

**Bearing witness to the animal condition. Exploring the complex motivations, experiences and coping-strategies of Sheffield Save Movement Activists (UK)**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Bearing Witness to The Animal Condition. Exploring the complex motivations, experiences and coping-strategies of Sheffield Save Movement Activists (UK)**

Alex Hinchcliffe and Richard J. White

#### **Introduction**

Animals in the food system are interesting for developing a theory of witnessing because the power imbalance between human and nonhuman animals is so great, as nonhuman animals are fundamentally ownable, commodifiable, and killable in service to human interests. In witnessing animal suffering in the food system, then, even the act of caring deeply for animals becomes a subversive political act of acknowledging an animal's subjectivity and her embodied experience. (Gillespie, 2016, p. 573)

The Save Movement's call to bear witness in ways that recognises the 'plight' of animals (Wolch and Emel, 1998), or 'the animal condition' (Pedersen and Stănescu, 2012), is gaining in momentum across the landscapes of non-violent direct action (see Nocella et al. 2014; Nocella et al, 2015; Pellow, 2014). Typically, Save Movement activists aim to strategically (and legally) occupy key sites that signify the transition between ostensibly 'non-violent', 'visible' and 'public-spaces' from those spaces that are altogether more 'violent', 'hidden', and 'private'. This is certainly true whenever vigils are organised in near proximity to slaughterhouses, and the activists bear witness to the transportation and unloading of non-human farmed animals. Unsurprisingly, Save Movement vigils are highly contested, unpredictable, complex and precarious spaces. Much of this can be accounted by the presence of a number of animal bodies flowing through it at any particular moment: from human activists, slaughterhouse workers, security guards, police officers, truck drivers and members of the general public to the involuntarily, coerced and cowed appearance of other nonhuman

animals. These, in turn, become places filled with extreme emotions (anger, resentment, fear, anguish, despair, hope), that capture a heightened atmosphere of tension, compromise, negotiation, and resistance (Jones, 2013). In this way, the inter-species activist geographies seen here have much in common with many other forms of direct action birthed in the name of social and spatial justice.

Situated in this broader context, and despite being very much an emergent area of enquiry across the social sciences, critical researchers have begun the important task of unpacking more fully key coping strategies of social justice/total liberation activists. This nascent research has brought a number of significant insights and reflections to light (e.g. Gillespie, 2016, 2018; Socha and Blum, 2013). However, within this body of literature, there is precious little research explicitly focused on the (UK) Save Movement: with the work of the researcher-activist Alex Lockwood (2016, 2017, 2018, 2022) being a notable exception. Responding to this lacuna, the chapter aims to help address these gaps in knowledge and understanding by drawing explicitly on a qualitative case study focused on Save Movement activists in the UK city of Sheffield. More specifically, the research draws attention to the findings that emerged from qualitative primary research that addressed these three central questions:

1. What are the main experiences of activists Bearing Witness?
2. What are the key motivations of activists who Bear Witness?
3. What are some of the important coping strategies employed by these activists?

The intention of the chapter then is two-fold. Firstly, to offer deeper and more nuanced understanding regarding the activist geographies harnessed through The Save Movement. Secondly, by drawing close attention to the types of activism and activists involved, the hope is that these insights can be used to highlight good practice, tactics and strategies that might

helpfully inform other forms of inter-species social justice activism and liberation movements.

Following a brief reflection on the research methodology that informs and underpins the research, the chapter will then introduce the Sheffield Animal Save Movement more fully. The key findings from the research are then grouped into three central themes: (1) the 'encounter', focusing on the activists experiences of Bearing Witness; (2) the rationales that activists draw on not only to attend a vigil, but do so repeatedly having already experienced the suffering and misery that takes place first-hand; and (3) the coping strategies that activists draw on to help cope with their experiences and negative emotions. The chapter continues by making several key reflections that emerge from these findings, before drawing to a conclusion.

### **A Note on the Methodology**

The qualitative research methodology used to inform the chapter draws on a range of complementary methods. Beginning in the summer of 2017, a series of one-to-one interviews with prominent Save Movement activists, as well as the use of 'activist diaries,' were used as a means to elicit insights into original, complex, unique and personal reflections of those fighting for liberation on the front lines. In addition to the oral testimonies of the activists' experiences, participants were also invited to bring photographs which were particularly meaningful to them. Some of these are included in the chapter. Recognising the important *social* dimension of *Bearing Witness* activism, a series of complementary focus-groups were set up in the hope of encouraging more reflective forms of discussion around key themes. A final key approach was the use of ethnographic research, drawing extensively from the first-hand experiences by one of the authors (Alex), who has been highly active within the Sheffield Save Movement since its inception in 2016. Where appropriate, in the interest of

maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms have been used instead of actual names.

### **The Save Movement and Sheffield Animal Save**

Founded in 2010 in Toronto, Canada, the Save Movement has multiplied rapidly in recent years. New chapters can be found across Africa, North America, South America, Asia and Australia, New Zealand, and Europe (including Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Spain). Indeed, there are now over 70 Save Movement groups active in the UK (The Save Movement, no date). Common across all Save Movement groups is the call to ‘Bear Witness’. The explicit reasons for doing so are two-fold: first, to express an inter-species solidarity and justice in the present moment, and secondly, to document with photographs, video footage and personal testimony the suffering of nonhuman animals and use this in the future to raise a deeper consciousness around a broader public. Anita Krajnc, founder of The Save Movement, advocates for a love-based, Gandhian approach much like the civil rights movement (Krajnc, 2012), indicating the ideology guiding the movement. All Save Movement groups are governed by a set of guiding principles and a code of conduct (see Box 1).

#### **Box 1: The Save Movement's Code of Conduct**

##### **Code of Conduct**

Our aims are to show love and compassion to animals in their final moments and raise awareness of their wrongful and unnecessary suffering and exploitation.

This code of conduct aims to give clear guidelines to vigil attendees.

The Save Movement (TSM) wants to ensure:

1. A welcoming, peaceful and safe environment for all those who attend.
2. No increase of anxiety or stress to the animals to whom we bear witness.
3. The principles of TSM are upheld.

When attending vigils, please adhere to the following:

1. At all times be mindful to keep a safe distance from the trucks when they are in motion, especially when they are turning.
2. Listen to, and respect the instructions of any TSM marshals who are there to ensure the safety of vigil attendees.
3. Respect the boundaries of any coned areas implemented by TSM to ensure safety.
4. Refrain from any violent, loud or threatening behaviour either verbal or physical towards slaughterhouse workers, security, police or truck drivers and members of the public.
5. Minimize loud noises or shouting in the presence of animals so as not to heighten their anxiety or stress. Do not use megaphones in close proximity to trucks. Approach them slowly with love and respect.
6. Respect other vigil attendees. We are all there for the animals and to build the animal rights community.
7. Non-compliance of the above or disrespectful behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated and we may ask individuals persistently violating the principles to leave the vigil. \*

\*Please note we accept that from time to time breeches of these guidelines may occur. The important thing is to always be striving towards upholding these ideal principles at all times. It is the duty and responsibility of all those who attend to ensure a safe and peaceful vigil experience for the group as a whole. Above all, stay safe, stay mindful, and stay committed to those who need us to hear their voice.

Sheffield Animal Save held their first vigil in January 2017 at Woolley Brothers slaughterhouse near Sheffield. The vigil attracted over 25 activists. Since then, the group has increased the frequency of their events: in 2018, vigils were being held once a week at multiple locations both within, and close to, Sheffield. One of these strategically focused on the N. Bramall and Sons abattoirs. In 2017, these abattoirs were the subject of an Animal Aid undercover investigation. The video footage of the nightmarish scenes recorded there was subsequently picked up by local and national media, drawing public attention toward a range of egregious forms of animal cruelty (Burke, 2017). Examples of abuse included, but were not limited to:

Fearful sheep... running in circles to evade being stunned and in another incident slaughtermen are seen laughing as an animal is twitching on the floor, having just been shot. At one point the udder of a spent dairy cow explodes. (Animal Aid, 2017, para 3)

Over the last eighteen months, while many of the vigils have been attended by a large number of activists, a core group of regular activists, those who rarely miss an event, has emerged. Their commitment is unwavering, doubly so in times of adversity, as when activists are exposed to the well below-freezing temperatures of an English winter. It is this group whose views were drawn on extensively as part of the research methodology.

To come across this huddle of people, holding signs with animal rights messages on them at 7am on a cold, frosty January morning, outside what appears to be an indeterminate 'ordinary' location, a passer-by may be forgiven for thinking ‘why on earth are these people there?’ It is to this question that the chapter will return shortly. Before doing so, an important contextual question needs to be considered: what is it like to *be* there?

## **Part I: The Encounter**

At the designated site, Save Movements activists stand in empathetic solidarity with every cow, pig, sheep or chicken as they pass through (i.e. are transported as "living stock" on slaughter trucks to be deposited and unloaded). The activists bear witness in full knowledge of the violence and suffering that has been always-present in these other animals' lives to this point and will again in the near future. This *near future* violence, they know, will be catastrophic enough to result in intense suffering, pain and ultimately the loss of life. The activists also know that, since their birth, these farmed animals that pass before them have been incarcerated, denied even the most basic of natural instincts, not least the freedom of space and movement. Born into a speciesist world, they never had a hope of living anything close to a natural and free life. In order to be transported to their deaths, these animals are crowded onto trucks and trailers and have no access to food or water during this time. Too many times they are forced to endure all kinds of extreme weather, from blistering heat in summer months to the piercing cold throughout the winter. Unsurprisingly, in such conditions many farmed animals often don't survive the journey, perishing from heat, cold or stress-induced pneumonia (Dunayer, 2001). During extreme cold winter days, it was not uncommon for Sheffield activists to witness pigs, barely alive, arriving at the slaughterhouse gates with their bodies frozen to the vehicles.

### **Photograph 1: Sheffield activists bearing witness**





Irrespective of the weather, the cramped, appalling conditions that the animals occupy in the slaughter trucks are nothing new to them. Perhaps the journey to the slaughterhouse is the only novel experience for many animals that, hitherto, have existed inside of dark, pitiful sheds during their unnaturally short lives. Certainly, time spent in daylight, fresh air and travelling are all unknowns. Activists talked about not being able to detect any positive reactions in these animals' faces that might reflect the novelty of the experience; their eyes betray their anxiousness and fear. The miserable disposition of animals arriving for slaughter is a common observation, as Kranjc (2012) states, "You can immediately discern confusion, fear, and pain in their captivating eyes." Their spirits are crushed and broken just as surely as their bodies will shortly come to be.

Having witnessed the arrival of the farmed animals, the Save Movement activists then observe the often brutal and merciless process of unloading the animals from trailers into pens where they are held before going to slaughter. This "living stock" must be moved as quickly as possible, their commodified lives valued only in capitalist terms, and for the workers [and their owners], time is money (for powerful reflections on the entanglement of animal oppression and capitalism see Nibert, 2017a, 2017b). No exceptions are made, regardless of however weak, injured or ill the animals may be. Activists from Sheffield Animal Save have witnessed slaughterhouse workers repeatedly kicking young pigs from

trucks and violently prodding cows with long metal poles in efforts to force them into the slaughterhouse. This behaviour is reportedly common amongst workers at the N. Bramall and Sons slaughterhouse, as mentioned earlier. Activists, when interviewed, often reported witnessing slaughterhouse workers' wanton cruelty to other animals, as well as experiencing inflamed levels of aggression and hostility directly to their own persons. Indeed, examples were given of Save Movement activists having personal items stolen by slaughterhouse workers, activists being sprayed with a high pressure water hose and activists being doused in blue dye used in the slaughterhouse to mark inedible body parts.

Finally, the farmed animals are seen standing huddled and isolated in front of the slaughterhouse. The *sensory* dimensions of space - particularly sounds and smells - betray the hidden horror that lives within the slaughterhouse itself. One of the most nauseous is the foul and noxious stench of - quite literally - death. The chicken slaughterhouses in particular create an odour so objectionable that it becomes almost visible in the atmosphere, a point that activists from Save Movement groups that bear witness to chickens will regularly draw attention to and reflect on. Concomitant with the smell are the piercing screams of those animals who are facing - or enduring - their own deaths. It is a heart-breaking sound for activists who are present, one which burns deeply into their soul and which, once heard, can never be forgotten. It is a sound that is born at the very moment our human dominion over other animals is at its most violent; a terrible terrifying cry that is, undoubtedly, the same as humans make when subjected to such torture and brutality. It is primeval sound, something beyond words. Thus, in their last moment of life on this earth, their final breaths scream of injustice, anguish and misery, a futile cry for help that will never come.

To bear witness to this once is incredibly hard; activists speak of having to resist every instinct to either flee or to intervene directly (and illegally) to end this inter-species nightmare. To come back and bear witness to this is to open yourself to a hellish dystopia that

wrenches and guts your heart again, and again, and again. Not surprisingly, the distressing nature of attending a vigil and bearing witness to callous acts of cruelty and brutality carried out just meters away was keenly felt by the respondents. An increasing sense of dread and unease was commonly experienced by activists as a Save Movement vigil approached. This sense of foreboding never goes away no matter how many vigils an activist had previously attended.

For first time activists though, their worst fears and expectations never prepare them for what they encounter. Rachael, for example, spoke openly of the trauma she experienced: “I attended my first vigil at the beginning of June for their [Sheffield Animal Save] five-day event ... I found the first day to be one of the worst experiences of my life and I almost vomited”. Lily also reflected on how her thoughts are taken over by knowledge that the animals that will be slaughtered, and also animals are being slaughtered nearby at that particular moment in time. She recalled a particularly traumatic experience she went through with Manchester Pig Save, when bearing witness to pigs being transported to slaughter: “[F]rom Manchester Pig Save where you can hear the gas chambers, when I first saw that I broke down, I think most people do at their first Save.” The feeling of helpless is also closely linked to frustration, a connection Alex drew attention to in his activist diary:

My frustration is often the over-riding feeling I experience during and after attending a Save Movement vigil; frustration at the fate faced by billions of animals across the world, at the apathy exhibited by the majority of society towards their plight but predominantly at the minimal impact I am able to make in that moment. Each truck passing by packed with innocent animals destined for slaughter is another reminder that thus far, for these animals at least, our efforts to advocate on their behalf have ultimately been in vain, leading to intense feelings of guilt and failure.

This dystopian reality is a particularly bitter pill to swallow and process, and is recounted by other respondents. For example, Rachael spoke of: “[T]he feelings of helplessness, overwhelming frustration and sadness [that] are difficult to deal with”. Indeed, for many activists, the tremendous feelings of sadness, anger and frustration are exacerbated by the inability to be able to actually do anything (legally) to directly help those animals escape the abuse.

Repetitive emotional distress is also experienced by activists, not least those who record and re-watch vigil film footage or photographs. Two of the research participants were creating a documentary film concerning the Save Movement at the time they were interviewed and spent a lot of their time at different vigils with different Save Movement groups. Interestingly, for them, the mental and emotional burden didn’t come so much during the event, but rather afterwards as they worked through the material they had collected. As Joshua describes:

It could be days and weeks after when you’re going through everything else, that’s when it hits you more and more because you have to go over it and over it and over it instead of it just happening in real time where you can deal with it all at once, it just comes back again and again, that’s the weird thing about filming; it's easier on the day but worse after.

For these activists, being focused on the task at hand and thinking (semi-professionally) about ‘the right’ camera angles and achieving a good shot meant they didn’t fully appreciate the emotional nature of their subject and surroundings in these moments. However, upon re-visiting the material, it was then that sadness, frustration and anger hit them. Naomi revealed how difficult she finds it to process the realities of the animal’s fate:

It's the editing part that's the really hard part, and I think that's because I know that they're not here anymore, like that animal that I was with is now not here, like sometimes I just can't even comprehend that.

For Save Movement activists, their mental state may justifiably be framed as representing a type of 'post-traumatic stress'. Indeed, a number of the research participants reported thoughts constantly preoccupied with images and memories of vigils, with some even revealing they had experienced breakdowns and nightmares as a result. In short, it is impossible to underestimate the (emotional) stress and pain that activists endure, and this suffering became apparent throughout the research. This was something that Alex also drew attention to in his activist research diary:

Faced with the devastating reality that animals are being slaughtered in the billions despite our best efforts, coupled with seeing the distressed, confused and hopeless faces of these individuals moments before they endure an unimaginable fate, it is no wonder that myself and other activists often experience overwhelming feelings of guilt, born out of frustration and helplessness. This in turn can often lead to activists charging themselves with not doing enough for the cause. This feeling of moral duty can often cause more feelings of guilt, leading to activists struggling with the thought that they aren't active enough. (23<sup>rd</sup>

August 2017)

Indeed, throughout his diary, a common theme Alex reflected on was a deep sense of guilt that emerged through not doing enough activism. One illustration of this was when he had to spend time away from the city: "feeling ready to get back to Sheffield and get back doing stuff; feeling guilty about not getting involved with activism recently."

This entry was written when Alex went on a family holiday for a week. The sense of guilt at missing activist events was undoubtedly exacerbated by social media, which

documented what vigils had taken place in his absence. This feeling of inadequacy is a familiar refrain echoed by others. As Rachael noted:

I always feel so guilty that I'm not doing enough. It's such a conflict because I genuinely believe that doing vegan outreach and street activism is the best use of my time and resources and I know I cannot do everything but when I see other people doing so much I can't help but feel guilt.

In this sense, the space in which activists occupy is never, or rather no longer 'out-there'. It is a space which has become internalised - a haunting and traumatic space, one which affects engagement with others (activists spoke of intensified negative feelings of frustration and alienation toward non-vegan friends and family) and society more generally. On a profound level, it becomes impossible to fully leave this space, as you cannot unsee what you have seen, and these memories are powerful enough, quite literally, to affect everything thereafter (see photograph 2). As a prominent Sheffield Save Movement activist, Megan McGrath, noted:

The stench of animal faeces from the transportation trucks is something that lingers long after leaving, along with the sights of the skeletons, heads and organs of the animals that not minutes ago we stroked being forklifted into a skip as waste. (McGrath, 2017, n.p.).

**Photograph 2: Bearing Witness - a haunting and traumatic encounter**



### **Exploring the Motivations of Save Movement Activists, or Why We Continue to Stand Outside Slaughterhouses at 6 AM**

Given the profound emotional and psychological distress involved, seeking to find out why Sheffield Animal Save activists return to bear witness brings to light a complex range of motivations. For example, there was a broad consensus in both the focus groups and interviews that *not* acting on their heightened consciousness around the suffering of animals and the violence that befalls them was simply not an option. Not only was this a key expression of their unconditional commitment to critical vegan praxis, but also because of a strong sense that other forms of *indirect* action - signing petitions, for example - was nowhere near enough. Indeed, these feelings, particularly antipathy toward appealing to government to end animal suffering, run true across many animal rights activists. Here, and in the broader context, activists often speak of a *desire* to draw attention to the injustices they see by taking direct action (Herzog, 1993). For Sheffield Animal Save activists, the motivation to take direct action through bearing witness went beyond a desire, and was framed instead as a ‘moral duty’: an obligation to act on behalf of animals.

Unpacking this appeal to a moral duty and understanding the rationales that underpin it is revealing. For some activists, this moral duty was rooted in overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame associated with their past, specifically their speciesist worldview, and how this manifested itself through the consumption of animals' bodies. Peter captured these complex emotions perfectly when reflecting that:

I owe it to the animals...spending most of your life eating animals, to me it feels like when I go to the vigils it's a motivation to wake up, to go there and bear witness and give them one final moment of comfort.

In addition to drawing on the past failures, where attending vigils allowed individuals to express remorse for their complicity in animal abuse, there were other complex factors at work when an identity of self (ego) was replaced by the collective identity of 'human'. Thus, over-riding motivations for attending the vigils were less about personal histories (forgiveness?), but were driven by a sense of shame for *being human*. As Naomi reflected in her interview:

I think it's about being there for the individual animal, *and apologising that you were part of that*, and showing everybody that isn't already vegan ... to bring it into everybody's consciousness.

Alex also reflected in depth on this question in relation to his own commitment to attending vigils, one which centred around a 'moral obligation':

When being woken at 4:30am in the freezing winter months and facing the prospect of standing for 5 hours in the cold outside of a slaughterhouse, staying in a warm bed seemed particularly comforting. Thinking about the derision and abuse from slaughterhouse workers, the general public and police, made this feeling of inertia even stronger. But I always remind myself of the animals that died as a result of my past actions, and I also have an ongoing moral obligation to



act, given that I knew the fate that these animals would soon face. This helped massively in my involvement with Sheffield Animal Save. Additionally, the idea that if everyone took the easy, comfortable option and didn't show up, that the animals on route to slaughter that morning would face their horrific fate without a single moment of potential comfort or connection.

It is important that reflections that draw on highly personal reasons as motivations for being present in these places of misery should not be seen as indulgent or virtue signalling. Indeed, throughout the research timeline, many activists, when being asked to focus on their own activist biographies and negative experiences on vigils, realized these were things they had rarely thought about. Held against the immense suffering and trauma of the animals they had bared witnessed to, there was a real reluctance to discuss their own suffering. The core of their activism was never about them, it was always - and will always be about the other animals.

The activists were there *because* of those living animals, both to express an inter-species solidarity and, wherever possible, to try to physically connect or comfort them in some ways. The opportunity to make physical contact was heavily negotiated. The slaughterhouse staff and police did allow a short window of time, while the animals were still inside the slaughterhouse trucks, for activists to approach the animals and communicate with them and/or take photographs. This desire for positive connection rather than just 'passive observation' is instructive, for it underpins a persuasive re-framing of the Save Movement as both an intrinsic and instrumental space of activism.

### **Photograph 3: Beyond Witnessing –the need for physical connection**



The intrinsic (as an end in itself) dimension of Bearing Witness has often been underplayed, particularly by those who are sceptical as to what part of the "Save" Movement actually "saves" nonhuman animals. While this is an important critique, it is important that the motivation to try and help the animals condemned to slaughterhouse is never lost nor marginalised (see Photograph 4). With this in mind, perhaps the 'Light Movement', rather than 'Save Movement' would be a better description, since these vigils shine a critical light on some of the darkest socio-spatial human-animal encounters, Ruby drew attention to this as a primary reason for attending vigils:

When I was looking at them, they needed something more other than a camera shoved in their face, like at Manchester pig save I was comforting them, singing to them, doing whatever I can, just to make them count.

Embracing a spirit of inter-species solidarity, one rooted in a feminist (Kemmerer, 2011; Gaard, 2002) or anarchist praxis (Nocella et al, 2015; Socha, 2012; White, 2015, 2017), meant that activists were continually questioning what animals are going through, listening for an answer and aiming to respond to that individual (Adams, 2016; Gillespie, 2018; Socha, 2013). The idea is to make some form of connection with an animal, either through taking

their picture and sharing it on social media or by attempting to comfort them through physical contact (gently stroking) or through talking and trying to sooth them was a common refrain. This is consistent with one of the core central aims of the Save Movement, the act of trying to help an animal who is suffering, which, Lockwood (2018) argues, looks to provide “momentary solace and succour, including with water and fruit, to the animals”. Thus, through bearing witness to the victims of the animal abuse industry on their final journey, the Save Movement activist intention, albeit too brief and too temporary, is to transform spaces of fear - permeated by the sounds and smell of suffering beings - to ones which contained inter-species compassion, kindness and solidarity (see also Silvennoinen, no date).

Participating in The Save Movement is motivated by a number of important future-orientated goals. One of these is the power of connecting with the individual animal, rather than talking about species in the abstract. The commitment and resolve that this individual connection brings with it is such an important factor: the fight for *someone*, the subject of a life (Regan, 2004) and not *something*. Lily articulated this when concluding that:

individually catching an image of the animals, connecting with them and looking in their eyes: having that moment of connection [means] you will never forget that animal, nor will you allow them to be forgotten...[you can] show the world that their meal had a face... a name and a story.

Carol Adams (1990) coined the term ‘absent referent,’ which is the literal being who disappears in the eating of dead bodies. By documenting the plight of animals and sharing their individual stories, the Save Movement ensures that, for some animals at least, the fact that they were a living being with an interest in their life is forced into the public domain and thus not forgotten.

### **Coping Strategies: The Importance of Activist Friends and Communities**

A strong emphasis on the collective human expressions of solidarity and support within the Save Movement was highly valued as a coping strategy. In common with many social justice movements and expressions of direct action, the appeal of bearing witness *in solidarity* is an important facet to the Save Movement. As Kranjc (2012) argues, the Save Movement works in ways that “touches the collective spirit” and “nourishes community support while sustaining the activists and building the movement”.

The opportunity to unite with others, and offer and receive support was vitally important for those who engage in the Save Movement. That said, many activists recognised that their coping strategy was, arguably, one of not coping but of seeking ways to downplay and ignore the mental stress and burden placed on them through bearing witness. An attitude of 'just keep going' was frequently invoked. As Ruby said: 'I don't really think about it before or after, I just kind of get on with it'. This attitude of trying to block out any negative feelings or emotions relating to bearing witness resulted in individuals trying to distract themselves in order *not* to think. Rachael, for example, spoke of how she once had 'a complete breakdown', with tears streaming from her face during a vigil. To avoid this, her coping mechanism revolves around getting on with filling time with everyday tasks, such as routine housework and caring for family:

You kind of go on auto pilot though don't you? You know you've got to go so you just go, and then I come home and I'll wash pots and pick kids up from school, as if I've not done it, because if I don't ... if I think about it too much, I just go wow, so it's better for me to just carry on.

Other coping strategies included trying to find ways of channelling frustration and exasperation into positive, productive energy in order to create better futures. Activists spoke of harnessing their sadness and anger and allowing it to motivate them, hence redirecting it into other forms of advocacy and activism. Lily epitomised this resolve when noting that:

I try and use my sadness to think well, fuel something, knowing that I'm doing something that will help some animals somewhere ... using my sadness to fuel something else, that's kind of the way I cope with it.

This is a very positive approach to mental stress, with a focus on using it for good and allowing it to drive oneself to keep on working for nonhuman animals. This pragmatic approach of holding the interests of those one is trying to help as the most important thing was echoed by another activist, Jake, who reminded himself of the victims of the animal abuse ("livestock" industry) when he was struggling:

It's just generally thinking about what's happening out there, thinking about the animals that we're out there for. That's what brings me back if I have any negative experience.

For some, the sense of moral duty highlighted earlier seems to help activists carry the mental burden, allowing them to recognise the reason they partake in Save Movement vigils and use their frustration and sorrow to drive their future activism. From personal experience, I (Alex) found that putting things into perspective by comparing my own personal mental and emotional suffering with that of the victims of the livestock industry was a useful strategy. This allowed me to frame my own mental distress in the context of the far worse suffering of another being, leaving me with the resolve to carry on fighting on their behalf.

Finally, another popular coping strategy used by Sheffield Animal Save activists involved talking openly about what happened at the vigil and any associated feelings or emotions. The reasoning behind this was that talking to one another in essence shared the burden with others and allowed time for strategies for coping with these feelings to be devised. For many, the simple act of talking about their feelings with others was beneficial enough to warrant as a method of dealing with negative thoughts and mental stress from activism with the Save Movement. Pennebaker (1997) championed this line of thought,

arguing that in relation to negative, distressing situations, keeping our thoughts and feelings to ourselves can be detrimental whilst disclosing them to others is a healthy, beneficial act.

Natasha described her coping strategy as follows:

Well we often go for a cup of tea, a cup of tea works wonders. If we're going to one [a vigil] in a different city we'll make sure we go to a nice vegan café. But for me because I live in a house with three other vegans I just find it so important to talk it out afterwards because when I haven't it's really played on my mind and I get nightmares and stuff.

For Natasha, spending time with other activists in a non-activism setting seemed to be an optimum coping strategy. This was echoed elsewhere, for example in Kelly's conviction that: "I think the only strategy I can say we have is doing something nice and social afterwards and lifting each other's spirits."

It is clear that it is of vital importance for activists to bind together as a community in efforts to cope with mental distress and feelings of sadness, anger and frustration. Whilst some activists also noted strategies that were personal and involved self-reflection, it is worth mentioning that during the focus group with activists from Sheffield Animal Save, there was unanimous agreement from all of the research participants that the time we had spent talking about all things relating to Sheffield Animal Save had been a very positive experience, allowing activists to discuss with and listen to others with similar experiences to themselves.

### **Coping Strategy: Friends and Family**

It is clear then that feelings of frustration and guilt often go hand in hand with one another. Feelings of frustration can also be brought about when talking to family and friends about attending Save Movement vigils. By mainstream standards, waking up at 5am to go

and stand at the side of a road outside of a slaughterhouse is a rather unusual way to spend a morning. The process of becoming vegan and the subsequent task of informing friends and family of one's new (critical) lifestyle can be troubling in itself, with many acquaintances not understanding why someone would make such a decision and often reacting in such a way that mocks, ridicules and derides the person changing their lifestyle (Socha, 2012). A particular theme for younger vegan activists is the assertion that this moral awakening is just a phase, one that will soon pass within a few months.

Reflecting on my (Alex) own experiences my parents were sceptical as to how long my new lifestyle would last given my past history of obsession with new things before quickly losing interest. 7 ½ years on, though, I think they have accepted this isn't a phase. With a loved one going vegan, the issues of animal exploitation in everyday life are thrust right to the fore and become unavoidable subjects for friends and family to confront; this may expose any unease or discomfort they feel at the thought of eating animals, which can often lead to defensive reactions. Given this often heated response to simply learning of a loved one's new lifestyle, it is no surprise that telling friends and family about attending Save Movement vigils can often bring about tense and fraught environments full of misunderstanding, unwillingness to talk constructively, and inevitably heated arguments.

In the context of coping strategies, many research participants reported a general negative, unreceptive response from friends and family toward their activism with the Save Movement. As one respondent, David, said:

My mum said, it's ok you being vegan, but you going outside these slaughterhouses and protesting or demoing, you're forcing your opinions on other people. The rest of them [family] are generally very defensive, they won't even try a vegan meal, they won't even taste it, they don't want to know ... they'll shut you up if you talk about it.

This was perhaps an extreme reaction, with other research participants citing more indirect derision and mockery from family through indifference, strange looks and rolls of the eyes. Some activists reported that friends and family took them more seriously and respectfully due to their obvious commitment to the cause by consistently bearing witness to animals. Where genuine understanding and tacit support from social networks were present, this made an important difference in terms of extending and deepening activists' coping strategies. Where this support was absent, feelings of isolation and alienation were more pronounced.

### **Final Thoughts and Reflections**

If trends in the recent past are anything to go by, then The Save Movement will continue to grow as a means of expressing inter-species solidarity and raising public consciousness toward the plight of farmed animals. By exploring the complex experiences, motivations and coping strategies of activists involved with the Sheffield Animal Save movement, the intention of the chapter has not only been to offer a timely window into this form of activism, but also to offer insights which might provide deeper connections across other animal rights based activism more generally.

Through drawing attention to particular spaces and bearing witness to the final moments of the animals that pass through them, the chapter has sought to impress upon the reader how The Save Movement activists seek to confront cruelty and raise consciousness across a broader public. By exposing these violent geographies, Save Movement activists are challenging the idea that the barbarity, death and panic associated with slaughterhouses are absent from our supposedly 'civilised' society (for discussion on the need for social *and* spatial justice see White and Springer, 2018). As Gregery and Pred (2007) state of the uncovering of everyday violence: "They show that terror and torture are not the exclusive property of others, but inhabit the central structures of our own society too" (p. 5?). In



addition to this, by being present at the sight of another's suffering and attempting to help, to care, through offering kindness, sympathy and support means that the farmed animals' final moments are not comprised solely of fear, bewilderment and terror. In this way, Save Movement activists introduce a radical inter-species expression of love and solidarity to an otherwise unrepentantly speciesist space. What we do to them, ultimately, we do to ourselves. As Save Movement founder Anita Kranjc (2012) recognises:

Looking at the pigs, touching their snouts as they push through the air holes to nudge and sniff our hands, hearing them grunt to communicate with us and each other, strengthens our resolve to do all we can to help them.

In this sense, bearing witness is an important and radical practice that potentially re-envisions our relationship with nonhuman animals. Indeed, as Lockwood (2018) states, the interspecies solidarity shown can assist us in re-thinking the boundary between human and nonhuman. This promise notwithstanding, the act of bearing witness does come though at a significant price for the activists themselves, which needs to be better recognised (Gorski & Chen, 2015). The negative physical, emotional - and social (if activism results in the alienation of friends and family) - environments that individuals unwillingly enter demands new coping strategies. With this in mind, it is heartening to see initiatives emerge that are explicitly and unapologetically designed to help encourage new networks of support and care to be found within animal activist groups. For example, in October 2018, Save Movement activists were invited to attend an "activist burnout & self-care workshop" in Leicester (Aherne, 2018), where:

There will be a number of speakers on the day ranging from counsellors to mental health nurses. There will also be a short yoga & meditation/mindfulness session to end the day. Workshops & talks will cover a range of areas from trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, compassion fatigue.

Finally, though the emphasis on Sheffield Animal Save Movement activists draws on a highly situated and localised evidence base, we hope that their experiences and reflections offer important synergies that other inter-species social justice movements can recognise, express solidarity with, and learn from. Indeed, if this chapter has helped in some small way to bring new insights into activist solidarity and understanding, and perhaps encourage the reader to join their local Save Movement event, then it will have more than served its purpose.

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### **Dedication**

Dedicated to Regan Russell, a Save Movement activist killed on June 19th 2020 whilst attending a Toronto Pig Save vigil. Rest in power.

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