 'phone or e-mail (see below). If you know of anyone else who is or may be interested in taking part please pass on the contact details below.

Thank you once again for your participation.

[Contact details...]

APPENDIX 3: *Summary of material collected shown by individual participant*

Participant's name	Dietary change aimed for	Diary material submitted (pages*)	Number of interviews done
1. Nicola	>VEGAN	44 pages	4
2. Paul (M)**	>VEGAN	45	3
3. Cathy	v>VEGAN	67	3
<i>[Total for Top three ('case studies'): ~156 pages; 10 interviews]</i>			
4. Greg (M)	>vegetarian	16	2
5. Tamra	>vegetarian	10	4
6. Clare	>vegetarian	22	2
7. Paula	VEGAN	22	1
<i>[Total for Top seven ('core participants'): ~236 pages of diary; 19 interviews]</i>			
8. Dawn	>vegetarian	(not received)	2
9. Julii	vegetarian	14	0
10. Alison R	>VEGAN	11	1
11. Alyson T	v>VEGAN	12	0
12. Jacqui	>vegetarian	-	1
13. Shannen	>vegetarian	4	2
14. Jenny	> vegetarian	-	1
15. Jane	> vegetarian	6	1
16. Karen	> vegetarian	(lost)	2
17. Carol	vegetarian	15	1
18. Tina	>VEGAN	19	0
19. Lisa	>vegetarian	2	0
20. Elizabeth	vegetarian	9	0
21. Michael (M)	>vegetarian	2	0
22. Marja	(VEGAN)	6	0
23. Richard (M)	(VEGAN)	3	1
<hr/>			
GRAND TOTAL:	Diaries: ~328 pages*	Interviews: 31	

* Standardised format: A4; size 12; double line spaced.

** '(M)' denotes *Male* participant

APPENDIX 4: *Data for individual participants*

NB.

* - Indicates that the participant was particularly difficult to classify.

Table 1: *Participants' characteristics* (for discussion see Chapter 5)

	Total	Individual participants by name																					
		VEGETARIAN														VEGAN							
		<i>Carol</i>	<i>Clare</i>	<i>Dawn</i>	<i>Elizabeth</i>	<i>Greg</i>	<i>Jacqui</i>	<i>Jane</i>	<i>Jenny</i>	<i>Julii</i>	<i>Karen</i>	<i>Lisa</i>	<i>Michael</i>	<i>Shannen</i>	<i>Tamra</i>	<i>Alison R</i>	<i>Alyson T</i>	<i>Cathy</i>	<i>Marja</i>	<i>Nicola</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>Paula</i>	<i>Richard</i>
Number	23																						
Sex																							
Male	4					•						•								•		•	
Female	19	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•		•
Age																							
< 25	5		•		•							•		•			•						
25-35	10			•			•			•				•	•				•	•	•	•	•
> 35	8	•				•		•	•		•		•				•	•					
Nationality																							
British	17	•	•	•		•		•	•		•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Other	6				•		•			•		•		•									•

Table 2: *Dietary Transitions aimed for by Participants*
(For discussion see Chapter 5)

Dietary change aimed for:	Total	Individual participants by name																						
		VEGETARIAN														VEGAN								
		<i>Carol</i>	<i>Clare</i>	<i>Dawn</i>	<i>Elizabeth</i>	<i>Greg</i>	<i>Jacqui</i>	<i>Jane</i>	<i>Jenny</i>	<i>Julii</i>	<i>Karen</i>	<i>Lisa</i>	<i>Michael</i>	<i>Shannen</i>	<i>Tamra</i>	<i>Alison R</i>	<i>Alyson T</i>	<i>Cathy</i>	<i>Marja</i>	<i>Nicola</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>Paula</i>	<i>Richard</i>	<i>Tina</i>
New Vegetarians (from meat-eating)	14	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●										
New Vegans	9														●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Vegetarian to Vegan	5															●	●	?			●	●	●	●
Meat-eating to Vegan	3														●				●	●				

Table 3: *Reported Motivations for becoming Vegetarian & Vegan*
(For discussion see Chapter 5; and discussion of revulsion in Ch. 8)

Reported Motivation	Total	Individual participants by name																						
		VEGETARIAN														VEGAN								
		Carol	Clare	Dawn	Elizabeth	Greg	Jacqui	Jane	Jenny	Julii	Karen	Lisa	Michael	Shannen	Tamra	Alison R	Alyson T	Cathy	Marja	Nicola	Paul	Paula	Richard	Tina
Health	14*	*	*	*			*	●		●	*		*		*	●			*	*	*			*
Health Problem	5							●			●					●		●		●				
Moral	17	●	●	●	●	●	●		●			●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	*
Factory Farming	11	●	●	●				●		●			●			●		●	●	●	●			
Ecological	2									*												*		
Gustatory	2									●	●													
Revulsion	14	●			●		●		●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●			

Table 4: *Participants’ Accounts of Conversions and Transitions*
(For discussion see Chapter 5)

Theme:	Total	Individual participants by name																					
		VEGETARIAN														Vegan							
		Carol	Clare	Dawn	Elizabeth	Greg	Jacqui	Jane	Jenny	Julii	Karen	Lisa	Michael	Shannen	Tamra	Alison R.	Alyson T.	Cathy	Marja	Nicola	Paul	Paula	Richard
Conversion experience	11				•	•				•			•		•	•	•		•		•	•	
Notable day/date	9					•	•				•		•	•			•		•			•	•
Changing character	5	•	•	•									•						•				
Self-efficacy /Self-development	6												•			•				•		•	•
Change in taste	10	•					•	•		•	•			•		•		•	•	•			
Increasing revulsion	8	•		•	•	•	•		•				•						•				
‘Peace of mind’	9				•	•			•				•	•					•	•	•	•	

Table 5: *Participants’ accounts of avoiding topic of vegetarianism/veganism* (For discussion see Chapter 6)

	Total	Individual participants by name																					
		VEGETARIAN														Vegan							
		Carol	Clare	Dawn	Elizabeth	Greg	Jacqui	Jane	Jenny	Julii	Karen	Lisa	Michael	Shannen	Tamra	Alison R.	Alyson T.	Cathy	Marja	Nicola	Paul	Paula	Richard
Avoiding topic	10				●		●	●	●			●		●			●		●	●	●		

Table 6: *Reported food avoidances by individual participants*
(For discussion see Chapter 7)

- Key:**
- - Food item avoided
 - T - Strong Temptation but no Lapsing reported
 - L - One or more lapses
 - * - Indicates where it is especially difficult to classify this participant
 - V - Vegetarian cheese only eaten
 - Org - Organic
 - F/R - Free Range

Foods Avoided:	Total	Individual participants by name																						
		VEGETARIAN														VEGAN								
		Carol	Clare	Dawn	Elizabeth	Greg	Jacqui	Jane	Jenny	Julii	Karen	Lisa	Michael	Shannen	Tamra	Alison R.	Alyson T.	Cathy	Marja	Nicola	Paul	Paula	Richard	Tina
All 'flesh foods':	11	●	L	L*	●	L	L*	L*	T	L	●	L	L	●	L	●	●	●	●	L	L	●	●	L
Red meat	19	●	L	●	●	L	●	●	●	L	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	L	●	●	●	
Bacon	20	●	?	●	●	●	●	T	T	L	●	*	●	●	T	?	●	●	●	T	●	●	●	●
Fowl (chicken)	17	●	L	●	●	L	T	●	●	L	●	L	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	L	●	●	L	
Fish	15	●	●	L*	●	●	L*	L*	●	L	●	●	L	●	L	●	●	●	●	L	L	●	●	●
Shellfish	20	●	L	●	●	●	●	●	●	L	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	T	L	●	●	●

Animal ingredients	*	L	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	?	●	●	●	●	L	●	●	●	●	●	L	●	●	●
Cheese	6	?	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	L	V	?	V	V	?	●	*	●	●	●	L	●	●	L
Eggs	6	?							Org				F/R			●	●		●	●	L	●	●	L
All dairy	6	?														●	*	●	●	●	L	●	●	L
Alcohol	2	L															?	●				L	●	
Leather	5		L	*										*			●	●				●	●	
Silk/wool	*			●													?	?					?	
Other	*																							
Hierarchy	8	●	●			●									●		●	●			●	●		
Specific struggles	7	?					●	●					L		L		●			L				L

Table 7: *Reported frequency and planning of lapses by individual participants* (For discussion see Chapter 7)

Reports of lapses:	Total	Individual participants by name																					
		VEGETARIAN														VEGAN							
		Carol	Clare	Dawn	Elizabeth	Greg	Jacqui	Jane	Jenny	Julii	Karen	Lisa	Michael	Shannen	Tamra	Alison R	Alyson T	Cathy	Marja	Nicola	Paul	Paula	Richard
Frequency of lapses:																							
Frequent	4		●						●											●			●
Rare	8	●				●					●	●		●		●		●	●				
Never	9			●	●		●			●			●				●				●	●	
Planning lapses:																							
Planned	2	●									●												
Not planned	5		●			●				●									●	●			

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