

**Acting in Solidarity with the Natural World: Conscious Living and the Case of  
Vegetarianism**

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## **Abstract**

How humans live in solidarity with the natural world is a topic of growing importance in society. While concerns about the environment seem to be pressing in the media, little academic research focuses on our immediate relationships with the natural world. This thesis examines the natural other in society, animals and the environment, and examines how, and if, we choose to act in solidarity with the other. I argue that the development of a new concept, conscious living, explains and extends social theories of solidarity to include our daily interactions with the natural world. In conscious living, the connection between knowing and acting is examined along a continuum that differs from social theories of the bystander in that it accounts for variations in lifestyle choices and actor behaviour. The concept of conscious living is constructed through the examination of twenty-six interviews that were conducted in Ottawa, Canada, and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Vegetarianism is used as a case example because it exemplifies conscious living; the decisions we make about diet are everyday indicators of our solidarity with animals and the environment.

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## Introduction

The cohesion of society, or the degree of solidarity in which people live with each other, is often the focus of sociological study. Yet, as humans, we share the planet with many other non-human beings. We determine the boundaries of our human/non-human solidarities<sup>1</sup> and the extent to which the natural world is integrated into our societies. Although human unity is commonly studied, as is our relationship with the human other, examining the ways in which people live in solidarity with non-human animals and the environment is less often found in social research.

In this thesis, I demonstrate how our connection with the other raises two significant questions. First, who is the other in society? While the other can be any individual or being, I look primarily at the natural other, more specifically, non-human animals and the environment<sup>2</sup>. Second, how do we act towards the natural other? Why does one person act more than the next? Our actions concerning the natural other can be found in different types of solidarity. While social theories of solidarity explain larger themes of unity, I argue that the development of a new concept, which I call conscious living, can explain how our actions of solidarity toward the natural other happen on a daily basis. We are constantly making decisions that concern non-human animals and the environment. I contend that conscious living is an explicit example of social theories of solidarity because it exemplifies positive action, taken with the intent of helping the natural other, in the context of the everyday.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, solidarity is defined as living in unity with other human and non-human beings. This means taking their interests into consideration and refraining from causing harm. People living in solidarity with the natural world try to alleviate the suffering of non-human animals and the environment.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the 'natural other' refers to non-human animals and the environment. The term 'animals' is used to discuss non-human species, while the 'environment' includes all things that occur naturally on the earth .

Considering the development of the concept of conscious living, and our relationships with the natural other, I argue that it is necessary to look at our actions toward non-human animals and the environment. One approach to investigating conscious living is through examination of social theories of the bystander (Bauman, 2002; Clarkson, 1996; Cohen, 2001). I shall argue that these theories need to be expanded by representing conscious living as a continuum. Social theories of the bystander discuss people as either bystanders or actors in society and do not account for the variations in action that people choose to take. Conscious living also explains people as bystanders and actors, however, it takes into account that interactions with the natural world happen on a daily basis and different people make varying choices about helping animals and the environment. I argue that people cannot be classified simply as bystanders or actors, and that further, conscious living involves two components: knowing and acting. The link between social theories of the bystander and conscious living comes from the idea that both present the bystander as someone who knows and does not act, and an actor as someone who knows and acts. Ultimately, in conscious living, the connection between knowing and acting is examined along a continuum that accounts for variations in everyday lifestyle choices and actor behaviour.

Vegetarianism is used as a case because it is a strong example of our solidarity with the natural other that is tested on a daily basis. I argue that diet and food selection can exemplify conscious living; every day we consume food, and our choice of diet is an action that is dependent upon lifestyle choices that concern our solidarity with animals and the environment.

I have also chosen to use people's perceptions of vegetarianism as a model of conscious living because I have been devoted to issues surrounding the natural world since I was a child. Around the age of eleven I decided to become a vegetarian, and the consequences of this early decision have led me to become involved in food, environmental and animal rights issues. Around the age of fifteen I adopted a vegan diet and started to become more involved in animal rights. Through my encounters working with various animal rights and environmental organizations I have met many people with experiences both similar and different to the ones I have had. In addition, I have realized that people live their lives in very different ways, and make choices that benefit and/or harm the natural world. While most people would claim that they would never live with the purpose of intentionally harming either animals or the environment, it is clear that some people make decisions that are more beneficial to the natural world than others. This realization has led me to pursue research on how we interact with animals and the environment on a daily basis.

I believe that my idea of conscious living can partially explain and illustrate the way various people make decisions around everyday living with regard to the natural world, while contributing to social theories of solidarity and social theories of the bystander. Drawing upon existing literature, I conducted 26 in-depth interviews that were analyzed with a grounded theory strategy in order to develop the concept of conscious living. Both vegetarians and omnivores were interviewed in order to obtain comparative information. It is important to note that the examination of decision making around diet

centres on what people choose to eat<sup>3</sup>, rather than the amount of food eaten or the commercial side of food choices.

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<sup>3</sup> Food choices are constrained by socio-economic factors. This thesis looks at food choices that include options (eating meat, for example) that are available to the majority of North Americans. While food is considered a choice in this thesis, I am aware that the actual food choices people make are patterned by inequality. According to Torres (1997), animal agriculture and related industries, which profit from the exploitation of animals, can be located within the larger dynamics of North American capitalism, which breeds social inequality. The process and methods involved in the production of animal goods are hidden within a system of production and consumption that is specific to the global North.

## Chapter 1: Solidarity as a Daily Decision

When thinking about solidarity, and how people act in relation to each other, there are a number of key ideas that need to be considered. Most fundamentally, for the purpose of this thesis, do our daily actions translate into social solidarities? This chapter begins by addressing how solidarity can be considered in the context of the everyday, in order to situate a discussion about our relationship with the natural other in society. I continue by arguing that the development of the concept of conscious living is an extension of social theories of the bystander, in that conscious living is an example of solidarity that occurs on a daily basis. This discussion leads to a focussed look at how people choose to act in or out of solidarity with natural others. I ask the question, what characterizes one person as a bystander, and another as an actor? Each of these ideas is examined in this chapter in order to position the aim of this thesis, which is to construct the concept of conscious living as an extension of social theories of the bystander, through the use of vegetarianism as an example.

How do humans live together when conditions are trying? Social theories of solidarity examine a range of issues dealing with how humans interact with each other<sup>4</sup>. Primarily, these theories tend to be more abstract when discussing large ideas of how we form relationships and live together in unity. While the general concept of solidarity is applicable to my research, I am predominantly concerned with our everyday actions of

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4 One of the most fundamental arguments in social theories of solidarity is whether humans possess an innate sense of solidarity. Rorty (1989) believes that humans need to disregard the idea of being born with a sense of solidarity; he is positive that unity can be achieved by acknowledging others and working towards the creation of solidarity. On the other hand, Wilde (2004) claims that all humans possess an essence of solidarity that can be extended towards others, although actual unity depends on context and construct. Komter (2005) believes that solidarity is only possible if humans can sympathize with others, which includes human and non-human beings.

solidarity. Furthermore, I am interested in what these actions reveal about our relationship with the natural world. This thesis contributes to social theories of solidarity in two ways. First, it extends the notion of solidarity to include our relationships with the natural other, animals and the environment. Second, it shows that through our interactions with the natural world, conscious living can be constructed as a form of solidarity that occurs on a daily basis.

### **Who is ‘the Other’?**

Often when reviewing ideas about solidarity, the concept of the ‘other’ is mentioned. In a globalized society, where we are connected with people from all over the world, who exactly can be defined as ‘the other’? Social distance, boundaries and space<sup>5</sup> have immense roles in our lives, due to “postmodernization.”<sup>6</sup> Commonly, our ability to make distinctions in the world also involves a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Bauman & May, 2001). Here, the other will be explored in relation to ethical conceptions of solidarity, giving aid, citizenship and non-human otherness.

Komter (2005) examines issues of trust and solidarity as fundamental capacities that humans can extend to animals. When describing how society is changing, Komter claims that identities, convictions and commitments are becoming more diversified among individuals. Feelings of being rooted to a similar place have diminished, as have people’s abilities to initiate relations of trust. According to Komter (2005), solidarity is not merely based on mutual dependency but on the ability of putting oneself in the

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<sup>5</sup>We do not have to be in the physical presence of those in order to identify similar needs and a sense of community (Bauman & May, 2001).

<sup>6</sup>“Postmodernization” is a term used by Bauman and May (2001). It describes a society with increased access to information and communication technologies.

imaginary position of the other. Because there are differences among species, it may be argued that the idea of putting a human self in the position of a non-human self is absurd. However, Komter (2005: 174) continues to state that one's ability "to sympathize and identify with the predicament of another person is a key precondition to solidarity." As Komter extends her arguments of solidarity to non-humans, one may presume that the human recognition of non-human suffering is necessary in order for us to want to bestow help to animals and the environment.

With reference to sympathizing and giving aid to others in need, Bauman (2002) describes how humans must make decisions based upon a moral responsibility to the other. He states that the responsibility for the other includes the duty of prevision and precaution, and becomes the 'brute fact' of the human condition. He does extend his arguments around human responsibility to non-human species. "As one would expect of ideas struggling to get a hold on rapidly shifting attitudes, the attributes that are common to humans and animals now tend to be paid more attention and seen as more important than the differences between them. One by one, the boundaries between humans and the rest of living creatures, laboriously fortified in the past and proclaimed to be impassable, are effaced" (Bauman, 2002: 209).

Likewise, Urry (2000) explains otherness by writing about citizenships that can be extended to non-human species. Urry (2000) describes many different types of citizenships which are developing across different societies. Generally, he claims that there are specific and important duties involved in contemporary citizenship. While citizenship calls for the consideration of other's rights, Urry notes that nature might have rights as well. He claims that until recently, there has been no sense of an inclusive,

ethical community among nature (including non-human animals) and humans. The failure to provide basic rights to living beings results in campaigns for these rights. In addition, “new duties towards animals and objects reconstruct human beings as possessors of special powers and responsibilities” (Urry, 2000: 170). Further, the failure to provide basic rights to living organisms has generated campaigns to establish the rights of animals to freedom or liberty (Nash, 1989). According to Urry (2000: 172), “[c]itizenship is thus intricately intertwined with knowing about, avoiding or minimizing the impacts of such massive hazards upon the rights of humans, animals and the rest of ‘nature’.”

Addressing specifically the idea of non-human otherness, Berry (1989) claims that the earth and environment are things to which humans need to extend aid. People tend to blame the government and large organizations for environmental degradation, yet, the problem is constantly found in private life. He believes that in the end, humans must come to the realization that every problem dealing with conservation leads straight to the question of how we live (Berry, 1989).

While social theories of solidarity explain larger forms of unity, and our relationship with the human other, it is important to question the definition of the other in society. This section demonstrates that the description of the other can, and should, be broadened to include the natural other: non-human animals and the environment. Whether this solidarity with the natural other is expressed as empathy or action depends on the individual in question. How we choose to act will be explored in the following sections that look at the development of the concept of conscious living, the new distances between seeing and knowing, and social theories of the bystander and actor in society.

## **Conscious Living**

Rooted in ideas of social solidarity, this thesis begins to construct a concept I call conscious living that considers our actions toward the natural world as a form of solidarity that happens on a daily basis. Conscious living involves the knowledge that one is capable of change through self-awareness and self-responsibility, and that decision-making in everyday life has individual, collective and global consequences. In short, conscious living can be defined as the way in which people make decisions and take action on a daily basis. In addition, conscious living illustrates the idea that bystanders and actors are not singular groups in society. In reality, there are different degrees of those choosing to take action. While I hope that this concept can be used to discuss many conditions, I focus specifically on how and why people live with the objective of helping animals and the natural environment in order to alleviate non-human suffering.

Through an in-depth review of bystanders, actors and vegetarianism, it is clear that conscious living can be exemplified by those who are willing to make lifestyle choices based on a desire to alleviate human, as well as non-human suffering. While it is important to distinguish between actors and bystanders in life, it is even more crucial to recognize that those classified as actors or bystanders can have very different motivations and levels of willingness when it comes to giving help. Through the development of conscious living along a continuum, this becomes apparent.

## **New Distances between Seeing and Knowing**

A key aspect in developing the idea of conscious living concerns the societal conditions that have an influence on how people take action. The shrinking distances

between seeing and knowing can manipulate our solidarities and have a determinant effect on bystanding and acting. This will be further reviewed in the remainder of this chapter.

Today, postmodernization, and the process of globalization, means that the world is more connected together through changes in communication technology, the economy, legal organizations and tourism. More controversially, globalization refers to a change in consciousness about the impact that certain actions have on globalism (Turner & Rojeck, 2001)<sup>7</sup>. Dean (1996) identifies that the development of a postmodern society creates positions where solidarity is needed. In earlier societies, there was a common identity. In postmodernity, there are types of solidarity that are unique; we need different forms of unity than in previous times.

Similarly, Taylor (1991) believes that a radical anthropocentrism is fostered by modern industrial societies. Mobility is forced upon people as old ties are broken down. “By its very nature, this involves much more impersonal and casual contact, in place of the more intense, face-to-face relations in earlier times.” This, in turn, results in “self-centered modes of the idea of self-fulfillment” (Taylor, 1991: 59/ 60). Soron (2006) elaborates this point by discussing how commodities that we purchase arrive on the shelves through a network of impersonal market relationships. We often do not give thought to where our goods originate, as long as they fulfill a certain desire. Moreover, Komter (2005) looks at the idea of instant gratification, paired with solidarity, and claims that individualization, diversification and globalization have effects on solidarity. Information has become instantly available from anywhere in the world, while intracommunity communication has no benefit over global exchange.

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<sup>7</sup>Turner and Rojeck (2001) also write that globalization of culture threatens local practice and belief.

Bauman (2002) also considers the distances between seeing and knowing and the time it takes for one's actions to be gratified. Bauman (2002), when discussing the bystander and actor, asks the question of why there are so many bystanders in the world. He believes a reason for this may be postmodern society - that the consequences of any action one takes as an actor are distanced, and the results cannot be seen immediately. Another reason is that the distance between viewing and suffering has increased; there is an even wider gap between seeing and knowing. Again, this is an aspect of postmodernity. As the volume and quality of information available increases, people are able to witness suffering. At the same time, few messages of suffering come complete with information about what one can do to help. Overall, this creates a confusing environment of knowing and wanting to take action, coupled with the discouraging results of not being able to see the effects of one's actions. Although Bauman is distressed about our postmodern society, an examination of interview data will show that interviewees are still concerned with maintaining and creating social cohesion.

Discussions surrounding globalization and modernization are often glum and seem to offer little hope for future solidarities. Yet, once we acknowledge the fact that solidarities have changed and that we need to work with aspects of globalization, perhaps forms of unity can survive, and new solidarities can be created. Since information can be available from anywhere in the world, the potential to know about issues is enormous. Even though the notion of solidarity may be in transformation, there are still many people who feel and express a sense of unity not only with other humans but also with other non-human beings. The transfiguration of social solidarities is illustrated in this thesis through the demonstration of conscious living as a form of everyday solidarity.

## Choosing to Act

The ways in which we live in solidarity with other humans and non-humans vary depending on our individual life experiences. Bauman and May (2001) believe that as human beings, we often consider ourselves able to control our destinies. Thus, we have the power to determine our conduct and control our lives. We therefore have the ability to direct the outcomes of our actions. Yet, Bauman and May (2001) ask, is this a true account of how life works? We are encumbered with knowledge of the distress of others, which has increased as a result of globalization. While some may experience compassion fatigue, others decide to act in order to alleviate the suffering of others. How do we identify who chooses to act and why they choose particular issues to act on? While there is not one clear answer as to how and why people choose to give aid, social theories of the bystander<sup>8</sup> and theories of social change help to illuminate the importance of these questions.

According to Mill (2004), the engine of social change comes from the minority<sup>9</sup>. When individuals exercise ethical, moral and informed choices, they are also evaluating whether society or another being is at risk of being harmed. Mill was disappointed that custom had become the result of authority; he wanted to move away from tradition and encourage individuals to make informed choices. Mill (2004: 57/ 58) stated, “the evil<sup>10</sup> is, that individual spontaneity is hardly recognized by the common modes of thinking, as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account. The majority,

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<sup>8</sup> Bystander theory is a prominent theory in psychology. While it may be partly applicable to my research, the main focus of this thesis comes from sociological theories of the bystander. Social theories of the bystander are thoroughly addressed in the next section, Bystanders and Actors.

<sup>9</sup> Mill (2004) believed that mediocrity stagnates social progress; without a desire to better oneself individuals and society are limited. Although Mill is not writing in the present, his arguments can be applied to current social situations.

<sup>10</sup> Mill uses dramatic language in order to emphasize his main ideas.

being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are...cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody.” The belief that individual actions are not always recognized by the majority has not stopped some people from making ethical, moral and informed decisions. These lifestyle choices can be considered a type of subpolitics, which include a range of activity that is conducted beyond the official political sphere (Beck, 1999). The idea of subpolitics suggests that formal politics have been revised by those in counter-cultures who have articulated specific concerns not addressed in formal politics (Turner & Rojeck, 2001). “Subpolitics is destined to assume greater prominence in the general organization of everyday life”, since it is a more personal and compelling system in which people can develop issues that are salient to everyday life (Turner & Rojeck, 2001: 174). Similarly, Jones (2002) discusses the notion of ‘social responsibility activism’ and states that individuals consciously choose to change their daily activities in the hopes of bettering their world. In addition, he claims that social responsibility activism is closely related to contemporary social movements such as environmentalism and simple living.

When examining the Straight Edge Movement as a contemporary interest group, Haenfler (2004) discovers that a strong collective identity is essential for diffuse movements as it provides structure, a reason for commitment and resources for individualized participation. One argument, expressed by Haenfler (2004), is that people can be politically active by making changes on a day-to-day basis. In contrast, Wapner and Willoughby (2005) note that while daily lifestyle choices emphasizing efficiency, less consumption and personal sacrifice may make people believe they are participating in political action, in reality, personal lifestyle choices rarely help political causes.

Through the analysis of interview data, I tend to accept Haenfler's (2004) line of reasoning. Some interview participants, through their daily interactions with the natural other, have become heavily involved in political organizations resulting in the growth and development of animal rights groups, political parties, and education centres. Although the extent to which personal activism actually makes a worldly difference is not the focus of this thesis, how people perceive they are making a difference through the various lifestyle choices they make, especially around diet, contributes to the idea of conscious living.

Similar to Haenfler's (2004) contentions, Touraine (2000) claims that the political actors of the future are individuals who will transform everyday life experiences into political action. These forces will be able to generate new social movements through the forces of solidarity and diversity. "The subject is the individual's desire to be an actor. Subjectivation is the desire for individuation, and individuation can come about only if there is an adequate interface between the world of instrumentality and that of identity" (Touraine, 2000: 57). While Bauman and May (2001) discuss how individuals can take political action on a daily basis, they note that the amount of power and autonomy one has impacts the amount of action they take each day. Bauman and May (2001) believe that power is necessary in order to afford someone the ability to act. People have varying degrees of freedom, due to inequality in society, and therefore, a wider range of choice means greater power. Further, motives such as gain and moral duty can clash with each other and influence decision-making. The same person can feel different moral motives towards business and their family. In addition, Bauman and May (2001: 77) believe that two people may act differently when faced with the same circumstances, and thus, "the

power of circumstances is never absolute and the choice between the two contradictory motives remains open even under the most extreme conditions, while our individual actions are bound up with the actions of others upon whom we are dependent.” The fact that different people have had varying life experiences is obvious. Yet, it is important to take this into account when constructing the concept of conscious living and explaining how people choose to act towards the natural other.

Answering the question of why and how people choose to act can be quite difficult. While some of our decisions are a product of custom, we need to make conscious decisions in order to change society for the better. At the same time, elements like subjectivation and power need to be in place to allow an individual to make these decisions. Further insight into what makes people act in solidarity can be found within social theories of the bystander.

### **Bystanders and Actors**

While the term bystander has the same basic meaning for various theorists, there are aspects of the definition that vary. Looking at Bauman (2002), Cohen (2001) and Clarkson (1996), it is apparent that each writer has slightly different understandings of the bystander in society. These are important to understand in relation to each other as they help to develop the site in which conscious living, and its relation to vegetarianism, can be identified. How interviewees have been classified as bystanders or actors is discussed more specifically in chapters three through six. In the following sections I will outline how social theories of the bystander discuss bystanders, actors, knowledge and denial, in order to show that social theories of the bystander can be extended to develop

the concept of conscious living as it pertains to our everyday solidarities with the natural other.

According to Bauman (2002), bystanders are those who have not committed evil<sup>11</sup> by their own actions, yet refuse resistance or opposition to evil while being aware that evil actions are taking place. Often, a contested area lies between the crime of perpetration and the seemingly excusable and forgivable misdeed of bystanding (Bauman, 2002).

Cohen's (2001) definition of the bystander differs from Bauman's in that the bystander is part of a model called the atrocity triangle, where victims, perpetrators and observers are in different corners of the triangle. Bystanders are in the observer category and constitute those who come to know that a certain atrocity is happening. Cohen (2001) describes three types of bystanders which include immediate or internal bystanders (those who witness an action or learn about it from a primary source), external bystanders (those who learn of an action or event through secondary sources) and bystander states.

While Clarkson's (1996) writing about the bystander may appear similar to that of Bauman and Cohen, the goal of her book is to scrutinize the fact that people sometimes claim to be totally uninvolved in a given situation. "Existentially, if you know about a problematical situation, you are already in it. By refusing to be involved, you are involved" (Clarkson, 1996: 33). According to Clarkson, one cannot become actively involved in every cause, but must realize that knowing about something means being involved. Therefore, anyone who becomes *actively* engaged in a situation, for better or worse, is not a bystander. Active engagement can include the decision not to give help.

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<sup>11</sup> Like Mill (2004), Bauman uses the dramatic term 'evil' to emphasize his main ideas.

Although each theorist describes the bystander as a person who is not involved in a situation where another needs help, Bauman, Cohen and Clarkson describe the concept in different ways. Bauman's idea of the bystander is quite simple – a person who does not act on the behalf of another. Cohen uses Bauman's idea of the bystander, yet embeds it in a model that includes the internal bystander, external bystander, and bystander states. Finally, Clarkson claims that while a bystander can be considered a person who does not give aid when it is needed, the state of bystanding is relatively short lived since knowing about a situation is becoming involved in that situation. Making a decision to become actively involved eliminates the status of bystander, according to Clarkson. Even though Bauman, Cohen and Clarkson describe the bystander differently, my inclination is to side with the arguments of Bauman and Cohen. After reviewing social theories of the bystander, it is clear that bystanding and acting involves a combination of knowing and doing. I am oriented to accept the explanations put forth by Bauman and Cohen and define a bystander as someone who knows about a situation and chooses to do nothing, whereas an actor can be considered someone who knows about a situation and chooses to take some action. These definitions are exemplified throughout this thesis. In chapters four through six, interviewees describe situations where they have been aware that another needs help, and go on to discuss how they have chosen to donate or decline assistance.

### **Knowledge and Denial**

Both Bauman (2002) and Cohen (2001) claim that denial plays a large part in bystanding and acting, and the decisions people make about becoming actively involved

in a situation and giving help. Bauman (2002) believes that denial allows for the perpetration of evil and does not allow for the opposition of evil. “‘Denial’ is the answer to such vexing questions as ‘what do we do with our knowledge about the suffering of others, and what does this knowledge do to us?’” (Bauman, 2002: 203). Furthermore, denial is made up of a combination of lack of knowledge and lack of opportunity to act on knowledge, where arguments of ignorance are used in addition to arguments of impotence. Because of globalization, and a disappearing distance between seeing and knowing, arguments of ignorance are losing their credibility, and arguments of impotence are being used more often. The most popular excuse of bystanders, according to Bauman (2002) and Cohen (2001), is the argument of impotence.

Cohen (2001) believes that theories of denial are important to understand when investigating the concept of the bystander. Denial can be found in both experience and action through four components of human action. These include knowing (denial of knowledge), emotion (denial of feelings), morality (approval of what is being done), and action (concrete information about suffering is ignored).

While Cohen (2001) states that internal bystanders realize the suffering in their own societies, he does not account for instances where suffering happens in close proximity to people but remains hidden due to various forces. Cohen (2001: 147) does question how people use denial in their lives and states that “...even if most people ‘just don’t want to know what’s happening’, this does not explain why other people in the same culture, sharing the same values, react differently.” Bauman makes the same claim that people in identical situations may choose to act differently, based on their previous life experiences, beliefs and ideas.

Cohen (2001) and Clarkson (1996) also believe there is a close relationship between awareness and action. Cohen (2001) describes immediate bystanders in terms of people who witness or learn about human suffering first-hand; suffering usually occurs in close proximity. Cohen discusses external bystanders as people who find out about suffering that happens outside of their daily lives. This often includes events that happen in other countries. “There are few theories and even less data about how we respond to such appeals” (Cohen, 2001: 17). As external bystanders, people feel that actually doing something to alleviate external suffering is quite difficult. This corresponds to Bauman’s ideas about the distance between viewing and suffering. The further away suffering occurs, the more helpless people feel, and therefore, the less action they take to alleviate distant suffering.

Once again, it is difficult to determine how and why people choose to act. Denial may result in bystander activity, however, as access to communication and information increases, the argument of ignorance loses its potency. Further, people in similar situations may choose to act differently depending on the context of activity and the combination of their previous life experiences. In addition, witnessing suffering in close proximity is more likely to cause someone to give aid. Each of these conditions can be observed when analyzing the interview data.

### **Can Bystanders be those who Witness Non-Human Suffering?**

After reviewing social theories of the bystander, and notions of knowledge and denial, the question of how and if we can extend help to the natural other, remains. Can social theories of the bystander be used in relation to animals and the environment?

While this is not clearly outlined by Bauman, Cohen or Clarkson, each theorist uses examples of animals or the environment at some point in his/ her writing. It is my objective to extend the definition of the bystander to someone who does not come to the aid of another, whether it is a fellow human, animal, or the natural environment.

Bauman (2002) explicitly discusses the idea of the bystander with reference to the environment and animal rights. He discusses human responsibility to the environment by mentioning that the world is being polluted by a small percentage of individuals who do not take responsibility for their actions. These people are not considered bystanders, because they are taking action in a negative sense<sup>12</sup>. Bauman also looks at animal rights and briefly mentions that our perceptions of responsibility toward their well-being have shifted. Some people are becoming more accountable for the ways in which animals are treated.

While Clarkson (1996) does not discuss animal rights and the environment in as much depth as Bauman, Clarkson does mention bystanding and the natural environment. She states that every major social change in favour of justice, including those against animal cruelty, has been because bystanders decide to take action. With this, she describes responsibility as an individual's ability to respond to the events of the world. In addition, Clarkson describes relationships as the interconnectedness between people. While she does not overtly mention whether this connection can involve humans and the natural environment, this can be assumed, since she states, "[o]ur appalling capacity as human beings to inflict damage, death and torture upon other people, animals, trees and

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<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that people can take negative action towards the natural world. However, this thesis looks only at the positive action that people take; I define actors as those helping, rather than hindering, animals and the environment. Chapter 7, *Conclusions*, addresses the possibility of extending conscious living to include 'negative actors'.

plants, and natural systems in general, has its roots in a profound and terrifying disconnectedness from ourselves as physical organisms” (Clarkson, 1996: 29). Plainly, Clarkson believes that a desire to alleviate suffering can be felt towards non-human species.

After reviewing the notion of solidarity and the natural other in society, as well as social theories of the bystander, it is clear that solidarities can be formed between humans and non-humans. I argue that conscious living describes these relationships by discussing the varying connections between knowing and doing that can exist in bystanders and actors. Vegetarianism is used as an example of conscious living because it is a case of solidarity that happens on a daily basis.

### **Vegetarianism as a Case Example**

The research topic of vegetarianism and the development of the concept of conscious living is sociologically significant because it builds upon existing theories of solidarity in society, while contributing specifically to social theories of the bystander. Throughout this thesis, vegetarianism<sup>13</sup> is used as an indicator to determine how social theories of the bystander can be extended to describe specific types of bystanders and actors, through the development of the concept of conscious living<sup>14</sup>. Although those writing about solidarity have briefly alluded to the ways in which humans can be bystanders to non-human suffering, this area has not been clearly addressed; many

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (2008), a vegetarian is a human being who does not eat animal flesh, including fish and poultry. A vegan does not eat any animal products, including eggs, dairy and gelatine. An omnivore eats both plant and animal-based food.

<sup>14</sup> While there are many dimensions of vegetarianism that could be examined, this thesis looks at food choice as an indicator of social theories of solidarity. The political economy of food is a different aspect of vegetarianism that could be addressed, in relation to conscious living, in future research.

questions remain. Current social theories of the bystander do not discuss what happens when suffering is going on in close proximity to the potential observer, yet remains unnoticed. How do people move from bystander to actor? How does this occur in the case of vegetarianism? I argue that conscious living is a form of solidarity that happens on a daily basis. It is an extension of social theories of the bystander as it describes whether or not, and how, people take action when they are aware of a situation where another needs help. Thus, vegetarianism is used to demonstrate conscious living because people make choices about diet on a daily basis<sup>15</sup>. Whether one's decision to be vegetarian can be connected to notions of solidarity between humans, animals and the environment will be observed in the interview data.

Generally, as the numbers of vegetarians, environmental and animal rights activists increase, it is necessary to gather knowledge about who these people are and with what activities they are involved. Although there is some current research that looks at vegetarianism and its latent integration into other areas of conscious living, overall, there has been little research surrounding activism in Canada when it comes to the connection between diet, animal rights and the environment. There is no existing research that evaluates vegetarianism and the relationship between vegetarians and activists in Canada. Vegetarians were chosen as a research topic because the number of people who are adopting vegetarianism is increasing<sup>16</sup>, while it remains under-researched in academic literature.

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<sup>15</sup> The decision to become vegetarian is not always a moral choice. Some people may be vegetarian due to custom, tradition, religion or health. The interview findings, discussed in the following chapters, illustrate this point.

<sup>16</sup> Between 3 and 10 per cent of North Americans consider themselves vegetarian. In a 2006 Harris poll commissioned by the Vegetarian Resource Group, 2.3 per cent of those surveyed said they never eat meat, poultry, or fish/seafood. When the list is narrowed, 6.7 per cent said they never eat meat. Furthermore, 1.4 per cent of those surveyed said they also don't consume dairy products or eggs, which would classify them

Although there is little research about vegetarianism and activism, one writer who is well-known for her work on animal and human solidarities is Carol Adams. When looking at the philosophies behind vegetarianism, Adams (2000) examines the role that spirituality plays in the adoption of a lifestyle devoid of animal products. Her work is relevant to my research because she describes diet as a choice that has implications for human/animal relationships on a daily basis. Adams states that although many vegetarians claim they do not have a spiritual practice, the very act of eating vegetarian food is a habit that is disciplined and natural, like any other type of spirituality. Adams' research is useful in determining the extent to which a vegetarian diet can be seen to influence a specific lifestyle choice, such as spirituality.

Similarly, McDonald investigates how vegetarianism is about decision making that influences daily living (2001, 1999). She claims that there is a lack of literature that looks at the decisions people make around diet, and uses qualitative methodology to determine how people learn about and adopt vegetarianism. Her ideas surrounding a vegetarian world view are similar to Adams'; the diet one chooses has a broad impact on other areas of life. McGrath (2000) also studies the ethical and political foundations of vegetarianism, and more specifically, the ways in which a vegetarian diet as a value system is marginalized within modern society. McGrath considers vegetarians as having ethical, philosophical and environmental beliefs that are important in their lives. Clearly, vegetarianism can be used as a valid case to illustrate conscious living because it is an

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as vegans (*CBC News In-Depth, The Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research Highlights, The American Dietetic Association, 2003*).

example of human/non-human solidarity that occurs on a daily basis<sup>17</sup>. Each day people make choices about the food that they consume; these choices are a direct reflection of how, and if, people choose to act in solidarity with the natural world.

### **Research Questions and Approach**

Collecting information about diet allows for an exploration of social theories of the bystander/actor, and more importantly, of the potential links between the idea of solidarity and conscious living. The questions guiding my research include: what makes people act in solidarity with the natural world; why do some people take more action than others? To what extent do people perceive vegetarianism as an action intended to help animals and the environment?

The importance of this investigation, however, extends beyond the need to recognize how and why people decide to become vegetarian. At the centre of this research is the specific question of what motivates some individuals to take more action than others? According to social theories of the bystander, people are either actors or bystanders in life. While this may be true, people live with varying levels of social awareness and concern. This remains unexplained in bystander theories as the social classification of either bystander or actor does not interpret the differences between those who are minimally, as opposed to heavily, entangled in social activism. I believe that the concept of conscious living can be constructed in order to partially explain and illustrate the ways various people make decisions around everyday living with regards to the natural world.

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<sup>17</sup> I have chosen to interview only those who have made a conscious decision to become vegetarian. Those who do not eat meat for reasons not associated with conscious living (such as tradition) were not interviewed.

## Chapter Outline

Chapter two, *Methodology*, is a reflexive account of my experiences throughout the process of conducting this research. I outline how I selected the in-depth interview as a means of collecting data, and the way in which I sampled for participants. I also provide an illustrative account of how the data were transcribed, organized and analyzed within the approach of grounded theory.

Chapter three, *Bystanders, Actors and Conscious Living*, differentiates between bystanders and actors in order to develop the concept of conscious living along a continuum. I argue that it is necessary to extend social theories of the bystander to recognize how people choose to act differently towards the natural world. This is done by further dividing actors into a typology which includes the categories of participant, engager and activist. The main objective of this chapter is to establish how bystanders and actors can be situated along the conscious living continuum.

In chapter four, *The Bystander*, interview data are used to demonstrate how bystanders are a distinct classification of people that can be located within conscious living. The most relevant themes that emerged during grounded theory analysis are explored in this chapter in relation to bystanders, and include the interviewees' dialogues around moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility for helping the natural world, individual action, relationships and dietary benefits. The aim of chapter four is to show that bystanders are part of conscious living because their lifestyle choices involve moderate awareness of the natural environment, yet limited action.

The links between action and conscious living are examined in chapter five, *Participants, Engagers and Activists*. In this chapter I argue for the necessity of

differentiation among those categorized into the large group of actors. Through consideration of the interview data, I discuss how and why each interviewee is identified as a specific type of actor: participant, engager or activist. The same themes of moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility towards the natural world, individual action, relationships and dietary benefits are observed for each type of actor. Consequently, the diverse ways in which actors live can be compared, which works to strengthen the construction of conscious living along a continuum.

Chapter six, *Traveling Through the Continuum*, deals with the flexibility of the conscious living continuum by examining people's perceptions of vegetarianism. The first section looks to social theories of the bystander and the personal experiences of interviewees in order to generate an understanding of how people move from bystander to actor through the adoption of a vegetarian diet. The second part of this chapter, using social movements theory, investigates how actors move along the continuum of conscious living through changes in lifestyle, and ultimately, diet. The goal of this chapter is to point out that conscious living is a flexible concept. People's interactions with the natural other occur on a daily basis, and as a result, lifestyle choices and solidarities are always being reconstructed.

Chapter seven, *Conclusions*, provides a summary of the major arguments expressed in the previous chapters. I continue by reflecting on the research process, including my deliberations about the extent to which this study can be generalized, my concerns with the sample size, using vegetarianism as an indicator, and how I have ensured confidentiality within the written thesis. Finally, I suggest areas for future research.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

In order to develop the idea of conscious living, vegetarians<sup>18</sup>, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians were interviewed with regards to the way they make decisions in life. This chapter discusses my experiences prior to entering the field, the selection of the intensive/in-depth interview as a means of collecting data, and the way in which I sampled for participants. I also outline how the data were transcribed, organized and analyzed within the frameworks of grounded theory. For this research project, knowledge on the topic of conscious living and vegetarianism can only be developed through the process of theory building and adding to the existing literature.

### My Location in the Research

A theme which is central to qualitative research is that of reflexivity. Contemplating and understanding my own experiences are necessary in order to effectively create, interpret, and theorize the research data. It is also important to make explicit where I am situated in consideration of the research respondents (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). While the idea of reflexivity is usually mentioned when discussing qualitative research, what it means to be reflective, and how this impacts the written research report, remains under-developed. According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003) reflexivity has not been translated into data analysis practice in terms of how a researcher can actually be reflexive. Often, there is an assumption that the researcher, method and data are separate bodies, while each of these really needs to be considered in relation to each other. The following section deals in general with reflexivity in qualitative research,

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<sup>18</sup> I often use the term 'vegetarian' to refer to both vegetarians and vegans, unless otherwise stated.

how my own experiences as a vegetarian have potentially shaped the research data, decision-making during the research process, openness to the research subjects, and writing the report. Each of these areas is explored in more detail throughout this chapter, as it is important to outline the effects that my experiences have had on my research decisions.

Since I am deeply immersed in the culture of vegetarianism, my ideas are embedded in this research project. Before starting this investigation I thought that being a so-called ‘insider’ within the vegetarian community<sup>19</sup> would facilitate data collection and analysis. While my knowledge of vegetarianism may have been beneficial in making decisions, such as where to find a vegetarian sample, it also created burdens during the research process. Roberts and Sanders (2005) note that even though researchers may be insiders, it does not mean that access to a particular subject is easy. Norum (2000) also asks what happens when the distance between the researched and researcher is minimal<sup>20</sup>. As a vegetarian, I found that I was beginning my research with a set of assumptions based on my experiences and those experiences shared by my vegetarian friends. This was especially apparent when creating the interview schedule and starting to conduct research. At the start of data collection, many themes and ideas emerged that I had not expected. For example, vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians discussed the idea of dating and intimate relationships with others who do not share their dietary

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<sup>19</sup> Politics is the capability of individuals and institutions to make responsible decisions in light of their understanding of the communities to which they belong (Torres, 1997). I use the term ‘vegetarian community’ to refer to a collective body of individuals connected by a definitive inclination towards a plant-based diet. There is a core group of people in Ottawa who can be considered part of this ‘vegetarian community’.

<sup>20</sup> Norum (2000) also asks other important questions, such as, how much of our own experience dictates what we “hear” and do not hear when we are interviewing others? Further inquiry could include: how much of ourselves is inherent in our research? How honest are we about our biases? Are we vulnerable in our research (Krieger, 1991; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Tierney, 1998)?

preference. Being a vegan, and having a vegan partner, I have taken my relationship for granted and forgotten the difficulties in dating non-vegetarians. Similarly, some vegans mentioned that their career choices are affected by their diet. This is also an idea that I did not previously consider, because my career pursuits have not always been directly linked to veganism. Before entering the field I had assumptions about which topics the interviewees would most likely want to discuss. However, new ideas about vegetarianism that I had not expected were sometimes introduced during the interviews. Therefore, the interview schedule was always being expanded and redeveloped due to people's responses. Becker (1965: 602) states, "no matter how carefully one plans in advance the research is designed in the course of its execution. The finished monograph is the result of hundreds of decisions, large and small, whilst the research is underway."

Besides which issues would be discussed during the interviews, decisions had to be made throughout the entire research process. As I write, I am deciding how much information to share with the reader. Often, dilemmas emerge before, during and after data collection, and remain unreported in the final write-up (Roberts & Sanders, 2005). While it is hard to discern what constitutes a dilemma in research, there were times that my original research design had to be altered. Initially, my idea was to interview only vegetarians in order to gain the most information about the ways in which they make decisions around conscious living. However, it became apparent that non-vegetarians and former vegetarians also had to be interviewed to obtain comparative information. During data collection there were a number of obstacles that had to be overcome. While the interviews were conducted primarily in the winter, snowstorms had an impact on scheduling. Some interviews had to be re-scheduled, other potential interviewees

cancelled their interview and could not make a later date, and one interview had to be conducted over the internet due to a storm.

While interviewing participants I was gathering data from vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians at the same time. The number of males and females seemed about equal, nevertheless, when I went back to the interviews it turned out that the majority of male interviewees were vegetarian, while the female interviewees were predominantly non-vegetarian. According to Sandelowski (1995: 180), “there is no mandate to have equivalent numbers of women or men or numbers of persons of each sex in the proportions in which they appear in a certain population”, however, I wanted the interviews to capture the experiences of both men and women, so more interviews were needed. In addition, some of the categories for bystanders and actors were overlapping, and I had to gather more data in order to even out the number of participants in each category in order to facilitate data analysis. Further, it was difficult to obtain interviews from former-vegetarians; not many responded to my call for participants. Time did not permit me to conduct another round of interviews in person. Therefore, the interview schedule was emailed to willing vegetarian females and non-vegetarian male participants who filled it out and sent it back to me. This caused another dilemma in one instance, where an interviewee identified herself as a vegetarian and filled out the vegetarian interview schedule, while noting that she has started to eat poultry on occasion. This is inconsistent with the common definition of a vegetarian, and I had to make the decision to move this participant to the former-vegetarian category.

In addition to making decisions throughout the research process, considerations had to be made that were specific to each interview around the idea of how much

personal information I would divulge. Prus (1998) argues that it is important for the researcher to generate openness with the interviewee. Openness allows the researched to feel more comfortable with the researcher which results in the generation of more data. The information I shared with each interviewee depended on how well I knew him or her previously, the level of formality of the interview, and whether or not the interviewee was vegetarian, non-vegetarian or a former vegetarian. Some participants were friends or people that I had already met in and out of the vegetarian community. I did not share much personal information with those participants during the interviews; I either assumed that they knew a sufficient amount of information about myself or that they would feel comfortable asking me questions. When interviews seemed more formal, I tended to share more information about myself in order to get the conversation flowing smoothly<sup>21</sup>. This included relating my own experiences about vegetarianism, my involvement in various groups, my interests, and even cooking tips. I shared less personal information about my dietary and activist interests with the non-vegetarian group. I did not want non-vegetarian interviewees to feel that they had to defend their interest in eating meat. Rather than sharing personal information about my diet, in order to relate to their food choices, I sometimes discussed their experiences with reference to my non-vegetarian friends and family.

After data collection, issues arose around writing the research report. Closure and cutting off relationships with respondents had to be contemplated (Snow, 1980). This was obligatory in order to begin data analysis and apply analytical tools to make sense of the mass of information accumulated (Roberts & Sanders, 2005). The issue of closure does

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<sup>21</sup> Mason (2002) claims that in-depth interviews should contain a good balance of talk and listening on the part of the researcher.

not apply so much to my research encounters because I am and will always be immersed in vegetarian culture. The type of closure with which I must deal has to do with working with the data that I have collected while fighting the desire to further explore various themes. While data saturation was reached, new avenues for investigation are always possible.

Ending relationships with respondents is also a difficult topic. As mentioned, I personally knew some of the subjects prior to conducting the research. This does not mean that after the interview was completed I stopped being friends with these people. However, some of them wanted to discuss the results of my research while I was still in the process of data analysis. I had to communicate very gently that although I appreciate the time they took to help me with my work, I was not ready to discuss my findings. In some cases, when interviewing people whom I did not know, interviews turned into lengthy conversations that I really enjoyed. Some of these interviewees turned out to be people with whom I would have liked to establish a friendship. After I defend this thesis I will contact research subjects and offer to send them a short synopsis of the results.

As much as I would like this thesis to be a neutral account of how vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians take action in daily life, the fact is that I am conducting this research from the point of view of a vegan. My life experiences are integrated into all aspects of this research. While being reflexive about my position as an insider, dilemmas encountered in the research, decision making and writing, I have also tried to be aware of my personal beliefs, and how they may affect this project, in order to listen to the individual experiences of the participants.

## **Sampling**

Qualitative research does not use a set system of measurements to gauge sampling and research results. Thus, the idea of qualitative clarity must be taken into account. This means that I have tried to explain and validate my decisions during the research process, including my sample selection. According to Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995), the use of the term 'clarity' refers to the researcher's goal of making explicit all of the details of how the sample was assembled and the pragmatic constraints that influenced the sampling process. This section includes a description of whom I was sampling for, the sample size, and the sampling technique.

To research how individuals make sense of the connections between conscious decision making, personal lifestyle choices and the natural environment, I collected data from 11 vegetarians, 11 non-vegetarians and 4 former vegetarians. Ottawa was chosen as the city in which to base my research because there are vegetarian, environmental and animal rights groups located in the city. I also chose Ottawa because I am doing my Master's research at Carleton University. Perhaps a different location, such as Toronto, would have produced different results. Time and resources did not allow for comparative research to be done in other cities.

The dilemma in qualitative research design is that its nature is contrary to quantitative research design because the units of analysis and their character cannot be specified ahead of time. Therefore, the number of people I needed to interview and the appropriate techniques emerged during the process of conducting this research (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995; Sandelowski, 1995). Prior to entering the field, when estimating sample size, it seemed as if the moderate amount of 20 interviews was sufficient and

manageable for this type of research project. However, this number was modified once the research process had started; after 26 interviews the information reported by respondents had reached a level of saturation. Common patterns and themes had emerged. It became apparent that interviewees could be placed into specific categories based on the fact that they were answering questions in similar ways, and no new information was being reported.

After an evaluation of the different methods, it appeared that the most relevant type of sampling for this research project was information-oriented selection. This type of sampling maximizes information, since cases are chosen based on the expectations of their information content (Flyvbjerg, 2001). According to Mays and Pope (1995), qualitative sampling is not concerned with achieving representativeness but with reflecting the diversity of the groups being studied. In this situation, knowledge of the social structural matrix within which subjects operate was crucial to interview results (Alpert, 1952). My own knowledge of vegetarianism was very helpful when selecting the appropriate research subjects.

Vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians were able to take part by finding out about the study or by being recommended by another participant. This was managed by asking friends and colleagues to take part<sup>22</sup> and by posting a call for participants at two places that vegetarians frequent, including a vegetarian restaurant and a monthly, public vegetarian potluck. A simple poster with information on the study and contact information was posted at the restaurant, which was chosen based on its popularity. I did oral announcements about my research at the potluck, over the course of

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<sup>22</sup> Rapley (2001) writes that when accessing interviewees researchers often rely initially on friends and colleagues, and then on contact from other research subjects.

several months (November to February). I chose to advertise my research at the potlucks because I was personally involved in their organization and the potluck attendees seemed like they would be receptive to my work. I expected that the majority of vegetarian participants would be found through my social networks or advertisements at the restaurant and potluck, while non-vegetarians and former vegetarians would be discovered through word of mouth. However, this was not the case. An approximately equal amount of vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians responded to my announcements at the potluck, either to volunteer themselves or to recommend that I contact one of their friends. Word of mouth advertisement about my research also generated the same amount of each category of participant. In addition, some people contacted me and stated that they found out about my research because it was posted on a few different List Servs, of which I was not aware.

### **Interview Questions**

Given that the research being conducted is of a qualitative nature, and that the topic of the research pertains to individual experiences, the best option in terms of research methodology was the in-depth interview. I believe that people's views, understandings and experiences are important parts of the social reality in which conscious living is located, and can best be explored in an interview (Mason, 2002). I also chose to conduct in-depth interviews because information on the breadth of actors and bystanders is not available in existing research.

Generally, the interviews done in this research project contained elements of flexibility in that the interview questions were shaped by the respondents' answers

(Neuman, 2000; Barbour & Barbour, 2003; Rapley, 2001). Although general research questions were written before the interview, an unstructured, open-ended interview format was used. Questions were added to and/ or eliminated from the schedule<sup>23</sup> as new issues were addressed, and interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on their answers and experiences, and share whatever information they thought was the most valuable. This sometimes included personal stories. As additional people were interviewed, further themes around vegetarianism and social activism developed, such as subject matter about relationships and career choices. Thus, the interview schedule was constantly being expanded and subsequent participants were asked to comment on these areas of discussion. A basic outline of the final vegetarian schedule is listed below. The schedules for non-vegetarians and former vegetarians can be found in Appendix 1.

### **Vegetarian Schedule**

#### *Main Questions:*

- What type of vegetarian are you?
- How long have you been vegetarian?
- What made you go from vegetarian to vegan? (if applicable)
- Why do you follow a vegetarian diet?
- Is being a vegetarian a political or moral choice?
- In any way, do you consider yourself an activist? Do you consider other vegetarians activists?
- I'd like to know how concerned you are with environmental issues, animal welfare issues, food production issues and personal health issues. Could you rank these in order of importance?

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<sup>23</sup> Mason (2002) claims that it is necessary to ask different participants varying questions in order to generate the most useful data.

- Can you explain why you ranked them this way? Would you say you're very concerned, somewhat concerned or not concerned with each? How does this relate to your diet, and the choices you make on a daily basis?
- How did you become vegetarian? Was there an event?
- What are the benefits of being vegetarian?
- Do you feel responsible for helping the natural environment, or animals? (Is this connected to dietary choice?)
- When helping animals and the environment, how important is it to be vegetarian?
- Does one person taking action to help the environment/animals make a difference?
- Why aren't more people vegetarian? What would it take for more people to go vegetarian?
- Are you involved in any social activist groups? How did you become involved in these groups? Is this the same reason why you're still involved?
- Before you became vegetarian, did you know other vegetarians? Did they help influence your decision? How many vegetarians do you know now? (In person versus online)
- Is activism closely associated with your decision to become vegetarian?
- Does society encourage vegetarianism?

*Emerging themes and areas of discussion:*

- Tell me about your close, personal relationships – how are they connected to food and diet?
- Have any of your career choices been connected to diet?

## **Conducting the Interviews**

Although it was very easy to obtain a large number of volunteers willing to participate in this research, it was much more difficult to arrange the interviews. Proper time had to be allotted for setting up interview dates. Often, the length of the interview (approximately 40 to 90 minutes) was a constraint as to when the interview could be conducted. I was willing to accommodate each participant and do the interview wherever and whenever he or she wished.

Most of the interviews were done in public places such as coffee shops. Some participants requested that I meet them at their homes. Overall, I allowed the interviewees to choose where the interviews would be conducted because I thought that they would decide on locations where they would be the most comfortable. According to Rapley (2001), the researcher has to be aware of the environment in the interview setting. Usually, the interviews taking place in coffee shops were fairly quiet and we had a degree of privacy. The subjects seemed at ease in coffee shops, although being in a public space could have altered some of their comments. On the other hand, I felt slightly uncomfortable meeting with unknown participants in their homes. Being a female researcher, this was especially the case with male participants who preferred doing the interview in a private place. In all cases, a mutually agreed upon location could be found.

In order to obtain ethics clearance from Carleton University prior to conducting this research, I had to submit a package outlining my research project and the specific ways in which I would deal with issues of confidentiality and participant consent. At the start of each interview I had the participant sign a consent form, which consisted of a letter and description of my research that was approved by the ethics board at Carleton

University. I reminded participants that confidentiality would be used when taking notes and writing the research report as all the names and organizational affiliations of the subjects would be disguised. Since information-oriented sampling was used, questions of confidentiality arose as some research participants can be traced to each other (Neuman, 2000; Mason, 2002). Ultimately, the goal of research ethics is to protect the research subject and the researcher, while generating the most valid and reliable data as possible. The most pressing ethical concern I had (and still have) includes confidentiality and publishing reports in a way that best masks the identity of those interviewed. While I have changed respondents' names and affiliations, I have also altered the data to the point of removing all identifying information. Hopefully this does not compromise anyone's statements.

During the interview process I digitally recorded the interview and took manual field notes. I had a list of question in front of me that outlined the direction in which I wanted the interview to go, as well as allowed for a place to record observations and comments. Rapley (2001) states that a list of questions in front of the researcher can do more than guide the interview and generate responses; it can produce the researcher as an official interviewer and can prove to be a good place to record interactions, body language and gestures. The tape recorder was used to better record the conversation as less time was spent writing down responses. However, the tape recorder does influence talk and reminds people that their interview is permanently recorded, which sometimes makes respondents feel constrained (Rapley, 2001; Weiss, 1994). I gave participants the option of having the interview recorded, and in three instances, participants declined. In those cases, I relied on detailed field notes for data analysis.

While conducting the interviews I tried to be as receptive and understanding as possible in order to encourage participants to share their information. This included sharing some of my own information with the interviewee around my personal interests and involvement in vegetarianism and social activism, as mentioned above. This addressed the fears of Oakley (1981), and aimed to ensure that the researcher-subject relationship was not one-sided. Also, it was important that, to some degree, the interviewees considered themselves to be in conversation with me, allowing me to probe them gently and gain the greatest amount of information (Neuman, 2000).

Each recorded interview was transcribed prior to analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews were very helpful in analyzing the data, as they provided for detailed conversation that could not have been recorded with field notes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The information obtained from the research participants was analyzed through multiple, close readings of interview transcripts within the frameworks of grounded theory.

### **Data Analysis**

With the intent of developing the new concept of conscious living, I analyzed my thesis data through the construction of a grounded theory. According to Charmaz (1983), data remain reconstructions that are drawn from a number of sources such as observations, conversations, and interviews. Grounded theory analysis begins with coding, and continues with the formation of themes and major concepts. A project is not started with a preconceived theory, the theory emerges from the data.

Grounded theory was the best method of data analysis in that it allowed me to develop the concept of conscious living during my thesis research, using new data that I collected as well as data that were drawn from existing literature. As each interview was conducted, the interview schedule was modified through expansion, and each interview was conducted with regards to previous interviews. According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), the purpose of grounded theory is to build theory, and treat each case in relation to the next. A single case exposes some of the possible findings in the data, which can be considered in the following cases, along with new findings. As I alternated between interviewing vegetarians, non-vegetarians and former vegetarians, themes that were similar and different began to develop. Strauss & Corbin (1998: 88/ 89) state that,

we use a case to open up our minds to the range of possible meanings, properties, dimensions, and relationships inherent in any bit of data. Therefore, when we move on to the next case and those that follow, we are more sensitive both to those possibilities and to what else the new cases might teach us...As we examine other cases and compare incident against incident, we are more likely to recognize both sameness and variation in categories and to see how what applied in one case also might be relevant in the next case and where the two cases differ.

The understanding that each interview was important in relation to the interviews that came before and after was essential during the interview process. While I was conducting the interviews I also began to analyze the data through the organization of information into various themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This allowed me to determine which themes I wanted to explore in more detail, and which ones were not generating much insight into the topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The actual method of conducting a grounded theory analysis involves coding in order to develop the theory. Charmaz (1983) states that codes are created as data are studied, which helps to focus further data collection. Once many categories are found,

they can be grouped under a more abstract, higher order concept (see also Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The highest order concept in this case is that of conscious living. Focused coding<sup>24</sup> uses themes that reappear often to sort large amounts of data. In this way, coding is more conceptual than line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1978). Categories for synthesizing and explaining data come from focused codes which shape the conceptual frameworks which are under development. Grouping themes into categories, through the use of focused coding, allowed me to manage the interview transcripts by reducing the number of units with which I was working. This was done by fragmenting the transcripts and organizing them into various themes; the traditional cutting and sorting of interview transcripts was performed on my computer by electronically<sup>25</sup> moving parts of a transcript from one folder to another. Eventually, categories began to emerge. “Once a category is identified, it becomes easier to remember it, to think about it, and to develop it in terms of its properties and dimensions and further differentiate it by breaking it down into subcategories, that is, by explaining the when, where, why, how and so on of a category that are likely to exist” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 114). After going through the transcripts and organizing them according to various themes, I was able to place the themes into larger categories. Some of the most prevalent themes include moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility towards the natural world, individual action, relationships, and dietary benefits.

By means of analysing the collected data into categories I created a typology of people that could be labelled as bystanders, actors, participants, engagers and activists. According to Weiss (1994: 173), types can be a valuable device for explaining how

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<sup>24</sup> In Denzin and Lincoln, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Weiss (1994) suggests sorting transcripts electronically on a computer.

things happen; “a way of generalizing from concrete cases while yet retaining their holistic character is to introduce types.” This occurs when a common theme is identified within a group of cases and names are given to types by choosing an essential word or idea that describes the type. Although typologies are imaginary mental constructs that serve the purpose of summarizing interview data, “essentials that are believed to mark the type presumably have been inferred from examination of instances. To the extent that this is the case, types are anchored in reality” (Weiss, 1994: 175). I recognize that there are variations in the types I have created; however, I found that interviewees could be easily grouped. This typology then became part of concepts and major areas of exploration that address the fundamental differences between bystanders and actors, as well as the pragmatics of personal movement in and out of conscious living. Using interview data, the following four chapters examine the development of conscious living in greater detail.

### Chapter 3: Bystanders, Actors and Conscious Living

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major distinctions between bystanders and actors and to illustrate the development of the conscious living continuum. I will discuss how social theories of the bystander classify people as either bystanders or actors in society; I claim that it is necessary to extend social theories of the bystander in order to recognize the differences between varying types of action that people take towards the natural world. This is done by further categorizing actors into a typology. The goal of this chapter is to reveal how bystanders and actors can be placed within the concept of conscious living.

The purpose of arranging interviewees into the categories of bystander and actor along a continuum is to exhibit the variations in lifestyle choices that people make. The vast differences between interviewees grouped as actors can best be expressed through the creation of a more discriminatory typology; the actor category is further broken down into those I have classified as participants, engagers and activists. There are much fewer interviewees categorized as bystanders, and since many of their experiences are similar, the category of bystander cannot be broken into types<sup>26</sup> (Weiss, 1994). A greater number of bystander interviews could potentially facilitate the generation of a bystander typology.

Within the actor category, *participants* are those who take part in decision making, and hold ideals, that are generally considered socially responsible. Yet, they do not always live in ways that correspond to their beliefs and their overall feelings of

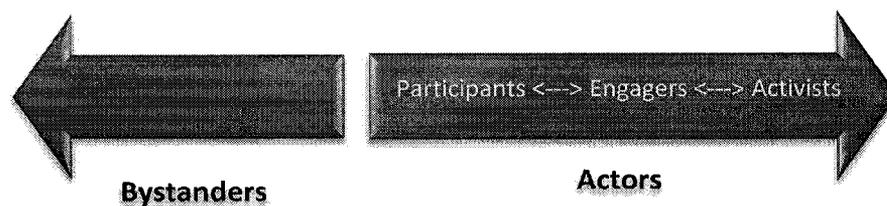
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<sup>26</sup> Although an insufficient number of bystanders were interviewed to facilitate the generation of bystander types, differences in bystander behaviour are discussed in chapter six, *From Bystander to Actor*.

responsibility toward the natural world are limited. The group of people classified as *engagers* make conscious lifestyle choices that often translate into other areas of life. They also spend a considerable amount of time doing things that are intended to directly benefit animals or the environment. Lastly, *activists* are actors who make conscious decisions on a daily basis. The interviewees in this category change the way they live in order to reflect their ideals, and take part in social activities that promote their interests. Activists are primarily concerned with affecting positive change and coming to the aid of the natural world. Nevertheless, there are a number of interviewees who do not fit into the category of actor. These participants are grouped together as bystanders, and have a restricted interest in living consciously with regards to the natural environment. Although some bystanders claim a responsibility to help the natural world, the amount of action they take in their daily lives is minimal when compared to actors.

*Figure 1*

### Conscious Living Continuum



### **Differences between Bystanders and Actors**

There is a broad range of lifestyle choices, reported by the interview participants, which have allowed me to categorize them as either bystanders or actors. While the actor category is more complex, as it is broken down into sub-categories, there are general differences between bystanders and actors that need to be discussed. In *Society Under Siege*, Bauman notes that two widely contested areas of scholarly research are devoted to that of the perpetrator and the bystander (2002). He notes that perpetrators and bystanders have been framed as very different entities in scholarly discourse, yet in reality, “there is an affinity between ‘doing evil’ and ‘non-resistance to evil’” (Bauman, 2002: 202). He claims that these two categories need to be brought together in order to be analyzed properly. By grouping people into the categories of bystanders, participants, engagers and activists, by no means am I attempting to state that these are the only groupings into which people fit. However, I use types to exemplify the concept of conscious living through an examination of the different ways in which people choose to live their lives in relation to the natural other.

While it can be deduced that bystanders are those who do not respond to the suffering of humans, animals or the natural environment, Clarkson (1996) also claims that the moral decisions people make are complicated. Bystanders in one area of life may decide to take action in another. While the interviewees classified as bystanders may be less concerned about the natural world, it does not mean that they are not actors in other areas of life that were not addressed during the interview.

Examining the interview data, there is a striking distinction between those interviewees classified as bystanders and those grouped as actors. Overall, 7 participants

are categorized as bystanders and the remaining 19 are actors. While it seems that an overwhelming majority of people can be considered actors, the degree to which they are involved in conscious living varies. This is expressed through the categorization of actors into participants, engagers and activists. However, there are particular differences between bystanders and those largely grouped together as actors. The main distinctions include diet choice, moral decision making, interest in activism, personal responsibility to help the natural world, and perceived dietary benefits.

The most obvious contrast between bystanders and actors is their diet. As illustrated in Table 1, all of the bystanders are omnivores, whereas the actors are a mix of vegetarians and omnivores. With regards to moral decision making around diet, many bystanders largely do not consider the food that they eat as a 'choice'. On the other hand, actors place an importance in making decisions around the foods that they eat whether they are vegetarian, non-vegetarian or vegan. Generally, bystanders have very little interest, and do not take part in, socially active groups that are designed to improve the environment. Actors are more likely to consider their decisions within a variety of contexts and become involved in activism. When discussing their personal responsibility to aid the natural world, bystanders claim that they are responsible yet do not make many decisions that are intended to help. Often, these interviewees acknowledge the impact of their dietary choices but admit that they are unwilling to change them in order to better the environment or animals. Actors, on the other hand, feel it is important to help the natural world and make a range of lifestyle choices that reflect their beliefs. While both bystanders and actors discuss the benefits of their diet ideals, bystanders see the immense benefits of eating meat and actors primarily discuss how vegetarianism can be beneficial.

Bystanders claim that being omnivorous is more tasty, convenient and healthy than being vegetarian. Actors, unlike bystanders, discuss the benefits of being vegetarian through an explanation of the many ways in which being meat-free can help the natural world. Each of these themes will be discussed in more detail, through the use of interview data.

*Table 1*

**The Division of Interviewees and Dietary Choices**

<b>Diet Choice</b>	<b>Bystanders (7)</b>	<b>Actors (19)</b>		
		<b>Participants (6)</b>	<b>Engagers (9)</b>	<b>Activists (4)</b>
<b>Vegan</b>	0	0	3	4
<b>Vegetarian</b>	0	2	2	0
<b>Former Veg.</b>	1	1	2	0
<b>Omnivore</b>	6	3	2	0

**Differences between Participants, Engagers and Activists**

Despite the fact that there is a clear distinction between bystanders and actors, there are also differences between the actors categorized as participants, engagers or activists. While they have more in common with each other than with bystanders, the ways in which these groups of actors differ the most involve their diet choices, moral decision making, interest in activism, and their relationships.

As illustrated in Table 1, there is a direct correlation between diet and categories of actor. While the participant category consists of 2 vegetarians, 1 former vegetarian and 3 omnivores, engagers include 3 vegans, 2 vegetarians, 2 former vegetarians and 2 omnivores. Participants are mostly omnivorous, while the majority of engagers do not eat

meat. In addition, all interviewees classified as activists are vegan. For reference purposes each interviewee has been given an assigned name, and I have included a reference number for each person which appears in brackets after his or her name. Basic information about each interviewee is listed in Appendix 2.

Every actor makes moral decisions and lifestyle changes while placing different levels of importance on certain issues. Although participants understand the ways in which food choices relate to helping the natural world, they are less likely than engagers and activists to actually change their lifestyles on a daily basis in order to aid animals and the environment. While engagers consider their food choices within a range of moral contexts, activists decide which foods they eat based on a strong desire to live consciously.

Each interviewee in the actor categories expresses some level of interest in activism, however, not all actors are involved. Participants and engagers view discussion as a type of activism whereas activists believe that people should be loudly voicing their opinions about the issues in which they are interested. Participants are not that likely to be involved in activist groups, while engagers may take part. Yet, engagers involved in activism do not necessarily belong to groups that are reflective of their dietary choices, even though the activities in which they participate are based on their moral decisions. Activists all take part in activist groups, and each interviewee in this category holds a major position in at least one organization.

Another difference along the continuum of conscious living occurs between the actors' discussion of personal relationships and dietary choices. For the most part, participants do not think that their relationships are based on the choices they make

around food. They are willing to be friends, and form intimate relationships with, those who have dissimilar diets. Engagers are more likely to describe the importance of having a partner who shares their dietary ideals, or in the least, a partner who has a differing diet yet is supportive of their food choices. The diets of their friends are not important to engagers. Nevertheless, activists claim that it is crucial to have partners, friends and acquaintances that share their dietary preferences.

Through a discussion of the differences between bystanders and actors, and the distinctions among those classified as actors, the need for the development of conscious living along a continuum becomes apparent. Although the ways in which bystanders and actors vary are outlined above, the following chapter, *The Bystander*, elaborates upon the key themes of moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility for helping the natural world, individual action, relationships and dietary benefits, in order to further develop the category of the bystander in society. Through the use of interview materials, how different people can be grouped into the category of bystander will demonstrate the need for the development of the concept of conscious living. The following chapter on the bystander provides comparative information for Chapter 5, *Participants, Engagers and Activists*, where the actor's place along the conscious living continuum is examined using the same themes.

## Chapter 4: The Bystander

Although the previous chapter outlined the principal differences between bystanders and actors, as well as a broad definition of the bystander in society, it is crucial to explore the bystander with respect to the data gathered during the interview process in order to detail how the bystander fits into the definition of conscious living. The most prominent themes that emerged during grounded theory analysis, which will be discussed in this chapter in relation to bystanders, include the interviewees' dialogues around moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility for helping the natural world, individual action, relationships and dietary benefits. The objective of this chapter is to gather a collection of ideas and experiences expressed by those who I have categorized as bystanders. This will show that bystanders are part of conscious living because their lifestyle choices involve moderate awareness of the natural environment, yet limited action.

While developing the continuum of conscious living it is necessary to describe the group of people who do not fit into the larger category of actor due to their relative lack of interest in living consciously with regards to the natural environment. A description of bystander behaviour helps to demonstrate the essential differences between bystanders and actors. Although some of the interviewees grouped into this category express a desire to help the environment and animals, the amount of action they take in their daily lives is considerably less than those interviewees defined as participants, engagers or activists. There are differences in lifestyle choices amongst the bystanders, and some bystanders live more consciously than others, which is partly why bystanders are part of the

continuum. Some of these differences occurring between bystanders are reviewed in chapter six, *Traveling Through the Continuum*. However, there are no remarkable themes that warrant bystanders to be further divided into sub-categories like the actors. This is potentially due to the fact that the majority of the interviewees can be classified as actors, and as a result, there were more participants to analyse in the actor category. Once again, it must be noted that although these participants are classified as bystanders based on the subject matter covered during the interviews, this does not mean that these bystanders cannot be actors in other areas of life (Clarkson, 1996). Overall, seven participants are grouped as bystanders. This includes 6 omnivores and one former vegetarian, whose experiences are described in detail.

### *Moral Decision Making*

Unlike other interviewees, bystanders are generally not concerned about the ways in which diet has an impact on animals. While some participants think that diet can be connected to the environment, only one claimed to change her consumption patterns based on the need to be environmentally responsible. Most interviewees do not see their diet as a choice and discuss how eating an omnivorous diet is a custom. Further, some of the participants say that they like eating meat and are not willing to give up the taste.

When asked why she is an omnivore, Lindsay (20) answers, “convenience, I like being able to eat whatever food I want.” Another participant, Tom (23), states that the reason for his diet is, “probably mostly because it is how I was raised. That is, my parents are omnivores. I do enjoy a number of meat dishes.” Similarly, “I grew up like that – my parents are like that...if my parents were vegetarian, I might be too” (Deb, 25).

Karen (24) agrees that her diet is traditional and does not see it as an area where conscious decisions may be made. She says, “no, it is not a choice, it’s just natural for me because I’ve always done that...there’s not much I can do to help the environment. It’s bigger than me, although I try my best to recycle.” Mirroring this thought, Tiffany (26) claims that she has always been an omnivore because, “I was raised that way I guess. I’m used to eating meats, grains, vegetables, fruit, junk, there’s everything.” She does not see diet as a lifestyle choice and also explains, “I don’t think a lot before I eat. Although I definitely do eat more vegetables and grains than other foods because of personal health issues...But, it’s kind of like out of sight out of mind. The meat tastes good, I know I need the protein, and it sounds like a weak excuse, but-.” Not wanting to know the truth about an issue stems from denial, which is typical of Bauman’s (2002) and Cohen’s (2001) description of the bystander.

Although some bystanders believe that diet is not a choice that one makes, they still see it as linked to their health, the environment and animals. Lindsay (20) describes how eating local is important; however, she is not concerned with animal issues.

I love living in Ottawa because I can go out to the farmer’s market and buy something that’s made locally, and organic, and just to avoid all these petroleum product foods that are exported from so far away and so bad for the environment. Animal welfare and rights issues is not so important to me particularly because I grew up on a farm where it was mostly organic... So for me, animal rights and welfare issues aren’t a big deal because the animals I grew up with on the farm weren’t treated in a cruel manner...although I realize that’s not the same thing as the chicken I eat for lunch or whatnot here.

While Lindsay claims that animal issues are not of importance to her, because of her early experiences as a child, it is interesting to note that she does realize not all animals are treated in a humane manner. She is knowledgeable about the suffering of animals, yet

chooses to take limited action, which is essential to the definition of the bystander.

Another participant, Jessica (22), states that she is concerned about animal welfare, yet is more focused on animal abuse outside of farming. Again, Jessica claims she knows that animals suffer in some types of farming, yet she does not choose to help those animals by changing her eating practices.

Other interviewees see their omnivorous diet as being the healthiest option.

Michael (21) claims, “I think that everybody needs a little bit of everything in their diet – clean meat products, vegetable and grain products just to have well-balanced nutrition.”

When asked whether he sees diet as connected to the natural world, Michael answers, “it is directly connected. Like I say, I realize by me eating meat and whatnot I’m probably not helping anything at this point, okay, but I still eat meat. I realize it’s something wrong, what I’m doing, but right now I’m going to be a glutton like everybody else and just eat the meat that I love. I know I’m not doing the right thing but that doesn’t mean I’m going to stop eating meat because I do love it and I do enjoy it.” This is another example of an interviewee who is aware of food’s connection to the natural world, yet resists taking action.

In addition, some interviewees see the health benefits of an omnivorous diet and trust that the government and institutions will make decisions that are in their best interest. Deb (25) states, “food production issues, it’s something I’ve never really worried about too much. I trust the government to protect us. If there are harmful pesticides, I guess I leave it up to someone else. There’s Health Canada, and it’s someone else’s responsibility. Animal welfare, rights and issues would relate to food for some people, but I don’t have any issues with eating animal products. Animal welfare and rights are

more related to pets.” According to social theories of the bystander, outlined in the first chapter, bystanders often believe that others will make the ‘correct’ decision for them. While Deb is informed that food choices may involve harmful pesticides, she chooses to trust the government’s decisions around her food consumption.

Like participants in other categories, bystanders are aware of a connection between diet, animals and the environment. While most see a direct link to the environment, others claim that animals are not negatively affected by their choice to eat meat. However, those who claim animal issues are important to them choose to focus on animal welfare outside of farming. Still others acknowledge the harm that animals face in meat production, yet choose to be oblivious and abdicate any social responsibility. This contradicts the hypothesis of Clarkson (1996) and Cohen (2001) who claim that as people become aware of a situation their chances of acting increase. Clarkson does note that people in similar situations often act differently depending on their life experiences, which cannot be thoroughly accounted for in this study<sup>27</sup>. On the whole, bystanders are vastly different than the interviewees in other categories who regard diet as a choice. Some of the bystanders do not equate their daily decisions about food with an actual lifestyle choice. More often, they believe that diet is simply a product of tradition and custom (Bauman & May, 2001). While they are aware of animal and environmental suffering being connected to their food choices, bystanders do not consider changing their diets in order to help the natural world.

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<sup>27</sup> A larger sample could better account for the differences in bystanding behaviour, and the relationship between knowing and acting.

### *Interest in Social Activism*

When asked whether or not they participate in any sort of social activism each bystander claims that largely they are not involved. They also do not think that vegetarians are activists solely through the adoption of a certain diet. Lindsay (20) states, “in our population, most people predominantly do have dietary restrictions for one reason or another. It’s just so common, it’s almost more common to be a vegetarian or vegan or not eat dairy than it is to eat red meat” (20). She goes on to mention that “you can’t be an activist just through your product choices, your consumption choices. Being an activist means making more effort than just the simple decision of what to consume and what not to consume” (20). When discussing whether or not vegetarians are socially responsible, Jessica (22) states, “some are activists, but I think also a lot of them aren’t. I think some people, maybe adolescents for instance, choose, you know, it’s almost a fad with them... I think other people do realize you know, that they feel that it’s wrong to eat meat.” While the majority of participants do not have much to say on the topic of activism, it is evident that bystanders stand out from other categories of people because they are clearly less interested in activism than the other groups.

### *Responsibility towards the Natural World*

Participants who were faced with the question of whether or not they feel responsible for helping the natural world were split in their answers. Half of the interviewees claim that they feel responsible, while the other half do not. Those that do believe they should be committed to helping the natural world, however, also express that they have a limited responsibility.

Tiffany (26) claims that she has a small amount of power over her ability to help the natural world. She asserts, "I feel I do have a social responsibility to do something or make responsible purchases to the best of my ability. But I also realize it's not really in my power to alter the way we do things. I can only do my part. But yeah, I do have an obligation to do what I can...Even though when we do buy meat I know that we're contributing to the whole factory farm problem it's not as often as it used to be."

Similarly, Karen (24) believes that the changes she might make in life have little impact. When asked if she has a desire to help the natural world, she says, "no, but I am aware of its existence. The differences I make won't make much of an overall difference. Choosing a regular hamburger over a veggie burger doesn't help. I'm not that connected to my food."

On the other hand, some participants acknowledge that meat consumption can be detrimental to animals, yet continue to choose an omnivorous diet and place priority on helping the environment. When asked if he feels responsible for helping the natural world, Michael (21) answers, "yes, in things that I do but not related to the fact that I eat meat. I know that's not contributing by any means but maybe in other things I do I help, contributing to the environment." Likewise, Lindsay (20) states, "I feel personally responsible for making conscious decisions about what I consume in terms of packaged meat, or stuff that is exported from far away, or if I have a choice to buy organic. I feel responsible about that. Animal issues, not so much...I don't really think about it when I'm deciding what to eat." Tom (23), who chooses to reduce his meat consumption also explains his concern for the environment. When asked if he feels responsible for helping the natural world, he explains, "yes, I do, for both the environment and animals, but more

so the environment. This feeling is connected to my dietary choice in the sense that I am happy to choose non-meat options at times and eat little red meat, which makes me feel good about myself, but on the other hand I am not prepared to forego meat altogether.”

Generally, bystanders discuss their responsibility for helping animals and the environment in different ways. Interviewees feel that they are responsible, yet have limited ability to help, and thus take little action<sup>28</sup>. The remaining bystanders do not think they are responsible for coming to the aid of the natural world, although they are largely attentive to the idea that it is in distress.

### *Individual Action*

While exploring the theme of individual action, it becomes apparent that bystanders are less likely to be involved in individual action than actors. At the same time, like the majority of interviewees, bystanders do feel that entering into discussion with others and relating to people on a personal level can affect change.

Discussing individual action, one participant describes how changes within a family can be adopted by different generations. Lindsay (20) states, “yeah, I think individual action makes a difference. Even small choices about recycling all your tins and your papers and stuff like that. My mom made that decision when I was a little kid, so me and my brothers grew up and we grew up recycling, so now I grow up recycling so when I have kids they do it, right? So a simple little decision like that, taking action, like even a small action has repercussions for generations.”

Other participants claim that time is a factor in the amount of change one can make on a daily basis. Therefore, people have to be very committed to an issue in order to

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<sup>28</sup> This is primarily the case with those concerned more about the environment than animals.

make changes in their lives. Michael (21) says, “maybe one guy has more time than another. A guy working like twelve hours a day is not going to have as much time to be activist about something that he believes in as opposed to somebody that does that for a living... it’s also where the issue falls into play with how you feel about it, how important it is to you. So, the only people who are going to be activists are those people who feel very strongly about it and can possibly make a little time for these things.” Similarly, Tom (23) addresses the idea of time and commitment. “I don’t think individuals should have to devote their entire lives to causes in order to make a difference. That being said, I realize the naiveté of that opinion in terms of making changes to long standing issues.” Generally, these bystanders believe that making lifestyle changes involves a large time commitment. This differs from the beliefs of people in other categories, who discuss how little changes can easily be made in many areas of life.

As mentioned, some bystanders express the same sentiments as participants, engagers and activists in that change can happen solely by being around others. When asked if individual action has an impact, Karen (24) remarks, “yes, people rub off on other people. People are followers, and one person can make a difference.” Deb (25) states, “I guess, yeah. I guess I’m borderline. It usually starts with one person. I’m thinking more of not just being one individual. One individual can make a difference and get more people involved.” Even though bystanders are less likely to be involved in activism associated with the natural world, some still reflect that individual action can have an effect in helping animals and the environment.

### *Relationships*

Discussing the theme of relationships, each bystander states that they have a number of friends, and sometimes very close friends or a partner, who is vegetarian. When exploring the idea of social networks, bystanders comment on the number of people that they know who have adopted vegetarianism, as well as the implications of dating someone with a different diet.

Lindsay (20) claims that while she knows a lot of vegetarians in university in Ottawa, she knows fewer in the area where she grew up. Michael (21) says that he is, “surprised at how many people I know are vegetarian, especially in the last five to seven years.” He says he has six or so vegetarian friends and could name twenty or more acquaintances. Similarly, Karen (24) counts that she knows a few vegans, a handful of vegetarians, and has two close vegetarian friends. She also states that she knows more vegetarians now than in the past.

As the ideas of dating and intimate relationships are considered by participants, engagers and activists, bystanders also talk about having ties to those who do not share their diet ideals. A former vegetarian claims that her transformation from vegetarian to omnivore involved getting married and having children. Jessica (22) recalls, “there were a lot of different reasons. I think a lot of it was just the influence of the person with me. At that time when I changed was when I got married. Also, it was not considered that healthy if you wanted to have children, not to eat meat...It’s hard to be vegetarian if your partner isn’t...it’s very hard.” Likewise, Karen (24) states that, “it’s difficult to be vegetarian if your partner doesn’t want to go vegetarian. If I decided to go vegetarian, it would be difficult for my partner. If I was dating a vegan, I could be vegan. But, if I’m

not immersed in a certain diet, it's difficult." Another interviewee expresses the potential difficulty of dating someone who is vegetarian. Deb (25) mentions, "it could be a problem if I dated someone who was a huge activist for animal rights or the environment. It would be a conflict of interest if they weren't willing to accept the fact that I eat animal products."

On the other hand, Tom (23) describes how he is supportive of his partner's decision to eat some vegetarian meals. He explains,

my partner, for moral reasons, chooses to limit meat intake to turkey and fish. She was a vegetarian for a time before we met, but found that her dietary needs were not being met. In the six years since we began dating, my consumption of red meat has probably been reduced by 50-75%. At home, I handle the majority of the cooking responsibilities and I am happy to accommodate my partner's non-red-meat diet, which I find healthier for myself as well. We eat occasional vegetarian meals, particularly vegetarian meat substitutes purchased from the store, or simply a dinner without a meat portion, for example, bean salad and vegetables. On most days, we eat a portion of meat at two of our meals, so skipping meat or an alternative at dinner does not really hamper our protein intake.

In addition to actors having friends who are vegetarian, bystanders also have social networks that include vegetarians and vegans. While the presence of meat-free acquaintances does not make bystanders want to give up eating meat, most still have concerns about being intimately involved with someone who does not share their dietary choices, with the exception of Tom (23). Even if bystanders are aware that vegetarianism is an option, due to their relationships with vegetarians, they choose to remain omnivorous.

### *Dietary Benefits*

Each bystander sees benefits in following an omnivorous diet. Most of the positive qualities associated with eating meat have to do with issues of health, taste and convenience.

Lindsay (20) claims that being a vegetarian can be difficult. She claims, “being vegetarian or vegan is more of an effort...it takes a lot of time to have a balanced diet, for vegetarians and vegans, in order to do it healthily, which I haven’t done, you have to make sure that you know you got your lentils, and you have your tofu and you have this and this and that...and that’s just a pain in the ass. So, it’s much easier to take frozen meat out of the freezer than actually have a good, well thought out vegetarian meal.” Lindsay (20) also says that being an omnivore is, “easier to move across cultures. When I go home and eat, or meet the boyfriend’s parents or something, it’s like oh, I can eat everything.” Also addressing health, Tom (23) describes, “certain key nutrients are easier to get from meat products even though I do realize a meticulous vegetarian diet can be very well balanced, particularly iron.” Another omnivore, Karen (24) claims, “I don’t need lots of vitamins, and I don’t have to be worried about food options, I can be easy going.” Tiffany (26) believes that omnivores have more food options than vegetarians, which is therefore healthier.

The other major benefit of being omnivorous has to do with the issue of convenience. Deb (25) notes that, “you can eat whatever you like because it’s one less thing you have to worry about. It seems stress free in a way. Some people might become too involved in it – worrying about what they eat and stuff. When you’re going out to eat or you’re invited over to somebody’s house you don’t have to worry about what you’re

eating.” However, Michael (21) believes that there are no real benefits of being an omnivore, “besides getting enjoyment out of eating.” While admitting that it is easier to be an omnivore, Jessica (22), a former vegetarian considers, “I guess it depends on your morals and views. You must feel better about the world if you’re vegan or vegetarian if you’re not eating meat.” After exploring the theme of perceived dietary benefits, it is apparent that most bystanders see some benefit in being omnivorous. Usually, they place the most importance on dietary health, taste and convenience.

### *Summary of the Bystander*

Upon examination of the interviewees grouped in the category of bystander, it is evident that they are part of the conscious living continuum with regards to the natural world. Although bystanders are not usually taking action to help animals or the environment, they are aware that their actions can have an impact. This means that they are living consciously to some degree, in that they are consciously choosing *not* to act. In addition, there are apparent differences between the participants categorized as bystanders. However, conscious living by a single bystander is not consistent across the themes. For example, Lindsay may be more concerned than Tom about buying local, and helping the environment, whereas Tom is more concerned than Lindsay about animal welfare. While both Jessica and Karen would adopt vegetarianism if they had a vegetarian partner, Jessica is far more concerned about the environment than Karen. Within the realm of this thesis, it becomes unmistakable that bystanders, with regard to the natural world, are their own category because further themes among the group were impossible to discern.

While bystanders make some conscious decisions about the environment and animals there is an obvious distinction between bystanders and actors. This could relate back to the idea of Bauman and May (2001) who state that not all our decisions are conscious; some are merely habitual. Perhaps bystanders make decisions around the natural world because they are based on routine. A number of participants claimed that they eat meat because they were raised as omnivores. However, I am unconvinced that the decision to eat meat is merely habitual. As stated earlier, postmodernization allows for a wealth of information to be available on almost any topic. Every bystander, to some degree, acknowledged that diet is linked to animals and the environment. Therefore, their decisions around food choices have to be deemed as conscious at some level.

Overall, most of the differences between bystanders and actors come from the ways in which participants answer questions about the themes of moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility to help the natural world, individual action, relationships and how their diets are beneficial. When it comes to moral decision making, most bystanders state that while they acknowledge how diet may be connected to the environment, they do not see their omnivorous diet as choice and continue to eat meat for reasons of tradition and custom. Others discuss the detrimental effects of eating meat, yet state that they are unwilling to give up the taste.

Bystanders are less interested in activism than actors, which will be seen in the next chapter, although, they do agree with other categories of interviewees in that diet alone does not make one an activist. On one hand, bystanders talk about how they have a responsibility for helping the natural world even though they feel they have limited power to make changes in their lives. On the other, they also believe that individual action can

make a difference. Some interviewees, still, do not think they are responsible for coming to the aid of the natural world. Whether or not they feel they have a responsibility to help the natural world, that their individual actions can make a difference, or that they are not personally responsible, in reality bystanders take little action to help animals and the environment.

In addition, most bystanders note that they know several people who are vegetarian, yet would have difficulty being in a close relationship with someone who is not omnivorous. One interviewee, Tom (23), does claim that he is supportive of his partner's decision to eat a portion of meals that are vegetarian. Since bystanders have friends who are vegetarian, they are clearly aware that being vegetarian is a dietary choice. Yet, it is not a lifestyle choice that they are willing to make. Overall, bystanders see many benefits in eating omnivorously which mostly have to do with health, convenience and taste.

By explaining bystanders in relation to the key themes I have identified, it becomes clear that bystanders are those who *are generally aware* that diet has an impact on the natural world. Nevertheless, bystanders choose to take little action to help animals and the environment by making changes in their food consumption. Bystanders consciously choose not to adopt vegetarianism, and because of this, they must be included in the conscious living continuum. I do realize that there are differences among those classified as bystanders, and I will briefly discuss this in chapter six. However, a larger sample size, with more interviewees classified as bystanders, would be needed to elaborate on this category of people. The next chapter discusses the category of those

classified as actor, which is broken into sub-categories of participants, engagers and actors, in order to further define conscious living.

## Chapter 5: Participants, Engagers and Activists

While bystanders are those who are aware, at some level, of the links between their dietary choices and the suffering of the natural world, they have made a conscious decision to refrain from taking action to help animals and the environment through a change in their diet. Bystanders know that the natural world is in need of aid, yet refuse to take action. Actors are also sensitive to the suffering of the natural world, however, they do take action to change their lifestyles in order to help animals and the environment. Like bystanders, there are differences in the experiences expressed by each actor. Although the shortage of interviewees classified as bystanders makes the development of sub-categories of the bystander impossible for this thesis, there are a number of interviewees classified as actors whom I have placed into the sub-categories of participants, engagers and activists. I have based their categorization on the same key themes as above: moral decision making, interest in activism, responsibility for helping the natural world, individual action, relationships and dietary benefits.

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate upon the large group of people I have categorized as actors, and discuss how and why each interviewee falls into the specific type of participant, engager or activist. This is done by looking at each type separately with consideration of the key themes. The main point of this chapter is to explain that those living consciously cannot merely be considered bystanders or actors; the range of action that actors take varies considerably among participants, engagers and activists. These variations in actors are necessary to discuss in order to further exemplify the definition of conscious living along a continuum.

### **The Actor: Responsibility for the Natural Other**

While social theories of the bystander discuss the bystander in society as someone who does not come to the aid of another, the actor can be generally defined as someone who has made a conscious decision to act in favour of another being (Bauman, 2002; Clarkson, 1996; Cohen, 2001). I would like to expand the definition of actor, in order to illustrate the concept of conscious living, to include any participant, engager or activist who becomes involved in a situation where someone or something requires help. Through the sub-categorization of actors into participants, engagers and activists, the differences in the action that people take becomes apparent.

Bauman describes the actor as taking responsibility for the other, and claims that part of the human condition is about coming to terms with the moral self (2002). Bauman (2002: 208) states, “[w]hether or not we recognize and willingly assume responsibility for each other, we already *bear* it, and there is little or nothing at all we can do to shake it off our shoulders.” Bauman continues to write that our responsibility extends beyond the everyday relations we have with others, to include “‘humanity’ as a whole”, everyone living on the earth, animals, and the environment (2002: 208-209). As I have outlined in the first chapter, this thesis considers the natural other and specifically, the suffering of animals and the environment. Here, the categorization of actor, and thus those classified as participants, engagers and activists, is based on interviewees who are aware that the natural world is in need of help and are, therefore, willing to bestow aid.

## **The Participant**

With regards to Bauman's discussion of the actor, and the ways in which humans can take responsibility for the natural other, it becomes clear that the category of people defined as participants are involved in conscious decision making. When looking at the interview data, there are a number of themes that emerge alongside those who can be classified as participants. While these interviewees are making decisions to change their lives in some areas, they are not necessarily living in ways that correspond to their main concerns, or making changes in other areas of life. Along the conscious living continuum, participants are those actors who are taking the least amount of action towards helping the natural world. Out of the 19 actors identified, 6 of them can be classified as participants. One of the participants is a former vegetarian, 2 are current vegetarians and 3 are non-vegetarians. Discussion of the key themes reveal that participants make moral decisions based on an interest in the environment, health, food production or animal issues. This group also has a limited interest in social activism, although some participants may define themselves as activists. In addition, people in this group feel somewhat responsible for helping the natural world, yet often remain doubtful that one person taking action can make a difference. Participants report that their personal relationships are not affected by the diet they choose, yet, food does play a large role in their lives. The vegetarians also see little benefits in being vegetarian, while non-vegetarians see many benefits in having an omnivorous diet. These themes will be discussed below with reference to the interview data.

### *Moral Decision Making*

The interviewees that I have grouped as actors make different types of decisions based on concerns for health, animals, the environment and food production; it is clear that they have taken action in at least one area of life. Since conscious decision making is examined through diet in this thesis, the moral decision making that is addressed mostly concerns food consumption. However, some actors have less concern for their diet than for social justice or animals.

When vegetarians were asked why they follow a vegetarian diet, there was an array of answers. Most vegetarians have ethical reasons for choosing that type of diet. Matt (2) states that eating meat is gross and ethically wrong. Growing up around farms, he saw the environmental impact that farming has. Another participant, Kevin (3), describes how a personal feeling made him become vegetarian. He states, "I was considering [vegetarianism] for quite a while and then my friend had a dog that I really loved, and I started feeling more connected to animals. And then I started thinking that I didn't want to eat animals. It was a little harder at the beginning to make the switch because I thought it was going to be very difficult, and then one day I decided I just wanted to do it." He goes on to note that although his reasons to become vegetarian were not motivated by a feeling of responsibility to the environment, he realizes that a vegetarian diet may be beneficial for the natural world.

Similarly, other interviewees mention a concern for animals, yet place a deeper responsibility on helping other people and the environment. Keith (1) states,

when I first came to vegetarianism it was through Peter Singer, I had read utilitarianism, and found the idea kind of compelling, the idea of sentience....But after reading American environmentalists I came to terms with the fact that people are inevitably consumers and have an impact on

the environment. The issue for me, and the reason I'm more concerned about social justice is because I feel like the ability to connect people to other people has little to do with animal rights. It has everything to do with creating a just system that people can live in. And I don't think that necessarily connects them to the treatment of animals, but I do think that how we treat them does have something to do with how we look at each other.

Another participant says, "you can't ignore environmental issues these days. Everywhere we turn we seem to be running into more and more environmental problems. I love camping, photographing wildlife, canoeing. If I want to keep doing these things I guess I have to care. Everybody wants to be healthy. I love animals, but we are omnivores. Wolves eat deer, and I like the taste of chicken. As for food production we have government regulations to uphold our quality of food" (Jeff, 5). At the same time, Allison (4) notes that limiting the amount of meat she eats is a political choice, "but being an omnivore is something I try not to think about in order to not face the things that I know are there and if I really considered them I would probably be a vegetarian or vegan." Regardless of the motivations behind these participants' decisions, it is clear that they are dealing with information they find unsettling, and making changes in their lives in order to come to the aid of another. When it comes to making moral decisions, each participant acknowledges that food choices are connected to the well-being of the natural environment. They have therefore deemed it important to care for the natural world and make lifestyle changes that are reflective of their concerns.

### *Interest in Social Activism*

When it comes to showing an interest in social activism, although some of these interviewees may consider themselves activists, their participation in activist movements

is quite limited. One vegetarian participant notes that he is an activist, but “at a very low level. If I talk to someone on the bus I might tell them about my diet, but I haven’t been to any rallies or anything like that” (Matt, 2). Allison (4) says, “I think I take part in activism, but I don’t think I do enough to consider myself an activist, especially not in the group sense. If you’re looking at it with the idea of people making individual decisions, that’s part of my daily life. I make choices the same way I think activists do.” On the other hand, Kevin (3) states that his decision to become vegetarian, “was a purely personal thing. I’m not even promoting it to other people. It’s something I didn’t feel like doing. I’m not asking other people not to do it. For me, being a vegetarian is not a social activity so I do not consider myself an activist. It’s completely personal, but I understand other people have different motivations.” Although most participants have an interest in social activism, their involvement in movements, and desire to extend their conscious decisions to other areas of their life, is quite restricted.

### *Responsibility towards the Natural World*

Although most people would not claim that they intentionally harm the natural world, they also do not make efforts to come to its aid. Yet, most participants feel responsible for helping the natural world to some degree. When asked whether or not they feel responsible for helping the natural world, most interviewees discuss their dietary choices and the decisions they make concerning animals, the environment, and social justice. Two interviewees are also conflicted when discussing their daily decisions around food.

Regarding a concern for animals, Kevin (3) claims that he does not feel okay with himself when he is eating animals because he really does not feel that it is necessary. “If you don’t need to eat animals you shouldn’t – you don’t need to eat another creature.” He also states that while a concern for the environment alone would not make him become vegetarian, being vegetarian is necessary for helping animals.

Other respondents are more interested in food production and social justice issues. “Health is secondary in my mind to the issue of food production. I would sooner buy local meat from a local butcher than I would from a supermarket that is shipping it in from a thousand miles away. That again has less to do with animal issues than it does with environmental issues, and with the fact that I would rather support small businesses, so that’s social justice” (Keith, 1). Likewise, Allison (4) states, “since I started caring more about food production issues and the environmental consequences and the economic consequences and also the social consequences of the way I eat and where I shop and basically what parts of the food chain I put myself in it’s made me realize there’s more to eating than just my personal health.” She mentions that she tries to buy meat, milk and eggs from local farmers.

There are also two interviewees that make conscious decisions regarding the environment, yet seem conflicted about decision making in terms of diet. Allison (4) states, “and the animal welfare thing. I feel uncomfortable talking about it right now. When I think about it it’s very clear to me I don’t like the idea of eating animals but it’s so ingrained to do it and I’m so used to it that I put it aside in my mind.” While Allison tries not to deal with issues around animal suffering, Jeff (5) reveals that he is unaware of how decision making around diet fits into the decisions he has made in other areas of life.

He states, “yes, I recycle, I am trying to drive less and less. I will not eat at McDonalds or shop at Wal-Mart. I think we each can make a difference if we do our part when we can. I have never thought of this being connected to dietary choices.”

While most participants make conscious decisions and are aware of social activism, they also live in ways that can be seen to aid natural others. Some people voice a concern for animals, the environment, or social justice, which has resulted in a lifestyle change. While two interviewees are conflicted in the decisions they make in one area of life, they are still taking positive action to help the environment.

### *Individual Action*

When asking interviewees about the extent to which individual lifestyle changes can actually help the natural world, there is a mixed opinion as to whether one person can make a difference. Two respondents are certain that individual action can have a large impact. Allison (4) states, “The reason I think that one person makes a difference to the environment is because they have an impact on the way other people think and by making these decisions early on, when we have kids, as long as it’s not unrealistic to keep these views, then we’ll be passing them on. Yeah, it does have a greater impact but mostly by virtue of other people taking notice.” Jeff (5) has a similar response and claims that if one less person does harm, the positive effects can help outweigh another’s negative effects.

Other respondents are doubtful that one person can make a difference, yet believe that it is still important to take action in life. Matt (2) mentions, “I can choose to be vegetarian but there’s still a million people out there that are eating steak right now so, fight the battles that you can win... One person can only do so much. But, if you can turn

five people off meat, then that's something, and they turn five people then a chain reaction. Someone's got to start it." Similarly, when discussing his reason to become vegetarian, Kevin (3) notes that while his motivation was for himself, other people becoming vegetarian can have a positive effect:

My major concern was personal. It was mainly to help myself. I was feeling bad about eating animals and I didn't want to feel that way. So, my main thing wasn't helping anybody else other than myself. But I'm sure if people start doing that it will have a positive effect on obviously animals and the environment. But on the other hand I'm not one hundred percent convinced that individual action can have a huge effect on environmental issues. I think the major problem doesn't come from individuals. It comes from the industries, from governments. Individual actions are definitely helpful....

It is apparent that even though participants have mixed feelings about whether or not their actions can help animals, the environment, or other people, they still think it is important to make decisions and changes in their lives in ways that suit their desire to help.

### *Relationships*

While personal relationships are important to bystanders, engagers and activists, participants seem less concerned with the effect that someone's diet may have on intimate relationships. In addition, they do not choose their friends based on their diet, however, some mention the potential difficulty of dating someone who does not share their dietary choices.

Keith (1), who was less concerned with others' diets states, "the dynamics at the dinner table wouldn't necessarily change if the food changed...I would never let the way people eat affect my relationship with them." Similarly, Kevin (3) explains, "I don't want to be labeled a vegetarian person that hangs out with vegetarian people. I don't think

vegetarianism offers something that makes you part of a group of people. I don't like to feel I'm hanging out with these people because they are vegetarian. I like to go and hang out with people who have the same interests, and taste in life and that sort of thing, not because they have the same diet as me."

Some non-vegetarian interviewees note that while they are not against the idea of vegetarianism, they might need to know more people or have more vegetarian friends in order to cook meatless food. Allison (4) says, "I think that if I had more close friends who were vegetarian I would probably, I don't know if I would be vegetarian, but it would probably would be more likely in that being vegetarian wouldn't disrupt my social life as much. The network of friends really does make a difference." Jeff (5) states, "well, my family cooks a lot of meat and potatoes, pasta. I like to cook but I don't know how to cook many vegetarian meals. Actually I don't think I have ever cooked a completely vegetarian meal. If I knew how to cook something tasty and filling I am sure I would."

Finally, two people mention the topic of dating someone with a diet different than their own. Matt (2) states, "it's not a concern until dinnertime, or we'll go to a restaurant...do you want to go to a steakhouse while the other person eats steak and you eat a salad?" George (6), a non-vegetarian mentions that if he was dating someone who did not eat meat, he would respect his/ her decision and prepare food that was appropriate. He claims that he actually eats a lot of meatless meals at home because they are often faster to make. At the same time, George (6) expresses, "the only serious impact about someone's diet if I was in a relationship with them would probably involve their attitude about it, and how they felt about my dietary choices. Although I would probably

be more receptive to changing my diet if I was with someone who knew what they were doing and they didn't try and force me to do it, but persuade me with the benefits."

While participants seem less concerned about others' diets than engagers or activists, as will be discussed later, there is a range of feelings about diet and its connection to relationships. Although some may feel that they would never start or end a relationship based on a person's dietary preference, others claim that they would need more vegetarian friends to further embrace vegetarianism. Further, some participants discuss the difficulty of dating someone with a diet that differs from their own.

### *Dietary Benefits*

It is interesting to note that most participants who are vegetarian do not spend a lot of time talking about the benefits of their dietary choice. On the other hand, non-vegetarian participants see the rewards of their diet and are quick to discuss the advantages of being omnivorous. Kevin (3), the only participant that discusses a benefit of being vegetarian states that, "first of all, I don't feel bad about eating animals. That's my major benefit. And also I'm convinced that being a vegetarian has positive effects on the environment. These are the major benefits to myself."

The non-vegetarian participants see the benefits of an omnivorous diet as being social, non-restrictive and healthy. For example, Allison (4) states, "I think it doesn't cut into your social life as much in that people are less likely to have a moral problem with eating anything on a menu. Where [we] go home a lot, our parent aren't like, oh god, what are we going to eat when they come home? It's a treat to go out and have a burger or something." Similarly, Jeff (5) claims that a non-vegetarian diet, "does not take much

thought. Most things in the grocery store have some sort of animal ingredient in them. I have never really taken the time to pay attention to the ingredient list. Humans are omnivores aren't we? I guess you could say it is out of convenience for the most part." Lastly, "I find it is easier to try and maintain a balanced diet, and there are no restrictions on my food choices" (George, 6).

The fact that participants do not see many benefits to the adoption of vegetarianism is telling of the ways in which they take action. While each participant is aware of the natural impacts associated with their food choices, they take action in different ways to help the natural world. Rather than becoming vegetarian to help the environment, some participants make other choices, such as buying local food or meat from organic farmers.

### *Summary of the Participant*

After examining the interview data with regards to those who have been grouped together as participants, several themes have emerged. Each participant is involved in moral decision making. This includes thoughts about the environment, animals, health, food production and social justice. Although participants, in general, can make conscious decisions in any area of life, the interviewees were asked to connect their ideas to diet and everyday living. Every person in this group makes conscious decisions on a daily basis that deal with food. While not every participant has adopted vegetarianism in order to help animals and the environment, they take action to aid the natural world in other ways. This can include recycling, buying local produce, and simply reducing their meat consumption. Even though some participants defined themselves as activists during the

interview, their actual participation in activism is limited. The majority of interviewees feel responsible for helping the natural world and discuss how conscious decision making sometimes transforms into lifestyle changes. However, most participants feel that one person taking action does not mean that wider social change will occur. Participants also state that personal relationships are not largely affected by their dietary choices, while two interviewees do discuss the potential difficulty of dating someone with a different diet. Finally, vegetarian participants do not see many benefits of a vegetarian diet, while non-vegetarians see advantages of an omnivorous diet. While the themes of moral decision making, social activism, responsibility for helping the natural world, individual action, relationships and benefits of diet are not unique to participants, the ways in which interviewees discuss these themes are very specific. After defining those classified as engagers and activists, the continuum along which conscious living operates will become more apparent.

### **The Engager**

The final two categories that must be discussed in terms of their position in conscious living are those typed as engagers and activists. Overall, the degree to which actors change their lives in order to help another, varies. Of those classified as actors, participants take the least amount of action when another needs help. Engagers take more action than participants, however, they are not as devoted to the alleviation of the suffering of the natural world as are activists, which are discussed in the following segment. The purpose of this section is to detail those interviewees typed as engagers.

While not all interview participants are living in such a way that they can be considered activists, they are going beyond the definition of participant in their daily lives. I have termed this category of people engagers, which describes a group of people who are making conscious decisions in their life, allowing those decisions to translate into other areas of life, and spending a relative amount of time contemplating the effects of their daily activities. From 19 actors, 9 are placed in this group. 3 engagers are vegan, 2 are vegetarian, 2 are former vegetarians, and 2 are omnivores. This section will also explore the themes of moral decision making, social activism, personal responsibility, individual action, relationships and benefits of diet in order to see how engagers compare to the others grouped as actors. In some cases I have included lengthy quotations taken from the interview transcriptions, in order to give the reader a better sense of the interviewee's experiences.

### *Moral Decision Making*

The interviewees that I have categorized as engagers make many moral decisions around the ways in which they live. While not all of the choices are based on diet, most of them are reflective upon diet in some way. A number of interviewees have a strong concern for animal welfare which has caused them to stop eating meat. In addition, some participants' concerns for the environment and nutrition have an impact on the type of food that they eat.

Some people speak about experiences or beliefs relating to the well-being of animals which resulted in the adoption of a vegetarian diet. Lisa (7) notes that the idea of having an animal as part of your diet is 'weird'. She has read a lot about the

environmental impact of being vegan, which is closely aligned with ecofeminism. On the topic of vegetarianism, Lisa (7) asks, “having seen how much better I feel not eating meat, it kind of makes we wonder if biologically we are supposed to eat meat?” Another participant, Steve (8), shares a particular experience that was the start of his inclination towards a vegetarian, and now raw vegan, lifestyle:

So, I went to see *Chicken Run*, which is a really corny movie. That movie, I know it’s supposed to be a funny movie but it really had an impact on me because at the time chicken was the only meat I ate but I ate a lot of it. And so after watching this movie I was just overwhelmed by guilt. And then there’s this one moment in the movie where the chicken just went “but I don’t want to be a pie” and then it just really hit me, what we’re doing to animals is really cruel. And that was a turning point, it sounds really flaky...the good thing is that I went and got a book and went on the PETA website, and I read about it and the more I read about it and the more I realized you know what, this is right, and I got more educated about it.

At the same time, Sherry (13) discusses why the main reason for her dietary choices centres on animal welfare. Yet, she notes the environmental and health benefits of a vegetarian diet along with detailing how her early experiences affect her dietary choices today. She says,

As I grew up I saw many animal deaths and vowed that when I was old enough to make a choice, I was going to stop eating meat – and I did...animal welfare is extremely important to me. It would be the reason I looked into vegetarianism and what motivated me to be vegetarian and also what keeps me vegetarian. My health benefits from vegetarianism. I find this very important. There are so many studies that promote a plant-based diet, that this is just common knowledge. The costs of meat production to the environment are extensive and it is important to me that I am not contributing to this through my actions. I also try to promote environmentalism in other ways too. I believe there were several events as a child and young person that really turned me. Specifically, I can name events where I saw chickens being slaughtered, a pheasant, partridge, deer, cows, dogs, etcetera, and I can remember the event clearly and how horrified I felt. I truly believed that I was contributing to the animal’s death in the event of meat production. I also think that being quiet about

animal welfare leads to the lack of care and promotion of cruelty of an animal's life.

This is comparable to Cathy (14) who states, "Once someone told me what it was like to work in a slaughterhouse and I couldn't stop crying. I guess I spent most of my childhood being blissfully ignorant. When you're at the grocery store it's not a living, breathing animal you're seeing so it's easier to disassociate yourself from it. Now every time I see one of the trucks full of pigs or cows I know where they are going and it makes me cry, but it also reminds me that I'm not contributing to it" (14). Many of these engagers have moving stories about the reasons that they are vegetarian. Often they stem from an early experience in childhood, reading a book, or seeing a film. In addition, each one of these interviewees has strong convictions about vegetarianism.

Likewise, Amanda (15) recounts how reading a book about the world food supply made her start thinking about her diet. This, combined with life experiences has made her think that being vegetarian is also important for the environment. Amanda (15) states,

Having returned around that time from a work trip to Africa, I was particularly receptive to arguments about what I could do, even in some small way, to see that more people in the world were better able to feed themselves. Around that same time, I was hanging out with people in social justice groups on campus, some of whom were vegetarian. They would tell me stuff and feed me good meatless dishes...I think it's really important to be vegetarian if you claim to want to help animals and the environment, but I know lots of people who claim to do the latter yet eat meat. It's like they compartmentalize and rationalize their reasoning and their choices, for example they would be horrified by cruelty to dogs or cats, but are okay with eating beef or chicken (maybe because they think these animals are worth less or have less feeling or thinking power than domestic animals; or maybe it's because they don't have to witness meat animals being killed). I think environmentalists are a little less prone to compartmentalize in this way. They tend to see the whole picture. The majority of enthusiastic "greenies" that I know are vegetarian or vegan.

Evidently, some vegetarians feel very strongly that the decision to not eat meat is one of the primary ways to help animals and the environment.

On the other hand, some omnivores are aware of their food choices and do not see vegetarianism as essential to helping the natural world. To Jenn (10), eating seasonal is extremely important; she describes how her omnivorous food choices are still related to animal welfare:

With food production I try my best to buy Canadian and seasonal. I've got one or two things during winter that I let myself splurge on. I buy bell peppers. I know they're one of the worst for pesticide use and they don't generally come from local areas. So, I let myself splurge on that and otherwise during the winter I'm eating really like carrots, hot house tomatoes from Canada, and apples from Canada. Okay, I'll let myself have that bell pepper once a week. Otherwise, try and buy local and stuff. Those issues play in and I got to admit sometimes it's week to week. Sometimes I don't really want to spend nine bucks on the organic chicken breasts when I can buy chicken thighs for like four bucks. So those things do and don't play a role in my dietary concerns. Environmental, well, related to seasonal foods, for example, that has to do with how far my food has to travel to get to me, what kind of condition it's going to be in when it gets here. Those are all connected. Animal welfare and rights issues, the chicken example.

Cassie (9), while following an omnivorous diet, is also concerned about her food choices. She states, "I eat meat, but only happy meat. That's my philosophy. So I eat organic, local organic meat, generally from farmers who I've met, at farmer's markets and stuff like that. So at least I know the animals aren't abused. And I try to eat pasture-fed because that means they're outside and not eating grains...and the same for dairy and eggs. Happy cows and happy chickens. And I try to eat locally as well." In addition, Cassie (9) claims that social justice can be aligned with eating locally and supporting family farms.

Each person who is an engager shares some level of concern for diet, and has knowledge of the certain dietary choices available to individuals. While not all interviewees place a priority on helping either animals or the environment, each one discusses how diet does have an impact on the natural world. In turn, they try and make decisions around food that help the natural world in some way. This is different than those classified as participants. While participants are making conscious decisions and lifestyle choices, they are not necessarily connecting those decisions to other areas of life. For example, participants with a concern for the environment may take part in recycling programs, however, they may never have considered the effects that diet has on the environment. Those who are engagers have considered their actions and lifestyle choices in a range of contexts.

### *Interest in Social Activism*

Those who are classified as engagers also tend to be more interested in social activism than those who are in the participant group. There is not a specific area where people tend to be involved; in fact, interviewees participate in everything from women's rights and social justice to environmentalism, health and animal welfare. While many vegetarian engagers claim that a love for animals is responsible for their decision to become vegetarian, an interest in animal issues does not necessarily mean involvement in animal rights activities.

Lisa (7), for example, is involved in a campaign and a resource centre at her school. She considers herself an activist based on diet, although she notes that it is difficult to call someone an activist for being vegan; they could work for a bad

corporation and be vegan. With an interest in women's rights, Cathy (14) describes how she thinks it is important to "consider the relationship between the abuse of animals and the abuse of women. In many instances of wife abuse animals are also seriously injured and/or killed and I wanted to make sure that a woman wouldn't stay in a potentially lethal situation because she couldn't take her pet with her. If we protect a woman's children we should protect her pets as well."

Another participant, Cassie (9), is interested in environmentalism and likes to write stories about the environment. She also volunteers with an environmental organization. She claims that she used to be more involved in protests, but does not believe in conflict: "I have trouble with the whole non-conflict and still wanting social change. That's a struggle. What I've done with the blog, I only focus on solutions... To try and get the information out to people, because so many people would make positive changes if they knew how."

This resembles another participant who is concerned about the environment and social politics, yet prefers to avoid confrontation. Jenn (10) believes that having a discussion with someone about issues can be seen as activism. She states, "Very broadly speaking, I am environmentally, and politically and socially active...Socially, for example, I am very interested in human rights. I do letter writing, for all three I write to my MPs, my prime minister, my member of council...there's a lot of stuff I follow long term and just talk about it with people and in that sense is somewhat activist." Similarly, Louise (11) states, "I think that having a conversation with someone, and the ripple effect, is just as useful and important. I know that I've been thanked by several people for changing their diet a little, or a lot, or just opening their eyes to something they thought

was okay to go inside their bodies. And I think if everybody talked to five other people, and they talked to five other people, then that makes a big change. So even when it's passive it's there." Finally, a participant with an interest in vegetarianism, animal welfare, health and the environment discusses how she tries to educate people. "I like to tell them that by reducing meat consumption, they can also help. Other vegetarians are more active activists. They get the word out to whole generations. I just consider myself a grass-roots kind" (Sherry, 13).

Even though people who are categorized as engagers are involved in a number of different types of activism, it is clear that they are interested in a type of passive activism that involves discussion and personal relations. While most of the engagers are not currently involved in activism, some do see discussion as an effective tool for potential social change. Most engagers take part in some sort of activism, while the majority of those grouped as participants are not involved or interested.

### *Responsibility towards the Natural World*

In addition to themes of moral decision making and social activism, the theme of personal responsibility towards the natural environment is prominent with those who are engagers. While most participants feel some degree of responsibility towards the environment, health or animals, it seems that all of the engagers feel a stronger commitment to responsibilities surrounding the natural world. While not all interviewees in the engager category are vegetarian, most feel that it is their responsibility to help the natural world. The majority of the discussion focuses on decisions about diet and consumer choices.

When asked whether or not she feels a personal responsibility towards helping the natural world, Lisa (7) states, “yes, I think so. I’m a living being on this planet. We all have responsibilities to it...I definitely feel like I have an obligation to not make things worse...Being vegetarian is a very easy way to help yourself, animals, and those around you.” She goes on to describe how being vegetarian is a fundamental step for those wanting to become environmentalists. Steve (8), who also feels an obligation to help other animals says, “I don’t get how some people value the lives of some animals over other animals. What makes one life more worthy than another? Especially people with pets that eat meat.” Similarly, Sherry (13) describes how her personal experiences growing up have now made her feel a sense of duty towards the outdoors. She states, “I feel responsible because I grew up in an area where the natural environment was your backyard and you can see with your eyes what choices people make affects the environment and seeing the dietary choices people make affects animals’ lives. I mostly feel responsible for animals’ lives, but the two are interconnected because the environment is destroyed to make room for meat producing animals, which affects the lives of the natural wildlife.” Another participant says that her desire to protect animals gives her a sense of satisfaction. Cathy (14) explains, “I think I would want to protect the environment and/or animals even if I did eat red meat. However, because I don’t I do feel a strong sense of responsibility for protecting animals and doing my part in protecting the environment. There’s a weird sense of satisfaction I get from knowing that because of me there are less cows and pigs being slaughtered, because of me animals of abused women have somewhere safe to sleep and because of me there will be less garbage in landfills.”

Concurrently, some interviewees express a personal responsibility for spending their money wisely and creating change within a system. As a vegan, Steve (8) thinks that the money one spends has an impact on various industries that are related to animal welfare. He claims that, “as a vegetarian you’re impacting not only the meat industry, by saying that you’re not putting your money there, but you’re also impacting the cosmetic industry. You’re sending a message by saying you’re not going to buy their products if they test on animals...You’re impacting a lot of different things through what you’re not doing. You make other people open their eyes to what’s going on out there.” Likewise, Jenn (10) describes how her omnivorous diet still allows her to be an active change in the way animals are raised and kept. She describes, “Somebody like me, I’ve put a lot of thought into it. I’ve worked at a vegetarian cafe. I’m constantly thinking about what I eat, where it’s coming from...All that said, I’m not a vegetarian. You can have the people that weigh all those issues and decide that I’m going to do my bit from the side of change from within, change my habits but don’t change completely what I eat” (10).

In the engager category, it is apparent that all of the interviewees feel a stronger sort of responsibility for the natural world, which they then carry out through conscious decision making, in their everyday lives. Regardless of the type of diet they follow, each interviewee describes how diet has an impact on the natural world. This is quite different from participants, who make conscious decisions and take some positive action in their lives, yet perhaps do not always think that responsibility in one area of life can be easily translated into personal commitment in another area, such as diet.

*Individual Action*

After asking participants whether or not one person can make a difference when helping the natural world, far more engagers than participants think that each person can provide effective assistance. The engagers generated the consensus that one person, when combined with many, can make a difference. While some remain doubtful that one person on their own can make changes, everyone was hopeful that there is never one person doing a certain action, and that together, individual action turns into productive group activity.

Lisa (7) states, “I have to believe that I can make a difference. There’s so much stuff that goes on in the world that is unpleasant that you have to make time to help in order to carry on sometimes.” Likewise, Cathy (14) explains, “I know that a lot of people don’t think that one person can make a difference but I’d like to think that’s not true. If one person couldn’t make a difference than nothing would ever change. It always takes one person to stand up and say that something isn’t right to start a movement. Also, as I’ve mentioned before I think that action always speaks louder than words and your actions are what have permanent effects on the world.” Sherry (13) describes how her individual actions have helped people change their diets. “I have personally made a lot of people more aware of what they are eating and reconsider some of their food choices...Family members have to take into consideration what I eat, and some have significantly reduced their meat intake. I have a few friends that are seriously considering a vegetarian/ mostly vegetarian lifestyle. History has shown over and over again that word-of-mouth works in getting the word out about issues.”

Other participants are even more certain that individuals form groups and can create change. Steve (8) says, “you know what, one person times thousands of people makes a difference. Everybody makes a difference. No matter what.” Another describes how people’s relationships can help action come about. Cassie (9) states that “people are embedded in relationships. So, if one person does make changes that’s going to make an impact on all the people with whom they’re in a relationship with, whatever the relationship. The whole revolution against plastic bags that’s happened in like the last seven months. That all started like decades ago I’m sure with two people bringing it to people’s attention.” Amanda (15), a vegetarian notes, “it’s easy to get pessimistic when I think of myself as only one person and ask myself what difference I’m actually making. I prefer to think of myself in concert with a bunch of other people. Lots of vegetarian/vegan people, including myself, make a difference.”

Every interviewee in the engager category believes that one person can make a difference, whether it is by themselves or in a group of others. Most interviewees seem hopeful that individual lifestyle changes can have a larger effect on the natural world. There is a remarkable difference between the engagers and participants when asked this question. Only two of the participants think that each person can help, and the rest are doubtful that an individual can have an impact on an issue. Since both participants and engagers feel personally responsible for helping the natural world, for the most part and to varying degrees, it is interesting that there is such a disparity when asked whether or not individual action can make a difference.

### *Relationships*

How participants and engagers view relationships according to diet also differs. While all participants think personal relationships and food are important, they are less inclined to allow someone's diet to shape their relationship. On the other hand, more engagers discuss the difficulty in dating someone with a different diet, as well as the importance of having a partner who is supportive of whatever food choices they make.

When it came to asking interviewees about their personal relationships and food, many commented on dating. Lisa (7) expresses, "it's definitely hard, especially with a girlfriend/boyfriend relationship. I'm single now, but I have experienced problems. I don't want to be physical with someone or kiss someone right after they've eaten meat." She continues by describing how she recently met someone she really likes, and is disappointed because she does not think he is vegetarian or vegan. After a while, Lisa (7) says that she starts to wonder why they will not adopt vegetarianism, yet does not want to push her beliefs on anyone. As a non-vegetarian, Jenn (10) also discusses how someone's diet may affect a relationship. She tells how she could not be involved long term with someone who lived on a fast-food diet. "If someone shows that little respect for their body, I find it disconcerting. If they care that little about their body, what does that say about the way they treat me? If you don't care about yourself, what do you care about?"

At the same time, others discuss the importance of having a supportive family and partner who is respectful of their diets. Telling about her experience first going vegetarian, Louise (11) recalls, "I remember asking my dad what a hamburger was and he told me and I said that cows were my friends and I didn't want to eat cows....they just always understood that that was something I wasn't interested in and they respected my

decisions at such an early age and that's something I'm so pleased about with my parents."

When talking about her personal relationship, Cassie (9) claims that she is lucky that her partner "doesn't feel like he has to have meat all the time. Again when he's at a restaurant he makes whatever choice, but I basically make all the food choices at home." Similarly, Cathy (14) states, "my partner is super understanding and supportive of any decision I make about anything. He's the cook in the house and he always makes meals with me in mind even if he later makes a steak or something for himself." Amanda (15), who is vegetarian, and has a vegetarian partner, describes their mutual diet as another thing that keeps her excited about being vegetarian. She describes,

my partner is vegetarian; we both were when we met. He's made me somewhat more strict about it, and much better informed. I think it would be really hard for me at this stage – if [we] weren't together – for me to be with someone who ate meat. I would have a hard time going back to meat-eating lifestyle, and I think it's just too difficult to sustain a relationship – both ideologically and practically speaking – with two different types of diets. So if I was looking for a new partner, vegetarianism would be one of the first things on the list of necessary traits. [We] also enjoy cooking, which also helps to keep us enthusiastic about being veg.

There is an obvious distinction between the engagers and participants when it comes to discussing the topic of personal relationships and food. The majority of engagers claim it is beneficial to have friends, family and partners who are supportive and accepting of their diets. Further, to many of the engagers, being with someone with a similar diet is important. The majority of the participants in the previous section, however, state that someone's diet would not have an effect on any existing or potential relationships.

### *Dietary Benefits*

Another significant difference between the engagers and participants is that the vegetarian engagers see many benefits to their diet, while the non- and former vegetarians have less to report. This differs from the participant group, whose vegetarians are not completely certain about the benefits of being meat-free, while the non-vegetarians and former vegetarians easily detail how their diets are beneficial.

Lisa (7) believes that the major benefit of being vegan comes from “the knowledge of theoretically aligning it with my feminist beliefs – ecofeminism.” She discusses how there is a connection between veganism, activism, and the idea of not harming natural others. In addition, she feels that eating a vegan diet is less expensive than an omnivorous diet. Louise (11) describes a sense of well-being that comes from being vegetarian. “I feel mostly that the main benefit for me is that I’m not putting this negativity into my body. If I ate meat it would be coming from such a place of suffering, and hormones. Nothing like that is good to put in my body.” Similarly, Amanda (15) claims that for her, the benefit of being vegetarian comes from “some piece of mind knowing that I’m not personally contributing to the meat industry...Having a healthier diet.”

Sherry (13) describes the health benefits of being vegetarian and also talks about how she can help the environment. She states, “I have turned meal time into something special. I am benefitting life somewhere on this earth by the choices I have made at my mealtime. I have benefitted my life my lowering my cholesterol (by being vegan, I am not contributing any cholesterol from outside sources to my body). I am not taking in hormones that are in meat products that can lead to cancers. I am not eating large

amounts of saturated fats. I am helping the environment in many ways such as reduction of greenhouse gases, helping maintain grasslands and forests.”

Overall, the main difference between participants and engagers, when exploring this theme, is that the vegetarian engagers feel strongly that their food choices have many benefits, while the non-vegetarians are less likely to discuss the benefits of their diet. This is in opposition to the participant type, where the vegetarians were not as sure about their dietary choices, while the non- and former vegetarians saw many benefits of being omnivorous.

### *Summary of the Engager*

After reviewing the major themes associated with the engagers, several differences between participants and engagers are apparent. Every engager, as well as every participant, makes moral decisions and lifestyle changes. While interviewees in both categories place differing levels of importance on certain issues, the engagers are more likely to elaborate on how diet can have an impact on the natural world. Vegetarian or not, the engagers, unlike the participants, try to make decisions around food that are beneficial to the natural world. The engagers have considered many of their conscious decisions within a range of moral contexts. Interviewees in this category are also more likely to be involved in a type of passive activism than participants, who are not as inclined to be socially active. However, both participants and engagers see discussion as a type of activism. In addition, those classified as engagers feel a strong responsibility towards helping the natural world, which is translated into everyday living; not all participants consider how responsibility in one area of life could be transformed into

other areas. Another major difference between the engagers and participants is that every engager believes one person taking action can make a difference, either alone or in a group. Few participants think that one's own actions can help. There is also a distinction between the two categories as they discuss relationships and food. While participants do not think that relationships can be determined by another's diet, the engagers are more likely to discuss the importance of having a similar diet when it comes to dating and long term commitments. Finally, the vegetarian engagers feel that not consuming meat has many benefits, while the omnivores are less specific about the benefits of a non-vegetarian diet. The reverse of this is true for the participants. The ways in which activists are situated in these themes will be discussed in the next section, with the aim of completing the actor typology.

### **The Activist**

How do constant, daily lifestyle choices fit into the idea of our solidarities with the natural other? This next section, which explores the group of people categorized as activists, deals with the question of politics and what it means to be a political actor. If conscious living is envisioned as a continuum, activists would be on the opposite end of bystanders (see Figure 1, pg. 46). They are making conscious decisions every day, changing their lifestyles in order to reflect those decisions, and taking part in activities that promote those decisions. This type of social responsibility activism is directly related to conscious living as it involves people who are changing their lives on a daily basis, in the hopes of bettering the natural world. Before conducting this research, I suspected that there would be a correlation between choosing a vegetarian diet and also being involved

in other socially aware activities, such as participation in environmental and animal rights groups. While not all the vegetarian actors are involved in social organizations, all activists are. From 19 actors, 4 participants are classified as activists. Two are male, two female, and all of them follow a strict vegan diet. The reasons for their classification have to do with the ways in which they discuss the same key themes. Their responses differ greatly from those of the participants and engagers, which will be illustrated below.

### *Moral Decision Making*

Like participants and engagers, activists are involved in making moral decisions on a daily basis. While the previous two categories involve conscious decision making around a number of issues, activists are primarily concerned with animal and environmental issues, and the ways in which they are connected to diet. Each interviewee classified as an activist expresses that helping the natural world is a deep moral imperative.

Most interviewees discuss how all life is interconnected, and it is essential to help animals and the environment. However, each activist thinks it is slightly more important to give aid to animals. Joe (16) states, “animal welfare and rights is at the top, because when it comes to being vegan, the respect for life is the most important. And then I put environmental issues. I understand the environmental impact, if you’re vegetarian on the environment, but that’s not really why I’m vegan. It’s below animal rights and welfare because I expect we’re already doing a decent job of it, better than animal rights.” Erin (19) claims that animal rights are a priority in her life. “I don’t believe animals are for anyone’s selfish purpose...They should not have property status and they should exist

independently of what uses we have for them.” While animal rights is the most pressing issue for Erin, she also notes that diet has an influence on the environment and health. She states, “meat is the number one contributor of climate change”, and “vegetarians and vegans are the healthiest people on the planet.”

Other interviewees see their dietary choices as having an equal impact on animals and the environment. Bridget (17) tells the story of how she came to adopt vegetarianism. “I was in university and some of the stuff that I came across while doing my research was the information about how much water and land and grains it takes to produce a pound of different types of animal meat. I was absolutely horrified by how inefficient it was...I just realized it was completely arrogant to think that you should be entitled to use up that much land just to feed you dead animals.” While Bridget originally went vegetarian for environmental reasons, she is currently vegan and aligns herself foremost with animal rights issues.

Similarly, Paul (18) believes that vegetarianism is critical to helping the natural world. He is equally concerned about the environment and animals, and views all life as being interconnected.

Being vegetarian is the most important thing in helping the natural world. I think that understanding animal flesh, and the institutions that provide it for us, understanding that they are based in violence, understanding how our society has functioned in the past, understanding how that is based on violence, understanding the path we are set upon, we observe this violence on the earth. Whether it's human to human, whether it's human to non-human or human to the environment, we now understand that when we hurt the inhabitants of the earth we lessen the quality of our own lives. It's a matter of looking at violence and understanding the violence in our own society and trying to deal with it in a humane fashion. If we are to understand compassion we have to understand that violence only breeds violence.

It is apparent that activists see the importance in making moral decisions on a daily basis, and allowing those decisions to influence such a major part of life as food choices. In addition, they have put much thought into helping animals and the environment, and wholeheartedly believe that a vegetarian or vegan diet is the only way to help the natural world.

### *Interest in Social Activism*

While participants show little interest in activism, and engagers are slightly more involved in social activities (although not always related to their primary moral concerns), activists are immersed in various types of activism, most of which focus on diet and vegetarianism. Joe (16), who is involved in an activist organization, believes that other vegetarians are not necessarily activists solely because of the food that they eat. He states that, “being vegetarian is a good start, but you’re not really doing that much. It’s much better to be more active.” In addition, Joe thinks that to be considered activists, people must “speak the truth loudly, instead of just doing it themselves.” Bridget (17), who holds a position in a vegetarian organization, believes that promoting a diet void of animal products is a priority. She states, “one of the most important things in my entire life is to promote veganism. I would say that is probably activism. And I do that in a number of ways...I try to show that vegans aren’t all young kids. To show that vegans can be professionals, that vegans can be really fit and healthy. They can be everything that a mainstream person can be, but without harming animals. So, I’m trying to use myself to show people that anybody can be vegan and it’s not just a subculture.”

Two of the other participants see activism as stemming from their social activities, as well as their employment and volunteer experiences. Paul (18) explains how he is a volunteer for a world-renowned environmental organization, as well as on the board of directors for an education centre. Erin (19) describes herself as growing up as an activist since her mother has always been involved in politics. Erin (19) currently works for a political party, participates in an Ottawa-based political organization, and is involved in a vegetarian association as well as various animal rights organizations. She states, “I think what I do in my professional life is activism” (Erin, 19). Clearly, each person classified as an activist is heavily involved in social activity. Not only do they participate in various organizations, each activist holds key positions in these organizations.

#### *Responsibility towards the Natural World*

In addition to being socially active on a regular basis, each activist thinks it is his or her personal responsibility to help the natural world. They also think that it is up to others to learn about issues, such as the environment and animals, and make positive changes in their own lives.

Most participants discuss the idea that people should be obligated to help others. Joe (16) says, “I think it’s really important to be vegetarian...how can you care about animals if you eat them?” Erin (19) agrees, “It would be hypocritical to care about animals and not be a vegetarian.” Similarly, Paul (18) claims that “I don’t think you can make food choices without feeling a sense of obligation.”

At the same time, Erin (19) believes that most people would like to make decisions that benefit others, yet perhaps they are unaware.

I feel like when you realize what's what and see the truth of the situation – I think a problem right now is most people don't know. Most people I think if given the chance would make kind choices and choices that are good for the environment. But the system's not set up that way to make it easy like that and society has a vested interest in keeping people away from that type of issue so I think when you are able to learn about it for yourself and you get it, you get what's wrong with eating meat, what's great about being a vegetarian or vegan, you have a responsibility to do something about it. I definitely feel like I have that personal responsibility that because I get it I have to tell people about it so more people can get it, and save animals by making more people get it and reducing environmental destruction by making more people get it and we can make our population healthier by helping more people get it.

While activists believe that they are personally responsible for helping the natural world, they also think that others should be obligated.

### *Individual Action*

Activists also feel that individual action has an influence on the well-being of the natural world. Some believe that individuals joining groups of people are more likely to affect change, as the engagers feel, while others believe there is a need to move beyond diet in one's life in order to help the environment and animals.

When asked whether one person can make a difference, Joe (16) states, “[y]es. It definitely does make a difference. How could it not? We're each only one person...I don't think that just being vegetarian is doing very much, but yes, I think that one person can do a whole lot. Just one person can join a group, and work with that group.” Similarly, Erin (19) claims, “one person is one person but when all these people combine to being five, ten percent of the population that's that many fewer animals that are being killed.”

Bridget (17) believes that the promotion of vegetarianism is what deems someone an activist. She claims, “being vegetarian or vegan may in some ways be a political

choice, but a lot of people are really quiet about it and I don't think that's being an activist." Bridget continues by repeating some of the ideas expressed by the engagers in that she thinks one needs to be actively talking with people and entering into discussions about pressing issues.

A different interviewee, Paul (18), describes how individual action is essential since as a society we can no longer trust the government or institutions. He explains, "You can't rely on governments or institutions to make these changes. Partially because of the notion that they're established, functioning for the good of society, created for the good of society, however, through our human evolution the notion of our society has evolved in a way that was unforeseen. We can't rely on the institutions to make these changes. As individuals we are responsible to observe the path ahead of us. We have the power to shape the future of these organizations in a beneficial way for society" (18). Paul's statement is in direct opposition to some statements made by bystanders, who believe that we should trust our government and institutions to make decisions for us. Regardless of the different ways activists see individual action as helping the natural world, it is clear that they unanimously believe in the importance of taking action in one's life.

### *Relationships*

While the vegetarians in the engager group are concerned about dating non-vegetarians, and express an importance in having a partner that is supportive of their diet, activists discuss the fact that they associate more with vegetarians than omnivores. This is relevant for intimate relationships, as well as more general acquaintances.

Joe (16) explains that when one is involved in social activism, he or she is more prone to meet other vegetarians. Joe claims that people with a more active conscience are more likely to be vegetarian, and thus an activist. He says that before he became a vegetarian he knew some people who influenced his decision to switch from an omnivorous to meat-free diet, and discusses how his number of friends has gone up, now that he's involved in activism. Also, the number of his friends who are vegetarian has also increased since many people involved in the same groups as him are vegetarian or vegan.

On the other hand, Bridget (17) notes that before she became vegetarian, she did not know many people who followed that diet. Now, she knows many vegetarians both in person and online, and in Ottawa, she has a circle of about 50 vegetarians with whom she associates. Similarly, Paul (18) states that half or more of his friends now are vegetarian, whereas when he was omnivorous, he knew very few vegetarians. Erin (19) also claims that she enjoys making friends with those who share her dietary preferences. She says she seeks out vegetarian friends and knows 30-40 other vegetarians. In addition, half of the vegetarians she knows are activists. "I know people who are just activists by nature. They like to shake the boat, they like to look for alternative world views, and when they find them it's in their nature and personality to promote that and work towards it being better" (Erin, 19). While the activists stress an importance in having a partner who shares their involvement in vegetarianism, they are also more concerned than engagers in having a wider network of friends who are also vegan or vegetarian.

### *Dietary Benefits*

Like the engagers, activists strongly believe that having a vegan or vegetarian diet has many benefits. They name some of the same benefits, such as helping animals, the environment, and personal health. Joe (16) claims, “I think the best benefit is that you have way more respect for animals, for life.” He also says that there is more efficiency with food energy, being vegan is better for the environment, and it is cheaper than an omnivorous diet. Joe (16) adds, “you don’t have to deal with slaughterhouses, the safety of workers, if I ate meat I would worry about that, but I don’t. When people start talking about how there’s mercury in fish, and that they’re so worried, I think okay, you be worried. It doesn’t really affect me. I don’t worry about it.”

Bridget (17) also describes the myriad of benefits:

I just like myself a lot better. I just think it’s – the benefits aren’t even just for yourself. There’s benefits for animals, there’s benefits for the environment, it’s just karmic almost...I think that being vegetarian as well makes you a lot more conscious of health because you’re constantly being put on the defensive by people asking, “Where’s your protein?” So, a lot of vegetarians do more research on that. It makes them more health conscious which I think makes them more healthy in general. It’s not to say that there aren’t unhealthy vegetarians, but I’d say on the whole vegetarians and vegans know a lot more about nutrition than most people, which probably only benefits them.

Finally, Paul (18) and Erin (19) reiterate the notion that being vegan is beneficial in numerous ways. Paul (18) states, “I think it comes down to health. The benefits of a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle are health. Environmental and personal health.” Erin (19) says, “every aspect of my life benefits from not eating animals...my health, the peace of mind that I’m not harming my body” (19). She also claims that vegans are saving the health care system money by having generally more healthy lifestyles. Clearly, activists see many benefits in having vegan diets.

*Summary of the Activist*

After discussing the activist category in comparison to participants and engagers, it is evident that there are numerous differences along the continuum of conscious living. While each category is making moral decisions, activists believe strongly that certain choices can be carried out in a number of avenues of life. Each activist interviewed feels that diet is imperative to helping the natural world. Like the engagers, activists have considered their decisions within a range of contexts, yet, activists are more likely to go a step further and participate in social activity that involves issues they think are important. Also, each activist has a major position in at least one activist organization. While engagers feel a strong personal responsibility towards helping the natural world, activists feel a personal commitment to initiate others into feeling a similar sense of responsibility. In addition, both engagers and activists think that individual action can make a difference. When it comes to discussion about relationships, activists are more likely to describe the importance of having close relationships, as well as general acquaintances, with people who are vegetarian. Vegetarian engagers think that having supportive friends and partners are important, however, they do not all feel that their relationships have to be with others who share their dietary choices. Lastly, both vegetarian engagers and activists see the beneficial aspects of living vegetarian and vegan lifestyles.

The main objective of this chapter has been to outline and go into detail about the typology of actors. Through examination of the sub-categories of participants, engagers and activists, differences among key themes are revealed. When I first started analyzing the data along the principals of grounded theory, I was not sure how easy it would be to divide the category of actor into various types. However, the distinctions between

participants, engagers and activists are quite clear, and thus, the task of developing a typology was not as difficult as I first expected. Even though this chapter has demonstrated that there are variations among those classified as actors, it is necessary to explain how the positions of bystanders, participants, engagers and activists move with flexibility along the conscious living continuum. The following chapter will discuss how bystanders and actors come to be, through the revelation of people's experiences, and how the categorization of bystander or actor is not stagnant, as classifications intermingle and interviewees make lifestyle choices that can change over time.

## Chapter 6: Traveling Through the Continuum

While the goal of the previous two chapters was to establish the continuum of conscious living through the construction of bystander and actor categories, this chapter considers how people come to be actors or bystanders in life. After describing bystanders, participants, engagers and activists, it is clear that interviewees categorized as such have a specific place in the conscious living continuum. Bystanders are those who know and do not act, while actors, to varying degrees, know and take action. Of all the actors, participants give the least amount of assistance to the natural world, while engagers are seen to be more involved in bestowing aid through changes in their diet. Those classified as activists are the most concerned with the links between diet and the suffering of animals and the environment, and feel that a vegan diet is necessary in order to help the natural world. Therefore, conscious living needs to be envisioned as a continuum since the ways in which people know, and decide to take action, vary.

Given that the placement of bystanders and actors within conscious living has been established, it is crucial to now examine how certain people become bystanders, while others are actors. Further, why are some actors participants, while others are activists? This goes back to my initial research question that asks, in general, do we act towards the natural other? The purpose of this final chapter is to address the flexibility of the conscious living continuum through the choices people make around diet. In the first section, I discuss how interviewees have moved from bystander to actor through the adoption of vegetarianism. Social theories of the bystander are used to explain how this passage takes place. The second part of this chapter illustrates how actors travel within

the continuum and can be considered participants, engagers or activists depending on their transitory lifestyle choices. For the reason that conscious living is concerned with everyday instances of solidarity with the natural world, and that people's expressions of solidarity can change over time and space, it is inevitable that movement within the actor category takes place. I look to social movements theory for a partial interpretation of this actor behaviour. Using vegetarianism as an indicator, the intention of this chapter is to argue that conscious living is flexible; people become bystanders, actors, and move among actor categories because conscious living involves lifestyle choices, and solidarity with the natural other, that occur on a *daily basis*.

### **Becoming a Vegetarian**

What makes people decide to change their lives in the hopes of bettering the natural world? "As one would expect of ideas struggling to get a hold on rapidly shifting attitudes, the attributes that are common to humans and animals now tend to be paid more attention and seen as more important than the differences between them" (Bauman, 2002: 209). Bauman also states that the limits of human responsibility are always in flux; an 'attitudinal shift' can be described as a sudden willingness to see what previously went unnoticed. Whether or not interviewees express their vegetarianism as an abrupt enthusiasm towards helping the natural world will be uncovered.

Although social theories of the bystander provide detailed descriptions of bystander behaviour, they are less enlightening when it comes to describing how people actually become bystanders or actors in life. Most likely this is because everyone's experiences are different. As Bauman mentions in the first chapter, even two people who

have had the same life experiences may choose to act in different ways. In order to discuss what motivates people to move from bystander to actor, and to adopt vegetarianism, it is necessary to use real examples taken from the interview transcripts. I have highlighted personal accounts where interviewees tell stories about how they came to adopt vegetarianism, thus moving from bystander to actor. Also included are selections from omnivores, both bystanders and actors, describing the circumstances under which they would give up eating meat. Interview excerpts are loosely arranged according to the subject's placement in the category of either bystander or actor.

### *Bystanders*

Although each interviewee classified as a bystander is an omnivore, one of the questions asked during the interview process was, 'are there any circumstances that would make you take up a vegetarian diet?' The most common responses had to do with health and personal relationships, which is consistent with the bystander categorization. Even though they recognize the links between food and the natural other, bystanders are not willing to become vegetarian in order to help the natural environment.

While Michael (21) acknowledges the negative impacts of eating meat, he believes that farming conditions would need to worsen for him to adopt vegetarianism. He states, "well I really enjoy eating meat. What would probably drive me to become a vegetarian is basically if something happens in the world where we're really making negative impacts by eating meat. I know in a lot of ways you are making negative impacts at this time by eating meat but where it gets very, very intense. You know, something were to happen, some type of economic collapse or something where it was

just harder.” As a bystander, Michael is aware the eating meat can have detrimental effects. He notes that he would adopt vegetarianism but remains vague about what the circumstances would have to entail.

Michael’s response differs from other bystanders, who primarily state that they would become vegetarian only for their health. Lindsay (20) notes that she would only become vegetarian for reasons that benefit her. She claims, “people are entirely self-interested. So, for me, I might change for health issues, or convenience issues, because it benefits me.” Also, Kate (12) claims she would be vegetarian if, “eating meat was hazardous to my health, if I didn’t know where it was coming from, or if I couldn’t get meat that was environmentally friendly.” These excerpts represent a small selection of interviewees who would become vegetarian for reasons associated with health. Every omnivore interviewed, except Michael, mentions that health would be the number one reason to give up eating meat. This indicates one difference among bystanders. Although still part of the bystander category, Michael would be placed closer to the participant side of the conscious living continuum. He is aware that the natural world suffers due to his dietary choices, and would be willing to adopt vegetarianism in order to alleviate the suffering of the natural world. This is different than those interviewees who would only adopt a vegetarian diet if their health was at stake. The intention of their actions would have nothing to do with helping the natural world, and thus Kate, for example, would be further away from being classified as a participant than Michael.

In addition to health, other participants claim that they might consider becoming vegetarian if they were with a partner who did not eat meat. While Tom (23) has a partner who eats many vegetarian meals, he believes that for himself, “changing to a vegetarian

diet would require a significant investment. I don't know about the actual financial cost of the dietary change, but for me it would involve a great deal of learning – for example, how to eat a healthy and well-balanced vegetarian diet, as well as how to eat a varied and flavourful diet.” Karen (24) states that she would be willing to give up eating meat if she was dating a vegetarian or vegan, while Lindsay (20) believes that having a vegetarian partner to help make meals would be essential. Lindsay explains, “if I had a partner who was vegetarian, to cook and share the preparation hassle and cost hassle of being a vegetarian, sure. I'm not wedded to eating meat. If something tastes better and is just as healthy, in that case I would shift.”

While each bystander claims that health would be the primary reason for adopting vegetarianism, it is interesting to discover that some interviewees would be willing to change their diets for the preference of another person, but not to improve the conditions of the natural world. Still, this is consistent with bystander behaviour, as discussed by Bauman, Cohen and Clarkson in the first chapter. Bystanders are aware of affliction, but choose not to come to the aid of another. In addition, by looking at these few responses to the same question of what it would take to become vegetarian, it is clear that there are differences in the experiences and beliefs of bystanders. It is apparent that bystanders could be arranged along the conscious living continuum depending on their willingness and reasons for becoming vegetarian. At the same time, a greater number of interviews with bystanders would be necessary to develop sub-categories and differentiate among their characteristics. Whether or not the reasons for going vegetarian are the same for actors is explored below.

*Actors*

Within the category of participants, there are a number of reasons why vegetarians decided to stop eating meat, and why participants who are omnivores may decide to become vegetarian. While bystanders would consider adopting vegetarianism for reasons dealing primarily with health and relationships, participants discuss a wider range of scenarios.

Kevin's (3) current reasons for not eating meat have to do with the love he feels for his cat. Yet, he recalls an experience from when he was younger that also involves a love of animals. "As a child we raised cows. I had two of them that really loved me and I really loved them. And then, obviously someone ate them. I felt really, really bad, and for a really long time I didn't like eating cows." He continues by stating that when a person gets close to animals they cannot help but start thinking about eating animals. George (6), an omnivore, is aware of the connection between animals and diet, yet claims that he would be vegetarian solely for economical and health reasons. Based on this answer, it may seem strange that George is placed in the participant category. While he is not that open to becoming vegetarian, George realizes that his diet, as well as the other choices he makes on a daily basis, are connected to the well-being of the natural world. Although he is not a vegetarian, he still takes action to alleviate some of the stress placed on the environment. For example, George walks instead of driving a car whenever possible, and thinks it is important to recycle.

Another participant, Allison (4), although not vegetarian, tries to help animals and the environment by reducing the amount of meat that she eats. She believes that the idea of not eating meat is troubling to her because there are certain foods she enjoys eating.

She says, “there’s nothing specific stopping me right now [from becoming vegetarian] except for the fact that I’m not ready to give up meat entirely, you know, when we go to restaurants and if I want steak every once in a while. I don’t know, maybe I’d have to be exposed to the horrors of the food production or the way animals are killed to make meat” (Allison, 4). Similarly, Jenn (10), an engager, discusses how she grew up eating meat and loves eating eggs. She believes that if food practices declined and there were no meat alternatives, she may become vegetarian. At the same time, she notes that she tries to reduce her meat consumption on a regular basis.

Unlike the participants and engagers, who are both vegetarian and omnivore, those interviewees classified as activists decided to give up eating meat due to a concern for environmental and animal welfare. Joe’s (16) reason for becoming a vegetarian is based on the idea of not contributing to animal suffering. He went from an omnivore to a vegan overnight, and explains that his vegan friends helped with the transition. Similarly, Paul’s (18) interest in the outdoors, and experiences with the wild made him question his food choices. He states, “I knew I wasn’t living according to what I was starting to believe. I started reading books that were talking more about understanding your own morality, and really questioning my own morality and what I truly value...for a while, I started phasing [meat] out.” He also explains the flexibility of his diet. “I’m a fairly strict vegan. But, if someone bakes something and I’m at a function and there might be a little bit of dairy in it I will still consume it out of gratitude for that piece of food and the effort that person made if their intention was good. But I will not purchase dairy products for moral reasons, for environmental reasons, health and animal rights” (Paul, 18).

After looking at the reasons why interviewees have become vegetarian, and the situations that may cause an omnivore to refrain from eating meat, it is evident that differences exist between bystanders and actors. Bystanders claim that they would become vegetarian for reasons associated mainly with health, and also if they were involved with someone who was vegetarian. With the exception of Michael, their reasons have nothing to do with a desire to help the natural world. However, differences are apparent in the responses of bystanders. While some are open to the idea of vegetarianism, if only for accommodating the preference of a partner, others are more opposed to the adoption of a vegetarian diet unless it directly concerns their personal well-being.

Alternatively, actors have a number of reasons to explain why they stopped eating meat, or why they potentially would. While bystanders might become vegetarian for health or a relationship, there is no consensus among actors as to why or how they would become vegetarian. Their explanations include health in one instance, witness to animal suffering, and the ability to help animals and the environment. This is likely a result of the fact that there are omnivores and vegetarians in both the participant and engager categories; interviewees have obviously had different lifestyle experiences and have chosen to act in different ways, although each participant and engager is taking action to help the natural world. This exemplifies the fact that conscious living is a flexible construct. Once someone is aware of the suffering of another, they are living consciously. When that person takes action to alleviate the suffering of the other, they can be placed into the broad category of actor. The amount and type of action that a person chooses to take determines their placement along the continuum, in the sub-category of either

participant, engager or activist. Vegetarianism can be seen as a valid indicator of conscious living because it tests our everyday solidarities with the natural world. As seen in Table 1 (pg. 49), vegetarianism and veganism increases as does the amount of action one takes to help animals and the environment. Consequently, each activist interviewed follows a vegan diet, for the essential reason of helping the natural world.

### **Actors Changing Roles**

Once a person decides to change his or her life for the purpose of helping another being, how does that person make the decision to withdraw that help, or give further aid? Since conscious living is concerned with the action people take, on a daily basis, to come to the aid of the natural other, it is inescapable that actors' positions in conscious living change. Each day we have to make choices about the natural world, with consideration of our own life experiences. Over time, living circumstances, and perhaps beliefs, priorities and interests change. With reference to social movements theory, and interview discussions, how actors move back and forth along the continuum of conscious living is explored.

Since social movements theory is used to account for people's participation in various social organizations, it can be examined here to gain a better understanding of how and why people choose to act. According to Marx and McAdam (1994), individuals get involved in collective action depending on their individual characteristics and their social-structural conditions. The three main factors that are linked to actors include prior contact with another actor, membership in organizations and the absence of 'biographical constraints'. Generally, people become actors "not simply because they are

psychologically or attitudinally compelled to but because their structural location in the world makes them available for participation. It matters little if one is ideologically or psychologically disposed toward participation if one lacks the opportunity to get involved” (Marx & McAdam, 1994: 90). Whether or not this can be applied to those moving from bystander to actor is questionable. The ability to make decisions about diet is not something that requires large amounts of planning. Choices around food are necessarily made, by the majority of people in North America, on a daily basis. Therefore, it would be difficult to argue that bystanders are unable to adopt vegetarianism due to a lack of opportunity. However, once an actor is inclined towards living consciously, he or she may realize greater opportunities to make positive decisions in life, thus moving within the parameters of conscious living. For example, an engager who has reduced his or her meat consumption may choose to join a vegetarian organization to learn about new ways of cooking. This may lead to increased involvement in that organization, greater awareness of animal rights issues, and the adoption of a vegan diet. The engager might then be categorized as an activist, therefore passing through the continuum of conscious living .

Also examining the movement of actors, and how movement sympathizers are transformed into movement participants, Klandermans states that support and sympathy for issues are essential for taking action (1997). Additionally relevant to this discussion of the flexibility of conscious living is Klandermans’ description of how actors, conversely, can then become bystanders. He describes erosion of support as “the nonparticipation of individuals who, though once prepared to participate, have changed their minds and lost their readiness to take action” (Klandermans, 1997: 100). He claims that the transition

from actor to bystander is a result of various conditions. People can perceive the benefits of taking action as becoming suddenly less, their concerns for the issue are no longer as relevant, or their sympathy for the issue is not as strong. The purpose of this section is to further demonstrate conscious living as a varying concept that is dependent upon everyday solidarities with the natural world. This is done by investigating how former vegetarians and current vegetarian actors move within the conscious living continuum, by increasing or reducing the amount of aid they give to animals and the environment. Every interviewee in this section is a vegetarian actor, or has been at some point in his or her life. While the previous section discusses how people become actors, or remain bystanders, this section will explore those participants moving within the actor categories through changes in diet.

### *Former Vegetarians*

Addressing the question of movement within conscious living, the first group to be examined consists of interviewees who are former vegetarians. Jessica (22), classified as a bystander, was vegetarian for about six years. She claims that she originally adopted vegetarianism for health reasons, to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into her diet, because she cared about animals, and also for weight loss. She states that becoming involved in a serious relationship was largely responsible for her decision to become an omnivore. However, she says that “if I had someone here that cooked all my meals for me, definitely, yes, I would be vegetarian.” Even though Jessica (22) may have gone vegetarian partly due to a concern for animals, her reasons were still oriented primarily towards her health. If she became vegetarian again, for reasons only associated with

convenience, such as having someone prepare all her meals, she would still be classified as a bystander because she would be motivated by self-interest. Jessica's experiences fit with Klandermans' (1997) statement that some may become less involved in an issue because the costs outweigh the benefits. Having a vegetarian diet, separate from her partner, would be too difficult for Jessica to justify in terms of the extra work that preparing different meals would create.

Another former vegetarian, Keith (1), a participant, claims that he learned about vegetarianism during his undergraduate study and wanted to give it a try. He says that he went to an activist school and there seemed to be a lot of peer pressure to stop eating meat; he had many vegan and vegetarian friends who were involved in social justice movements. He explains, "I began to think about food in terms of where do I fit into things, what debt do people have to the environment, food production, our well-being. How you eat is pretty imperative to who you are." After becoming vegetarian, Keith (1) chose to start eating meat for a number of reasons. He states that it is difficult to cook vegetarian food and ensure that it is nutritionally sound. In addition, he has "never been comfortable with the idea of blurring the ethical lines between us and animals entirely. I feel like there are differences...My primary responsibility was people." Now, Keith (1) feels that our culture is far from a full-scale acceptance of vegetarianism, and he would not be comfortable returning to a meat-free diet. Once again, Klandermans' (1997) ideas are supported since Keith feels his health is of utmost importance (costs outweigh benefits), and that he now feels it is more important to help other human beings than natural others (sympathy is not as strong).

Cassie, (9) a former vegetarian classified as an engager, is somewhat of an anomaly in terms of Klandermans' (1997) concepts about erosion of support. Cassie explains how she first became vegetarian at a young age. She recalls, "when I was a youth I became responsible for cooking one of the family's meals a week, with the help of my parents. I started having some control and understanding of where food came from...I think it was just at that time that I was finally having to face where food came from, and food preparation which I had been sheltered from before." While Cassie was vegetarian for many years, she eventually developed a health problem that prevented her from being meat-free. When asked if she would take up vegetarianism once again, she states, "if I could have a diverse enough diet, considering my health problem, and get enough vitamins without eating meat, then probably yeah" (Cassie, 9). Although Cassie is no longer vegetarian, her position as an engager is based on a number of other actions she takes to help animals and the environment, which were outlined in the previous chapter.

Further, when discussing how people come to be vegetarian, and give aid to the natural environment, Cassie (9) reflects on her experiences and claims that people need to make a connection between their food and animals. She says, "it's knowing that animals and meat are related, and knowing that the animal is a sentient feeling creature, which may be a step that's missing in our society. Although I think that's changing, I think it's starting to change really rapidly. Going back to Descartes, who declared that animals had no souls, they were just an animal. I don't think people can really live with that anymore. More and more scientific studies are coming out that show that they have human capacities that are like ours but not as advanced."

While Jessica (22), Keith (1) and Cassie (9) discuss the reasons why they became vegetarian, and then omnivorous, it is obvious that they have had experiences that differ. Consequently, their placements along the conscious living continuum vary. While Jessica and Cassie may be willing to adopt a meat-free diet again, Keith claims that he is less likely to do so. Jessica (22), a bystander, would most likely only become vegetarian for reasons associated with her own self interest. Keith (1), a participant, although not likely to give up eating meat, is concerned primarily with human rights issues, yet still takes small amounts of action towards helping the natural environment. Cassie (9), an engager, cannot be vegetarian for health reasons, although she strongly sees the connection between helping animals and her diet. She is also involved in a number of activities that promote environmental well-being. Jessica, Keith and Cassie validate the idea that living consciously is based on the choices one makes each day with regard to the natural world. The way one lives their life can change from one point in time to the next, as beliefs and life experiences often do.

### *Current Vegetarians*

The next grouping of people deals with vegetarians and vegans who have moved around within conscious living. While most interviewees discuss what caused them to move from bystander to actor and adopt a vegetarian diet, these interviewees spend less time talking about how their actions towards the natural environment can change day to day. The relative lack of information about the specific ways in which actors help the environment on a daily basis was something I realized only once all of the interviews had been conducted, and time and resources did not permit me to re-enter the field. More data

about the lifestyle choices that actors make every day could further address how they move within the categories typed as participants, engagers and activists. Nevertheless, the detailed experiences of vegetarians that I have managed to gather will be compared to those of the former vegetarians, above, to strengthen the notion that conscious living can only be defined as a continuum.

Sherry (13), an engager, states that she has been a vegetarian on and off for over 28 years. “I was vegetarian for over six years during university, and then I had a doctor convince me that it was the wrong choice for my health. I have presently been vegetarian for over twelve years now, with ten of those years being vegan.” While Sherry (13) eventually went from vegetarian to vegan because of her concern for the natural world, another interviewee, Louise (11), explains her transition from vegan to vegetarian. She states that being vegan is “easier with a partner who is vegan.” Although, Louise does claim that her primary motivation for not eating meat is to help the natural world. While Sherry is firm in her current commitment to veganism, Louise mentions that she could become vegan once again. Sherry’s reasons differ from Louise’s, however, since Sherry would remain a vegan based on a concern for the natural world, whereas Louise would consider veganism depending on a partner’s preference. While both Sherry and Louise are actors, differences in their beliefs, and thus flexibility within conscious living, are apparent.

Another case of actor movement is presented by Erin (19), currently categorized as an activist, who describes how she became vegetarian at age eight, and then moved around from being omnivorous, vegetarian and finally vegan. At eight, she watched a documentary about animals being treated horribly for meat. This caused her to be

vegetarian until she was fourteen, after which she ate meat for six years. At twenty she became vegetarian again, and for the past year she has been vegan. When asked why her diet has been in flux, Erin (19) offers an interesting explanation.

Now, as to why I went back to eating meat, I don't really know and sometimes wonder and ask myself why and I can't think of any good reason. I think it was just being in high school and kind of being around your friends and not worrying so much about what's important for society, what's important for animals and health and whatnot and going with the flow and doing what your friends did. So I think that was probably it. Now, when I became vegetarian again I think it was going to university and I finally got away from friends that were meat eaters and I got to know more people that were alternative minded...in university there was more of that...I started to realize that I should become vegan as well if I wanted to live up to my ideals (19).

Even though Erin has moved around, and in and out of conscious living, she is currently considered an activist based upon her dedication to helping animals and the environment. Her experiences, lifestyle choices, and beliefs also differ from those of Sherry and Louise, and as a result of being an activist, she is placed apart from them along the continuum.

### **How the Movement of Bystanders and Actors Compare**

The purpose of this chapter was to strengthen my argument that conscious living is a flexible concept that must be considered in the form of a continuum. This was done by using vegetarianism as an indicator of people's willingness to help the natural other through everyday instances of solidarity. I began by asking how people come to be bystanders or actors, according to their experiences and ideas around vegetarianism. While each person's experiences can be described, it is impossible to come to any general conclusion about how someone becomes a bystander or actor. Social theories of the

bystander do not contribute much to this discussion, because once again, it is unfeasible to account for the differences in every person's life experiences. However, I did discover that interviewees generally did not become vegetarian through an abrupt enthusiasm towards helping the natural world, as Bauman (2002) discusses<sup>29</sup>. Rather, the process of changing their diets was slow and deliberate. While bystanders would consider becoming vegetarian for their own health, or the preference of a partner, they would not become vegetarian to help the natural world. This is consistent with their categorization as bystanders. Yet, one bystander is open to the idea of refraining from eating meat in order to help the environment. This is an example that shows that there are differences among bystander behaviour.

Similarly, there are disparities between the reasons participants and engagers would become, or are, vegetarian. Yet, activists remain united in that they feel veganism is essential in alleviating the suffering of the natural world. The dissimilarities in the ways in which bystanders and actors act towards the natural other are revealing of the fact that conscious living must be defined along a continuum based on people's differing experiences, ideas and everyday actions.

The second part of this chapter addressed how actors move within the continuum of conscious living as a result of their daily lifestyle choices. As there are differences between bystanders and actors as a result of differing life stories, individuals can also have experiences that may alter their beliefs, perceptions and willingness to act in favour of the natural world. Once again, this reinforces the flexibility of conscious living.

While Marx and McAdam (1994) claim that for a person to become involved in an issue they must have sufficient opportunity, I believe that this only partially applies to

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<sup>29</sup> I describe this on page 111.

those becoming vegetarian. Since people make decisions about food on a daily basis, they have plenty of chances to help animals and the environment. The argument of ignorance is not valid here, since every interviewee was knowledgeable, to different degrees, about the way in which food is linked to the natural world. However, the argument of sufficient opportunity made by Marx and McAdam (1994) can apply to some former vegetarians. Jessica, who was a vegetarian, found that the circumstance of having a family made it too difficult to make two types of meals each day. Similarly, Cassie, due to a health condition, is not physically able to be vegetarian.

Klandermans' (1997) claims around erosion of support are also applicable to former vegetarians, and those reducing their aid to animals and the environment. In addition to insufficient opportunity to remain vegetarian, former vegetarians Jessica and Keith experienced a lessening of concern for the natural world. They also thought that the costs of being vegetarian were more than the benefits (Klandermans, 1997). Similarly, Louise, a current vegetarian, moved from vegan to vegetarian due to her partners' diets. Following Klandermans' (1997) reasoning, Louise's need to be vegan was no longer as pressing after she ended the relationship with her vegan partner.

Overall, the difference among the actors' movements within the continuum, and the experiences of Louise, Sherry and Erin, exemplify the fact that conscious living is continuously constructed in everyday actions. Comparing interviewees classified as both bystanders and actors, speculations can be made about some of the discernable patterns of movement within the continuum. As mentioned, the evident differences in bystander behaviour suggest that with a greater amount of data, the category of bystander can be further divided into a typology. Also, those classified as bystanders may only become

vegetarian for reasons associated with health or personal relationships. While vegetarian actors describe a number of reasons why they are vegetarian, omnivorous actors, namely participants and engagers, seem more open to the idea of reducing their meat consumption or potentially adopting a vegetarian diet in the future. Relationships also seem to be a likely cause of movement within the continuum. Marriage and children caused one interviewee to give up vegetarianism, while some interviewees claim that they could be vegetarian, or move from vegetarian to vegan, if they were with a partner who supported their decision. While activists claim it is essential to be with a partner who shares their dietary choices, they also show little movement in the continuum and most likely have a stronger commitment to vegetarianism based on a greater interest in the well-being of animals and the environment.

Perhaps this is the most discernible pattern: those who have the greatest concern for the natural world are more likely to be vegetarian, or vegan. I believe that in most cases, people with the greatest concern are probably taking the most action to help animals and the environment and can therefore be considered activists. In addition, those who are somewhat concerned about the natural world can probably be considered either engagers or participants. It is more likely that engagers are vegetarian, since they take greater action than participants. The data also suggest that since participants have less concern for the natural world, if they are vegetarian, they are more likely than engagers or activists to become omnivorous and potentially move within the conscious living continuum. Once again, these ideas are only speculative, although they are based on the interview findings. Areas of future research, in the conclusion, will address the different dimensions of conscious living that could be explored.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

### Summary

#### *Social Significance and Findings*

The main objective of this thesis has been to take a closer look at the idea of human/non-human solidarities. I began by asking the following questions: what makes people act in solidarity with the natural world; why do some people take more action than others? In addition, to what extent do people perceive vegetarianism as an action intended to help animals and the environment? I argue that as humans, our conception of the other needs to be extended to include the natural world. Each day we interact with animals and the environment, specifically through the choices we make around food, which is revealing about our solidarities with the natural world.

This research is sociologically significant because the findings contribute to both social theories of solidarity and social theories of the bystander. While research around solidarity is usually related to the exploration of human kinship, this thesis shows how people may, or may not choose to act in solidarity with the natural world. Also, in the midst of uncovering the actuality that solidarity can be extended to the natural other, it is important to realize that because we are constantly interacting with animals and the environment, social theories of solidarity need to be examined in the context of the everyday.

Social theories of the bystander are also enhanced through the research findings. Usually, bystander theories only describe two categories of people: bystanders and actors. After an examination of the ways in which people act towards the natural world on a

daily basis, it becomes obvious that people cannot be easily placed into the categories of either bystander or actor. Therefore, social theories of the bystander have to be extended to include a range of actor behaviour, defined as conscious living. I have done this by creating a typology of actors which includes participants, engagers and activists. Through the construction of types, models of actor behaviour in relation to vegetarianism can be analyzed.

An emerging pattern in this research points out that being vegetarian appears to coincide with greater concern for the natural world. Yet, it is important to note that not all vegetarians act in relation to diet out of concern for the natural world. For example, those who are minimally concerned with the natural world are considered participants, while those who are the most concerned are likely be categorized as activists. It is probable that, outside of this research, more activists are vegetarian than are engagers or participants. In addition, the construction of conscious living along a continuum exposes the ways in which people move among the actor types. Patterns begin to surface that suggest that activists are less likely to transition from being vegetarian to omnivorous. There is a greater chance that vegetarian participants will begin eating meat because their concern for the natural world is not as strong. Factors such as relationships and health also have an influence on one's inclination to become, stay, or stop being vegetarian. However, the scope of this thesis only allows for an exploratory analysis of these choices; our relationships with animals and the environment needs to be more seriously examined in social research.

### *The Contribution of Conscious Living*

The concept of conscious living is necessary to explain the ways in which humans act in solidarity with the natural other on a daily basis. I have argued that this research is sociologically significant because it extends social theories of solidarity and social theories of the bystander. Adding to these theories has allowed for the construction of the concept of conscious living in order to explain how we interact with the natural world.

A similarity between social theories of the bystander and the concept of conscious living is that they both involve the two components of knowing and acting. While bystanders and actors both know about a situation where another needs aid, bystanders choose not to give aid while actors bestow varying degrees of support. Overall, conscious living is concerned with this link between knowing and acting, which is necessary to examine in terms of those classified as bystanders and actors. To account for the different ways that people choose to give help, conscious living involves an expansion of the actor category first described in social theories of the bystander.

Categorizing actors into a typology allows for a detailed investigation of the ways in which they act towards the natural other, using vegetarianism as an indicator. While it is impossible to devise a general equation for what makes people become either bystanders or actors in life, the variations in the way bystander and actor interviewees act towards the natural other are reflective of potential patterns of conscious living. As described above, and more thoroughly in the previous chapter, future research could address some of the emerging patterns such as movement within the continuum and how relationships affect diet.

Since people's beliefs, experiences and lifestyle choice differ, it is crucial to construct conscious living in the form of a continuum that has the ability to represent the changing actions of individuals. Interviewees who take positive action on a daily basis are making a range of decisions and have varying levels of interest in social issues. While a participant may be considered an actor because he or she takes part in recycling programs, for example, an activist may be an actor because of a commitment to veganism, eating local organic food, and being the president of an environmental organization. While there is a clear distinction between bystanders and actors, the variation in people's actions and experiences is demonstrated by interviewees who have moved within the continuum, as well as those transitioning from bystander to actor, and others moving from actor to bystander. I will continue by reflecting on the research process and outlining potential avenues for future research.

### **Reflections about the Research Process**

There are a number of matters that need to be addressed with respect to the research process that I have used. The extent to which this study can be generalized to society, the number of interviews conducted, the use of vegetarianism as an indicator, and means of ensuring confidentiality are discussed.

#### *The Difference of Experience*

The specific results of this study cannot be generalized to society as a whole. Sampling for meaning, the research was conducted on a very small scale in Ottawa. As experiences vary from person to person in this study, it is expected that the actions people

take towards the natural world would also vary between cities. Since calls for participants were conducted in public places in Ottawa, and I asked people I knew to take part in my research, I was personally familiar with some of the interviewees through my own involvement in vegetarian groups. Because the sample size of 26 participants was relatively small, and methods of sampling were not random, these exact findings cannot be generalized to all of society. Yet, speculations about surfacing patterns are possible. This thesis suggests that beyond these interviewees, in general, actors can be categorized into the groups of participants, engagers and activists. Each type has specific characteristics and ways of acting toward the natural world. One's placement in a type could be a predictor of their future actions toward animals and the environment. In addition, emerging patterns of movement along the conscious living continuum could reveal the likelihood of bystanders and actors to adopt/ give up vegetarianism based on their commitment to helping the natural world.

### *Sample Size*

While in-depth interviews provided a wealth of information in order to facilitate the initial construction of conscious living, it is clear that this concept is still evolving. As mentioned above, the sample size of 26 participants was relatively small, although it seemed to be sufficient for the scope of this research design.

However, once I had finished data collection and started to construct the concept of conscious living through the frameworks of grounded theory, it became apparent that the majority of interviewees could be considered actors with regards to the natural world. This was beneficial in that their interview transcripts gave me enough data to further

develop the category of actor into a typology that included participants, engagers and activists. At the same time, there were not enough interviewees categorized as bystanders to divide them into sub-categories or a similar typology. When I analyzed the data, differences among bystanders began to emerge, yet more data are necessary in order to determine how bystanders could be placed into sub-categories along the conscious living continuum.

### *Vegetarianism as an Indicator*

By no means is it my intention to limit the definition of conscious living to include only the actions people make around vegetarianism; I have chosen diet as one specific example of the ways in which people make decisions about how they live day to day. In my opinion, people's thoughts about being vegetarian are a valid indicator because the ways in which we act in solidarity with the natural world, on a daily basis, can be revealed through our dietary choices.

While I was able to use interview transcripts to determine how diet affects one's classification as bystander or actor, and the ways in which interviewees move along the continuum of conscious living, I was not able to address issues outside of how people act towards the natural other. Interviewees may have been categorized differently if the subject matter was wider in breadth. For instance, an interviewee could be deemed a participant because he or she buys local produce. At the same time, that person could potentially be considered a bystander due to a lack of interest in helping homeless people. Since only a few social issues were discussed during the interviews, I can only assume

that actors in one area of life may be bystanders in another, and vice versa. Nevertheless, this works to emphasize the fact that conscious living must be defined as a continuum.

### *Interview Issues*

Throughout this process, interviews were sometimes difficult to conduct due to the lack of resources available, such as a constant, common interview location. In addition, the nature of in-depth interviews makes them time consuming, and therefore, the amount of time I had to actually conduct the interviews was limited. These factors resulted in interviews taking place in less than ideal conditions and locations.

As mentioned, some interviews took place over email. While this had an impact on the structure of the interview in that it was not as flexible as one done in person, conducting research over email raises questions of confidentiality. Each person who did an interview over the internet signed a consent form, and had no problem with emailing me the answers to the questions that I asked. However, it must be acknowledged that sending information over email is not as secure as gathering information in person.

Besides ensuring that collected data are secure, it is important to be certain that identifying information is removed from the published research report. While interviewees may or may not be able to identify their own responses, it is crucial that interviewees cannot discern to whom the statements of another belongs. In some cases, I interviewed two people who were involved in a relationship with each other. While the two members of the couple were never interviewed at the same time, some of the ways in which they answered my questions about lifestyle habits were very similar. I have tried

my best to remove identifying information from this thesis. It is my hope that those involved in relationships will not be able to recognize their partner's comments.

### **The Direction of Future Research**

The construction of conscious living is the result of an exploratory analysis based on interview data and a reading of literature surrounding social theories of solidarity, the bystander, and social movements. I have conceptualized conscious living in the form of a continuum, along which bystanders, participants, engagers and activists are identified. Based on this model, patterns of acting towards the natural world have become apparent. With the collection of greater amounts of data, future research could add different dimensions to the continuum. Two of these dimensions could address people that are unaware of suffering, or those taking action in a negative sense.

The way I have started to construct conscious living involves bystanders and actors. Both are aware of suffering, but only actors take action. What about people who are oblivious to the suffering of another? Bauman claims that the argument of ignorance is losing its credibility due to globalization and the growing distances between seeing and knowing. While each person I interviewed was aware of the link between the natural world and diet, and the suffering of the natural world due to dietary choices, it is likely that some people remain unaware. Or, some may be aware yet not identify the situation as a problem. While those who are oblivious to the distress of the natural world would not be placed along the conscious living continuum, in future research, this group of people could be interviewed to discover how knowledge about suffering is obtained. When it

comes to the suffering of animals and the environment, to what extent can one still make the argument of ignorance?

Besides those who may be unaware of suffering, another group of people to consider are those taking action in a negative sense. This thesis looks primarily at those taking positive action, or no action, to come to the aid of animals and the environment. Nevertheless, there are people who take negative action and are the cause of suffering. These so-called negative actors could potentially be placed along the continuum, opposite the positive actors. Patterns among those actors I have identified point to the notion that perhaps a 'negative actor' typology could be developed in future research. This would add another component to social theories of solidarity and social theories of the bystander, as the link between knowing and acting could be further examined.

While this thesis only begins to address the ways in which social theories of the bystander can be expanded so as to describe the aid that people give to the natural world, a framework needs to be developed that further evaluates actors, and more specifically bystanders, in order to understand how our daily actions of solidarity come together with conscious living. This could be done by investigating the ways in which people help the natural world in other areas of their lives apart from being vegetarian. With regards to lifestyle choices intended to help the environment and animals, further study could look at choices made around careers, housing, and modes of transportation. Generally, I do not think that the definition of conscious living must be exclusive to discussions surrounding our relationships with the natural other. I am hopeful that in the future, the concept of conscious living can be further developed, and used to explore the multitude of solidarities in which we are united on a daily basis.

## **Appendix 1: Non-Vegetarian and Former Vegetarian Interview Schedules**

### **Non-Vegetarian Schedule**

#### *Main Questions:*

- What type of diet do you follow?
- Have you always been an omnivore?
- Why do you follow an omnivorous diet?
- Is being an omnivore a political or moral choice?
- In any way, do you consider yourself an activist? If someone is a vegetarian, would you consider them an activist?
- I'd like to know how concerned you are with environmental issues, animal welfare issues, food production issues and personal health issues. Could you rank these in order of importance?
- Can you explain why you ranked them this way? Would you say you're very concerned, somewhat concerned or not concerned with each? How does this relate to your diet, and the choices you make on a daily basis?
- What are the benefits of being omnivorous?
- Do you feel responsible for helping the natural environment, or animals? (Is this connected to dietary choice?)
- Does one person taking action to help the environment/animals make a difference?
- Are there any circumstances that would make you take up a vegetarian diet?
- Why aren't more people vegetarian? What would it take for more people to go vegetarian?
- Are you involved in any social activist groups? How did you become involved in these groups?  
Is this the same reason why you're still involved?

- Do you know any vegetarians?
- Does society encourage vegetarianism? Why or why not?

*Emerging themes and areas of discussion:*

- Tell me about your close, personal relationships – how are they connected to food and diet?
- Have any of your career choices been connected to diet?

**Former Vegetarian Schedule**

*Main Questions:*

- How long were you vegetarian?
- Why did you follow a vegetarian diet?
- Was being a vegetarian a political or moral choice?
- I'd like to know how concerned you are with environmental issues, animal welfare issues, food production issues and personal health issues. Could you rank these in order of importance?
- Can you explain why you ranked them this way? Would you say you're very concerned, somewhat concerned or not concerned with each? How does this relate to your diet, and the choices you make on a daily basis?
- How did you become vegetarian? Was there an event?
- Why did you then choose an omnivorous diet? Was there an event?
- How long have you been an omnivore?
- Why do you currently follow an omnivorous diet?
- Is being an omnivore a political or moral choice?

- In any way, do you consider yourself an activist? If someone is a vegetarian, would you consider them an activist?
- What are the benefits of being omnivorous? What are the benefits of being vegetarian?
- Do you feel responsible for helping the natural environment, or animals?
- Does one person taking action to help the environment/animals make a difference?
- Are there any circumstances that would make you take up a vegetarian diet once again?
- Why aren't more people vegetarian? What would it take for more people to go vegetarian?
- Are you involved in any social activist groups? How did you become involved in these groups?  
Is this the same reason why you're still involved?
- Before you became vegetarian, did you know other vegetarians? Did they help influence your decision? Compared to when you were vegetarian, how many vegetarians do you know now?
- Does society encourage vegetarianism?

*Emerging themes and areas of discussion:*

- Tell me about your close, personal relationships – how are they connected to food and diet?
- Have any of your career choices been connected to diet?

## Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

In random sequence, this list provides the most basic information about each interviewee in order to provide the reader with a quick reference to their age and gender. All names have been changed.

1. Keith, male, former vegetarian, age 26
2. Matt, male, vegetarian, age 27
3. Kevin, male, vegetarian, age 42
4. Allison, female, non-vegetarian, age 24
5. Jeff, male, non-vegetarian, age 23
6. George, male, non-vegetarian, age 26
7. Lisa, female, vegan, age 20
8. Steve, male, vegan, age 25
9. Cassie, female, former vegetarian, age 36
10. Jenn, female, non-vegetarian, age 29
11. Louise, female, vegetarian, age 29
12. Kate, female, vegetarian, age 27
13. Sherry, female, vegan, age 39
14. Cathy, female, former vegetarian, age 27
15. Amanda, female, vegetarian, age 30
16. Joe, male, vegan, age, 21
17. Bridget, female, vegan, age 28
18. Paul, male, vegan, age 31
19. Erin, female, vegan, age 23
20. Lindsay, female, non-vegetarian, age 25
21. Michael, male, non-vegetarian, age 23
22. Jessica, female, former vegetarian, age 39
23. Tom, male, non-vegetarian, age 28
24. Karen, female, non-vegetarian, age 24
25. Deb, female, non-vegetarian, age 27
26. Tiffany, female, non-vegetarian, age 24

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