‘Just because I’m vegan doesn’t mean my dog is’: Exploring human-animal relations among raw meat feeders in the UK and Australia

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Abstract

In food studies scholarship, food has long been recognised as a lens through which to understand human social, cultural, and ethical identities and relations. Non-human animals, when present, are often conceptualised as the 'eaten', with a persisting assumption that humans are the 'eaters'. This thesis begins by challenging this assumption and instead views animals-as-eaters. Drawing on understandings of the diverse and complex relationships with non-human animals in human-animal studies research, this interdisciplinary thesis seeks to explore the role of dog food and feeding as a means of understanding human-animal relations – referred to as 'human-dog feeding relations'.

While most dogs in Western cultural contexts are fed commercial kibble diets, alternative dog diets are gaining popularity. Popular among these, even for vegan and vegetarian dog owners, are raw meat-based diets (RMBDs), consisting of fresh or uncooked ingredients from farmed or wild animals that are thought to mimic natural or ancestral diets. The phenomenon of vegan and vegetarian dog owners feeding their dogs RMBDs raises interesting questions about possible tensions between human and dog diets, especially regarding ethical and environmental values. Moreover, by foregrounding complexity and diversity in approaches to human-dog feeding relations, it challenges prevalent ideas in the fields of veterinary and consumer science research that there are increasing similarities between pet food and human food.

This research employs an interpretative qualitative case-study approach to investigate the relationships of dog owners in the United Kingdom and Australia who follow plant-based diets (vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian) while feeding their dogs RMBDs. The research combines online interviews with participant-generated visual feeding diaries from 27 dog owners and their 53 dogs in the UK and Australia. The interview data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, resulting in the broad themes of care, control, and food identities. My analysis shows that feeding dog RMBDs is shaped by an ideology I have described as 'intensive pet care', which emphasises the need to nourish dogs, respond to their preferences, and meet their species-specific needs. Despite following plant-based diets themselves, participants held a strong belief that dogs need meat, which I interpret as closely tied to discourses of animality. RMBDs were also a way of establishing control over perceived contamination in the food system; while microbial risks were seen as manageable in the context of the home, chemical contamination in pet food manufacturing and production was of larger concern. Finally, food identities and resulting tensions from meat consumption were navigated through discourses I call 'ethical (raw) meat', which address animal welfare and sustainability. Drawing the analysis together, the thesis discusses the implications of this research for conceptually expanding research on human-dog feeding relations and conducting qualitative research with non-human animals. It also offers considerations for future research and interested parties, such as veterinary professionals, animal health and welfare organisations, and pet food regulatory bodies.

HDR Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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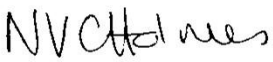

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Covid-19 Impact Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the trajectory of this research, particularly at the earlier stages. Starting my PhD in December 2020, restrictions to in-person research during Phase 1 of the study in the UK necessitated a shift to remote data collection methods, limiting opportunities for direct engagement with participants. These constraints required adaptations to the study design, particularly in terms of conducting interviews online and gathering visual data, which were originally planned as in-person interactions. These methods were carried through to Phase 2 of the study in Australia.

Additionally, due to international travel restrictions, I was unable to relocate to the UK at the beginning of this thesis as planned. This prevented me from accessing resources and engaging directly with academic communities at the University of Nottingham during the early stages of the research. Despite these challenges, I was able to adapt and continue the study remotely, relying on online meetings and virtual academic networks to maintain progress and connection with my supervisors and colleagues.

List of acronyms

AFN – Alternative Food Network

AFPM – Alternative Pet Food Movement

BARF – Biologically Appropriate Raw Food

DDIM – Diary-Diary-Interview Method

DIY – Do-it-yourself

FEDIAF – European Pet Food Industry Association

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

HREC – Human Research Ethics Committee

PFIAA - The Pet Food Industry Association of Australia

PGR – Postgraduate Researcher

PMR – Prey Model Raw

PPE - Personal protective equipment

QR Code – Quick-response code

RMBD – Raw meat-based diet

RSPCA - The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

SSP – Sociology and Social Policy

STS – Science and Technology Studies

TA – Thematic Analysis

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

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Prologue: my first raw encounter

Several years ago, as a postgraduate student interested in food cultures and human-nature relations, there were few things I loved more than eating together with people as we shared stories about food. Food, I believe, is much more than nutrition; it is a window into culture, identities, and relations. It serves as a profound way of understanding the social world, allowing us to explore who we are and how we relate to one another. This thesis begins with a story from that time – a story that transformed the way I think about food.

While living in Berlin, Germany, I visited a good friend one evening for dinner. We were about to start cooking when she went to the fridge, pulled out a small container of raw minced meat, and set it on the counter. I watched as she opened the container and carefully spooned the meat into a bowl, cracked an egg and added it to the meat – along with the entire shell – and finally sprinkled a few blueberries on top. Needless to say, I was puzzled, but even more so because my friend is vegetarian, and I am vegan. I wondered why someone who does not consume meat would put together this meaty meal.

Sensing my confusion, my friend laughed. 'Don't worry', she said, 'this food isn't for us'. It turned out that it was for her dog, Helmut.

As Helmut began devouring his meal, my friend shared the story of how she had found a butcher on the other side of the city who specialised in raw meat for pets. She explained that she did not particularly like handling the meat and would sometimes wear gloves because it reminded her of non-human animal[1] death. This tension intrigued me, so I asked why she would go through the discomfort of preparing raw meat if it unsettled her. Her answer was direct:

'Helmut is a wolf. He needs meat'.

In that moment, I looked at Helmut – a small black-haired Griffon – and saw not a wild predator, but a dog shaped by generations of breeding and domestication. Yet for my friend, Helmut seemed to represent something more primal, and his diet was an expression of that connection. Feeding him raw meat was not just about nutrition; it also appeared to acknowledge his identity as an animal with roots, however tenuous, in the wild.

[1] I use the term 'non-human animal' with caution and recognise that despite emphasising that humans are also animals, it centres humans as the primary referent (Price and Chao, 2023). Hereafter, I use the term 'animal' for the sake of simplicity and readability. Where appropriate, I will specify 'non-human animals' or other terms that challenge anthropocentric assumptions.

This encounter encouraged me to rethink my own assumptions about food. The first and most fundamental was that dog food is also food. While this may seem obvious, much sociological research on food consumption I had read during my studies assumed that food is human food, overlooking the complex ways in which we feed and relate to other animals in our care. Second, dog feeding, the act of giving food, is not just about fulfilling nutritional needs. It is a cultural practice that raises a wide range of ethical and social questions about what it means to care for an animal, what a dog is, and how humans understand their own identities in relation to feeding. I intentionally used the term 'meaty meal' above to provoke thinking about dog food not as a set of ingredients, but as a social event that is rich with meaning. Since domestic dogs, like Helmut, are dependent on their owners[2] for food, what they are fed is often a reflection of the owner's own values, identities, and understandings of their dog's needs. Yet, as I explore throughout this thesis, the relationship between what humans eat and what they choose to feed their dogs is neither straightforward nor without its own set of contradictions.

This thesis examines social and ethical aspects of human-dog feeding by investigating the values and relations between UK and Australian dog owners who follow a plant-based diet[3] and feed their dogs a raw meat-based diet (RMBD). By engaging with interdisciplinary literature from animal science, food studies, and human-animal studies, this thesis seeks to expand understandings of the complexities of human-dog feeding relations. While most veterinary and animal science research on pet diets focuses on similar dietary trends across human and dog diets, this is the first cross-cultural qualitative case study that focuses on divergent and alternative dietary practices between dogs and humans. Data was collected in two phases through a combination of talk-based online interviews and more-than-talk visual feeding diaries. A total of 27 dog owners, living with 53 dogs across the UK and Australia, participated in the study. The analysis developed from this data focuses on three themes – care, control, and identity – which are explored in the empirical chapters. Through exploration of these themes, the thesis provides a deeper understanding of RMBDs and offers new directions for future research on human-dog feeding.

[2] While I am aware of the contentious nature of the terms 'owner' and 'pet', these terms reflect those predominantly used by participants and serve as a reminder of the legal structures of ownership in both the UK and Australia. Where possible, I use the term 'dog' or the dog's name (pseudonym).

[3] Hereafter, I use the term 'plant-based diet' to include people who self-identify as vegan, vegetarian, and flexitarian. Again, I am considerate of contentions around the conflation of 'plant-based' with the ethical commitments of veganism. This language reflects a methodological choice with regard to the national contexts in which this study took place. For example, some Australians identify as 'vegetarian' despite consuming some meat (Lea and Worsley, 2003).

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Food as a window into human-animal relations

Scholars of food have long recognised that food is a window into understanding social, cultural, and ethical identities and relations (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; DeVault, 1991). However, what my anecdote in the prologue above highlights is that food is also a window into understanding human-animal relations and identities. Human-animal studies scholars have acknowledged the complex relationships that distinguish some animals as 'pets' and others as 'food'. These distinctions are shaped by cultural and religious norms that define which animals can and cannot be eaten (Joy, 2010; Stewart & Cole, 2009) as well as gendered norms relating to meat consumption and its avoidance (Adams, 2010). However, in much research from the fields of food studies and human-animal studies, there is often an assumption that the identity of the human is the 'eater', and the animal is the 'eaten'. By conceptualising animals-as-eaters, we can start to explore new connections between food, feeding, and human-animal relations that have so far received little scholarly attention in both food studies and human-animal studies. A focus on human-animal relations associated with feeding dogs raises interesting questions about entangled food identities and values. As such, an exploration of human-dog feeding is about much more than food; it also asks fundamental questions about what it means to be human and what it means, in this case, to be a dog, shedding light on the relationships between dogs, humans, and animals consumed as food.

Dogs are said to be the first animal species domesticated by humans and today are an integral part of social life in many societies around the world. It is estimated that 47 per cent of Australian households own at least one dog, with a total of 6.3 million dogs across the country (Animal Medicines Australia, 2021) while around 36 per cent of the UK households care for approximately 13.5 million dogs (UK Pet Food, 2024). Despite a long history of human-canine relations, in recent decades, shifts in the humanisation and commercialisation of pets have resulted in significant social and structural changes to their care and wellbeing (Fox & Gee, 2016). Human-animal studies scholars argue that the humanisation of pets has resulted in their integration into family structures, whereby they are re-imagined as individuals, family members, or kin (Charles & Davies, 2008; Fox, 2006; Fox & Gee, 2016; Haraway, 2008). In turn, the humanisation of pets is driving the commercialisation of the companion animal industry, which has seen a boom in the number of pet products available (Fox & Gee, 2016; Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023; Nast, 2006b). Pet food is the most dominant portion of this market; the UK pet food market was worth £4.2 billion in 2023 (UK Pet Food, 2024) and in 2024 the Australian pet food market is estimated to be worth US$3.06 billion (Statista, 2024).

Since the mid-20th century, most dogs in Western cultural contexts have been fed commercial kibble diets, a dry meat-based dog biscuit made up of by-products from the human food production system. While commercial pet foods traditionally differentiated foods for humans and foods for pets (Wrye, 2012), the humanisation of pets and prioritisation of their health and wellbeing has resulted in increasing numbers of premium speciality products and diets. In veterinary science literature on pet nutrition, there is a dominant narrative which stipulates that 'with the humanization of pets trends in human food and nutrition often spill over into the pet food industry' (Schleicher et al., 2019, p. 645). This narrative – hereafter called the 'humanisation of pet food' – has been explored through a number of quantitative empirical studies on pet feeding from consumer and veterinary sciences that have shown that people who purchase organic, premium, vegan and vegetarian, grain-free, and non-processed foods for themselves often do so for their pets as well (Banton et al., 2021; Dodd et al., 2019; Kumcu & Woolverton, 2015; Lenz et al., 2009). Although this body of research as a whole indicates that various purchasing behaviours spill over from human diets to pet diets, there has been limited exploration of this trend using qualitative sociological methods. I, therefore, argue that the 'humanisation of pet food' narrative requires deeper interrogation to critically address the complexity and diversity of human-animal relations, methodological limitations in previous research, and questions regarding commercial interests.

First, research examining how purchasing behaviours spill over from human diets to pet diets often conflates humanisation – the integration of pets into human families – with anthropomorphisation – the ascription of human-like characteristics to pets (see Boya et al., 2012; Kumcu & Woolverton, 2015). However, as human-animal studies scholars have long argued, humanisation and anthropomorphisation are complex processes entangled with other kinds of relations with non-human animals (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3). Thus, the idea that these dietary characteristics naturally extend from human diets to pet diets is anthropocentric, as it presumes that people are treating pets like humans. Moreover, this assumption overlooks important differences in human and dog feeding practices. As animal studies scholars have emphasised, it is important to examine both similarities and differences as understanding the nature of any complexity or difference is crucial for developing respect for non-human animals (Fox, 2006; Plumwood, 2002). Second, available survey-based studies are methodologically limited since study designs often focus on converging human-canine dietary practices, suggesting that vegans are most likely to feed vegan dog food (Dodd et al., 2019) and households who purchase premium human food are more likely to purchase premium dog food (Kumcu & Woolverton, 2015), for example. Neither do these studies explore nor explain divergent animal and human dietary practices in households, such as vegan and vegetarian dog owners who feed their raw meat-based or grain-free diets to their dogs. These groups are often omitted as statistically insignificant in survey-based studies although they are present in the survey data (Dodd et al., 2019; Empert-Gallegos & Poole, 2020) or remain a point of confusion (Banton et al., 2021). Survey-based studies have

been able to identify owner-reported similarities between human and dog diets, but have not explored deeper understandings of the complexity around human-dog food choices and why human and dog diets might or might not converge. Third, qualitative research on the diversity of human-animal feeding calls into question dominant trends and industry interests around the humanisation and commercialisation of pet food, which both assume and reproduce the phenomenon of 'feeding pets like people' (Wall, 2021). When one considers the broader structures of the commodification of pets and pet food, questions emerge around whether appealing but often unregulated product labels, such as 'premium', 'human-grade', 'natural' and 'holistic', are intended to benefit pet health or fuel the profitability of the pet food industry (Boya et al., 2015, Boya et al., 2012, Kumcu & Woolverton, 2015; Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023). Moreover, veterinarians have cautioned against the anthropomorphisation of pets and following human consumer trends because it can result in inappropriate feeding behaviours that compromise pet welfare (Downes et al., 2017; Kienzle & Bergler, 2006; Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023; Overgaauw et al., 2020; Schleicher et al., 2019). For the above reasons, I, therefore, argue that the 'humanisation of pet food' narrative requires deeper interrogation to critically assess the findings of previous research. A qualitative study exploring the relationship between plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBDs opens a window into understanding diversity and complexity in human-animal feeding.

1.2 Diversity and complexity in human-animal feeding: plant-based human diets and raw meat-based dog diets

Being vegan or vegetarian is more than a set of dietary preferences; it also tells us a lot about ideals, values, and social identities. These include ethical ideals around animal rights, religious beliefs, environmental sustainability, and personal health motivations (Hoffman et al., 2013; Jabs et al., 1998; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017; Ruby, 2012). In practice, ethical vegetarians typically avoid meat, but their diets include some animal products, such as dairy and eggs. Veganism is seen as an extension of ethical vegetarianism, resulting in the avoidance of all animal products, including eggs and dairy, but also reflects a broader commitment to rejecting all forms of animal exploitation (The Vegan Society, 2024). I note here that some vegans and vegetarians have ethical concerns about pet ownership due to issues around animal autonomy, the commodification of animals, and their treatment as property (Cudworth, 2011; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Serpell, 2009). However, many vegans and vegetarians do keep pets, which raises the question of how they approach the choice of which food to feed them, and what tensions this may result in.

Like being vegan or vegetarian, raw feeding is more than a set of dietary preferences – it also suggests a set of beliefs, identities, and relations with non-human animals (Lenz et al., 2009; Michel, 2006). In the 1990s, RMBDs gained popularity as a critique of commercial kibble and proposed a return to what are understood

to be natural, evolutionary, and ancestral diets that mimic what dogs would have eaten in the wild (Billinghurst, 1993; Lonsdale, 2001). Australian veterinarian Dr Ian Billinghurst, regarded as one of the most influential proponents of the Biologically Appropriate Raw Food (BARF) diet, claimed that feeding dogs raw meat and vegetables is healthier, cheaper, and more environmentally friendly than commercial pet food (Billinghurst, 1993). While RMBDs are broadly made up of commercial or homemade, fresh, and uncooked meat ingredients from farmed or wild animals (Freeman et al., 2013), there are a number of different approaches to raw feeding, including BARF, prey model raw, raw meaty bones, and whole prey.[4] While initially, homemade 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) raw diets were the mainstay of the raw feeding movement, there are increasing numbers of commercial 'pre-made mixes'[5] available to purchase from raw pet food specialists. Today, RMBDs are one of the most popular alternative pet diets, although this varies by region. A recent global study indicated that Australia has the highest rate of feeding RMBDs compared to other English-speaking countries; 88 per cent of Australian and 66 per cent of British dog owners include raw meat in their dogs' diets and Australians are more likely to feed their dogs RMBDs than commercial kibble (Dodd et al., 2020). However, it should be noted that this high percentage in Australia does not just reflect recent trends (Laflamme et al., 2008; Robertson, 1996). There is also anecdotal evidence that various local factors have supported Australians to feed raw over a longer period, including high rates of dog ownership in rural and remote locations, an historically limited availability of commercial pet food products, and ready access to raw meat products, notably including kangaroo, which is often seen as pet food (Wijnandts, 2022). As the global popularity of RMBDs has grown, so has their controversy within academic animal science and veterinary communities, as well as for many dog owners themselves. This is largely based on concerns around nutritional adequacy and risks of foodborne illnesses from handling raw meat (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2).

Previous quantitative empirical studies have shown that raw feeders, as they commonly refer to themselves, perceive RMBDs as healthier and more natural than conventional dog foods, and are distrusting of the pet food industry (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2017). Many owners report health improvements, such as shinier coats, cleaner teeth, muscle gain, and vitality (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022). Interestingly, studies have also found that a main reason for feeding RMBDs is

[4] RMBD approaches typically differ in terms of ingredient constitution. BARF, which also stands for Bones and Raw Food, consists of 80% muscle meat and offal, 10% bone, 5% fresh fruit and vegetables and 5% other ingredients. Prey model raw (PMR) is made up on of 80% meat, 10% bone and 10% organs (including 5% liver). Raw meaty bones are edible bones covered in muscle meat, and whole prey diets include the entire 'prey' animal, including organs, fur, or feathers.

[5] I also use the terms 'DIY' and 'pre-made mixes' to reflect the language used by participants to describe different RMBDs.

to respect a dog's 'carnivorous' or 'animal' nature (Morelli et al., 2019; Viegas et al., 2020). Although, these survey-based studies offer limited insight into what 'natural' or 'carnivorous nature' means to dog owners, they suggest that owners may define both their own identities and their dogs' identities through their diets (Michel, 2006).

Having argued that plant-based diets for people and RMBDs for dogs suggest specific identities, beliefs, and relations with animals, it remains unclear how these identities and beliefs interact, potentially conflict, or might be negotiated in the context of everyday food choices. Since the moral rejection of meat consumption forms the core of vegan and ethical vegetarian identities, research on vegetarian attitudes to pet diets has assumed that feeding dogs meat produces tensions with these moral beliefs (Milburn, 2017; Rothgerber, 2013, 2014). Moreover, I suspect that the *rawness* of raw meat may generate (or possibly alleviate) tensions around handling meat, animal welfare, and the environment, or could indicate the importance of other values, such as understandings of the dogs' needs. These diverse food choices for dogs and humans provide a window into understanding the relational values[6] people hold with food, the animals they feed, and 'food' animals, as well as the complex ways in which identities, relations, and the perceived needs of dogs shape food choices. More broadly, the case of dog owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs suggests a model of pet integration into family structures based not just on their similarities but also their differences to humans and therefore contributes to the understanding of diversity and complexity in human-dog feeding relations.

1.3 Thesis aims and research questions

As mentioned, the overarching aim of this research is to better understand diversity and complexity in human-dog feeding by examining how relational values, identities and human-animal relations shape food choices across human-dog diets. The thesis focuses on divergent canine and human dietary practices in households across the UK and Australia, where dog owners who follow plant-based diets feed their dogs RMBDs. It incorporates new findings from a qualitative case-study designed to investigate the relationships of dog owners in the United Kingdom and Australia who follow plant-based diets (vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian) while feeding their dogs raw meat-based diets. While the study does not offer a strict cross-cultural comparison, the study design aims to capture cultural differences in human-dog feeding, despite the niche study population. Moreover, based on the assumption that divergent human-dog diets may produce tensions between the values dog owners hold regarding food and their relations with their dogs, the thesis seeks to better understand what tensions might emerge (or not) through dog feeding and how dog

[6] Drawing on environmental values literature, I conceptualise 'values as relations' (see Section 1.4), which foregrounds the diverse relationships through which people derive meaning and how these relationships are constructed in various ways.

owners navigate potential trade-offs. As outlined above, there has been little exploration of human-animal feeding using qualitative sociological methods. Therefore, I aim to reflect on visual methodologies for researching human-animal relations, and particularly how we include non-human animals in qualitative research. In order to address these aims, I have developed a set of research questions to organise, bound, and focus the project (Punch, 2013). In many qualitative sociological studies, research questions are iterated and refined during the course of a project. The research questions below (Table 1) are the result of careful formulation and refinement throughout the project and reflect engagement with prior empirical, methodological and theoretical research (Rapley, 2022), as well as being iterated throughout the project, partially in response to my participants' priorities and ideas (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1: Research questions

Main research questions:

1) How do owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs understand the relationships between their own diets and their dogs' diets?
2) What can analysis of these understandings tell us about their identities and human-animal relations?

Sub research questions:

1) How do plant-based owners *view* their responsibilities for their dogs' nutritional health and wellbeing?
2) How do owners who follow plant-based diets *experience* feeding raw meat diets to their dogs?
3) How do owners *navigate* their beliefs and values associated with their own plant-based diets with feeding raw meat diets to their dogs?

1.4 Defining concepts: values as relations

This study aims to better understand how social and ethical values influence food choices across human-dog diets. The concept of 'values', however, is hard to define and is understood differently across disciplines. For example, in nutrition science, one often hears the term 'nutritional value'. The European Pet Food Industry Federation (FEDIAF) and Pet Food Industry Association Australia (PFIAA) set guidelines for nutrient requirements that are considered necessary for 'complete and balanced' pet food, which are seen as essential for the health and wellbeing of pets (FEDIAF, 2024; Standards Australia, 2023). These nutrients include fatty acids, amino acids, minerals, vitamins, and vitamin-like substances, such as taurine. In economics, the singular concept of value is often conceptualised as a 'magnitude of preference', referring to how much an individual or group wants or needs something (Tadaki et al., 2017, p. 2). In pet food research, this conceptualisation has been applied in monetary valuations to investigate consumers

'willingness to pay' for animal welfare-friendly pet food, for example (Gorton et al., 2023; Pearce et al., 2023). While discussions of nutritional value and monetary value do feature at points in the analyses in this thesis, when I talk about 'values' I am not referring to quantifiable nutritional profiles or the valuation of pre-selected sets of options. I am, unless specified, talking about social values.

One important conception of social values, often operationalised in psychological literature, is that values are individual priorities that humans possess, and which drive all human action (Tadaki et al., 2017). This approach can be observed in survey-based studies, where participants are provided with a list of value items. As mentioned, humans following vegan and ethical vegetarian diets are likely to prioritise values around animal welfare, the environment, and health, whereas raw feeding practices may be driven by pet health, lack of trust in commercial pet food, naturalness, and the dog's carnivorous nature (see Section 1.2). While highlighting individual motivations to choose certain diets for humans and dogs respectively, terminology in survey-based studies can often be vague and abstract, overlooking contextualised understandings of meaning. For example, it is not clear whether 'natural' refers to natural food or the naturalness of the dog. Moreover, these studies do not explore antagonisms, tensions, or trade-offs between these values, such as how the lack of trust in commercial food and naturalness may be connected or whether understandings of canine health are in tension with perceptions of dogs' carnivorous nature.

Due to these limitations, I argue that the role of values in human-dog feeding can be better understood by conceptualising 'values as relations' (Tadaki et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2016). In environmental values research, relational values can be understood as 'notions of appropriate or desired relationships between people and nature' (Tadaki et al., 2017, p.7). This can be applied to human relationships with dogs, food, and non-human animals consumed as food. In contrast to values as individual priorities, 'relational values are not present in things but derivative of relationships and responsibilities to them' (Chan et al., 2016, p. 1462). These relationships and meanings are spatially and historically contingent in the context of broader environments (Tadaki et al., 2017). In the context of this project, I see relational values as deriving from responsibilities to dogs and other non-human animals in the context of the broader food system. While some relational values are moral, Chan et al., (2018) argue that moral values are intended to apply universally while relational values are contextual. As interdisciplinary social research on human-animal wellbeing has demonstrated, these relations can often be complex, messy, and ambivalent (Brown & Nading, 2019; Cudworth, 2016; Ginn, 2014; Haraway, 2008). To echo Donna Haraway (2008, p. 105), 'multispecies coflourishing requires simultaneous, contradictory truths', which I believe is epitomised by the case of plant-based raw feeders, whereby the flourishing of dogs hinges on the death of other animals consumed as food. In the context of food and feeding, the contradictions and tensions that can arise from holding and living out a plurality of values in everyday food choices come better into view (Pratt, 2013, p. 7).

Importantly, food values differ based on 'how we balance various trade-offs inherent in making food choices under different circumstances and in diverse contexts' (Ankeny et al., 2019, p. 1). Thus, I see values as subjective, relational, contextual, and at times resulting in tensions and trade-offs.

1.5 Methodology

Previous research on dog owner's motivations for feeding RMBDs has predominantly used surveys (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al, 2017; Morgan et al., 2022; Viegas et al., 2020), which analyse a set of pre-selected issues that overlook people's own framing of issues and the complexity of meanings (Braun, 2013). In contrast to positivist approaches, which require reality to be demonstrated through the objective collection of data, qualitative research is suitable for constructivist knowledge claims, in which there are multiple meanings of individual experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Given the conceptualisation of relational values as messy, complex, and contradictory, a qualitative methodology is best suited to embracing messiness since it is interested in meaning and context (Creswell, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 1988, 2017).

In this thesis, I design two case studies which explore food values and human-animal relations between humans who followed plant-based diets and fed their dogs RMBDs in the UK and Australia. Case-study research is used to investigate 'a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context' (Yin, 2009, p. 18). I followed extreme case sampling, which involves choosing unusual or extreme cases (Gray, 2018; Neuman, 2013). Extreme case sampling is beneficial to conceptually expand current understandings of human-dog feeding because it can open up previously unexplored understandings of social life and provide new perspectives (Neuman, 2013). As mentioned, the perspectives of plant-based raw feeders have not been explored in previous research, but their perspectives are also theoretically relevant since they challenge or at least complicate, dominant narratives in human-dog feeding research around the humanisation and commercialisation of pet food and develop further understandings of complexity and difference. Moreover, the handful of survey-based studies exploring owner perspectives on RMBDs have mostly been conducted in a single country, such as the United States (US) (Morgan et al., 2017), the UK (Morgan et al., 2022), Italy (Morelli et al., 2019), and Brazil (Viegas et al., 2020). This is the first qualitative transnational study exploring values and relations around raw feeding in different cultural contexts. The participants included 12 British and 15 Australian dog owners over the age of 18 who identified as vegan, vegetarian, or flexitarian, and predominantly fed their total of 53 dogs RMBDs.

The study employed mixed qualitative methods involving talk-based and creative more-than-talk approaches in the form of participant-generated photo/video feeding diaries followed by semi-structured elicitation interviews which were held over Microsoft Teams. While visual methods are becoming

increasingly popular among human-animal studies scholars as a method that decentres the human (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton & Taylor, 2017), to my knowledge, this has seldom been applied to the topic of human-dog feeding (for an exception, see undergraduate work by Krafft, 2023). The aim of using mixed qualitative methods in this thesis is twofold: functionally, I sought to encourage deeper reflections among participants around relational values across their own diets and dogs' diets; and reflexively, I endeavoured to increase the visibility of non-human animals in the research process. In this way, this thesis contributes both to functional and reflexive method development for research on human-animal relations. During data collection, participants took photos or videos of dog food preparation, feeding times and their own food for three days in the week before our online research interview, becoming the basis for discussion during these interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, incorporating speech from the video diaries and then analysed in NVivo software using 'reflexive thematic analysis' (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The analysis presented in this thesis highlights the complexity of relations and values around human-dog feeding through the themes of care, control, and identity. I emphasise how relations between dogs and humans are embedded in social and cultural contexts such that we cannot think about dog feeding without thinking about *feeding relations* between dogs, humans, food animals, and the broader food system.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters, including an introduction, a literature review, a methods chapter, three empirical analysis chapters, a discussion and implications chapter, and a concluding chapter that reflects on future considerations.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature on alternative diets and human-dog feeding relations that inform the thesis. This interdisciplinary review chapter is structured into two sections. The first outlines quantitative studies from animal and veterinary sciences on RMBDs for dogs. It outlines a concentration on nutritional and safety issues with RMBDs but predominantly focuses on a handful of studies conducted in different national contexts that draw out pet owner motivations to feed RMBDs since these findings are most relevant for this project. Having critically reviewed these studies, I then present the research gaps that informed the questions guiding this thesis. The second section draws on three bodies of qualitative social science literature in order to conceptualise 'human-dog feeding relations' in the analysis chapters (Chapters 4-6) and discussion (Chapter 7). These include social psychological studies on meat consumption, sociological research on mother-child feeding, and interdisciplinary social science research on human-animal relations.

Chapter 3 lays out the research design, methodology and methods used in this thesis. The study employed a qualitative case study design consisting of two cases in different national contexts: the UK and Australia.

The chapter outlines reflections around the bounding of the case study, including the selection of plant-based raw feeders and the national contexts selected. The study used mixed qualitative methods, including more-than-talk visual food diaries consisting of participant-generated photographs and videos followed by an online talk-based research interview. The chapter describes the process of online and offline recruitment and subsequent data collection which was collected in two phases: Phase 1 UK and Phase 2 Australia. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, integrating the video transcripts and food diary photos, and then analysed using a six-phase 'reflexive thematic analysis' (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The chapter demonstrates how reflexive TA was conducted using a worked example of the development of a single theme. The final sections of the chapter include ethical considerations for qualitative research with non-human animals.

Chapters 4 to 6 constitute three analysis chapters which explore relations between plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBD through three themes: care; control; and identity. In Chapter 4, I argue that canine-human food choices are shaped by participants' expectations of dog feeding that rest on contextual understandings of human-animal relations. In order to shift functional conceptions of canine nutrition in animal science literature, I adapt sociological research on 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) to develop the concept of 'intensive pet care'. This relational analytical lens explores the importance dog owners place on investing time, money, emotion, and knowledge to nurture their dogs, respond to their dogs' preferences and, crucially, meet their species-specific needs. Through this lens, the chapter outlines three sub-themes that describe different expectations of care that participants held around dog feeding: *nourishing care, individualising care,* and *species-appropriate care*. Participants did not view vegetarian dog diets as what dogs would choose to eat, nor what was best for them due to their distinct nutritional and behavioural needs. These interpretations add nuance to the 'humanisation of pet food' narrative, whereby I argue that we are also witnessing the 'animalisation of pet food', a concept which I further develop in the Discussion and Implications in Chapter 7. This only underscores the power of 'intensive pet care' ideologies in shaping alternative pet food choices, which should be taken into consideration by animal healthcare professionals and animal welfare organisations when communicating with dog owners about food and feeding.

Chapter 5 analyses human-dog feeding through the theme of control. In order to shift narrow conceptions of food safety as microbial hazards in animal science literature on RMBDs, I draw on sociological research on 'precautionary consumption' (MacKendrick, 2010) and mother-child feeding (Afflerback et al., 2013; Cairns & Johnston, 2018; Cairns et al., 2013; Mackendrick, 2014) to explore dog owners' discursive mechanisms of control around contamination and processing across the whole food chain. I argue that these mechanisms of control are employed in response to perceived risks in the modern industrial food system and seek to maintain the ideal of the 'natural dog'. The chapter broadens current understandings of food

safety in animal science research on RMBDs by showing that participants are less concerned about microbial contamination, because they perceive the risks as containable in the context of the home, and more concerned about chemical contamination entering the (dog) food chain at the stages of manufacturing and production. Thus, the analysis highlights the importance of the spatial contexts in which participants navigate their concerns around food quality and safety concerns around chemical contamination, which are relevant for discussions and policymaking on pet food safety.

Chapter 6 addresses the theme of identity in order to explore complex relational food identities around meat consumption between dogs and humans. It draws on social psychological literature on meat consumption (Joy, 2010) and the vegetarian's dilemma (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014) to develop interpretations of participants' social and cultural understandings of the food identities that shape meat consumption in different contexts. The chapter is structured into two parts. First, the analysis shows that plant-based dog owners' experiences of feeding RMBDs produced both visceral and identity-based tensions that acknowledge complicity in animal-based food systems in more nuanced ways than previous literature would suggest. The second section demonstrates how plant-based dog owners employed what I call 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses as a way of navigating the tensions that emerged from feeding their dogs meat. Discourses around feeding humane, high welfare, and sustainable meat were presented as a compromise between perceptions of their dogs' needs as 'meat eaters' and their own ethical values around meat consumption. This analysis therefore complicates current understandings of meat consumption and its avoidance in critical animal studies literature and provides in-depth understandings of dog owners' views around sustainability, which is of increasing interest in animal science literature on the sustainability of pet food.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the empirical analysis in the context of broader literature and outlines the implications of the thesis. First, I address the conceptual implications of the research, which is of relevance for animal scientists and social scientists interested in human-dog feeding. Drawing on the analysis in Chapters 4 through 6, I explore the tensions that characterise living and eating alongside dogs. These tensions see dog owners positioned between humanisation and animalisation; between industrial and natural; and between carnism and veganism. While humanisation, industrial, and carnism represent dominant narratives around human-dog feeding in Western cultural contexts, such as the UK and Australia, the analysis in this thesis conceptually expands these narratives by foregrounding complexity and difference. Second, I reflect on the methodological implications of this thesis particularly regarding the development and impacts of using more-than-talk visual methods to advance research on human-animal relations. I anticipate this could be useful for researchers across different disciplinary backgrounds, including animal sciences, food studies, and human-animal studies.

Finally, Chapter 8 outlines a summary of the research aims and addresses the research questions by drawing on key interpretations from across the chapters. It provides directions for future research as well as considerations for interested parties, including policymakers, the pet food industry, veterinary professions, dog owners, animal welfare organisations, and organisations interested in sustainable food systems.

Chapter 2 – Understanding alternative diets and human-dog feeding relations

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this thesis explores human-dog feeding relations by investigating the values and relations between dog owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs in the UK and Australia. While pet food and feeding are of growing interest across both animal sciences and the social sciences, I argue that previous research, which is primarily based on quantitative survey methodology, has not sufficiently explored complexity and difference in human-dog feeding. I presented the first qualitative case study that explores divergent and alternative dietary practices between dogs and humans in two different cultural contexts. This interdisciplinary review chapter is structured according to methodological approach and sub-divided thematically. The first section presents a critical review of quantitative studies from nutrition and animal sciences on RMBDs for dogs. It highlights a predominant focus on nutrition and safety in previous research and draws out three research gaps with regard to qualitative research methodologies, the connections between human-dog diets and understandings of values as relations. In light of these gaps, the second section opens up the review to draw on qualitative social science literature from food studies and human-animal studies to better understand how human-dog feeding is embedded in social and cultural norms around meat consumption, notions of responsibility around parent-child feeding, and human-animal relations.

2.2 Animal science literature on RMBDs

RMBDs are of increasing interest in the disciplines of nutrition and animal sciences, with a growing body of research focusing on the broad themes of nutrition, health and safety, and owner perspectives. Although veterinary and animal scientists highlight nutritional imbalances and health and safety issues, self-report studies have found that dog owners largely perceive RMBDs to be beneficial to their dogs' health. Since these studies do not investigate broader motivations to feed RMBDs, this section of the review focuses on quantitative survey-based studies on owners' perspectives that provide a basis for understanding of why dog owners feed RMBDs as well as the role of knowledge and trust in commercial pet food. I argue however that this body of research is lacking in-depth approaches that explore social relations around human-dog feeding.

2.2.1 Veterinary perspectives: health and safety concerns around RMBDs

Despite the increasing popularity of RMBDs, they are often regarded as controversial in much of veterinary science and practice (Hilal, 2019; Stogdale, 2019). While this critical review will focus on dog owner perspectives around RMBDs (Section 2.2.2), I first include an overview of relevant veterinary and animal nutrition research, not only because this provides important context for dominant narratives among veterinary professionals, policymakers, and much of the pet food industry, but also because participants referred to these perspectives during research interviews.

Scientific research highlights three main concerns around feeding RMBDs, including nutritional balance, public health and safety, and health risks from feeding bones. First, veterinary professionals often express concerns about the nutritional completeness of raw meat-based and homemade diets (Lumbis & Chan, 2015; Pedrinelli et al., 2017; Remillard, 2008; Schlesinger & Joffe, 2011). Empirical studies have found both nutrient deficiencies and excesses in RMBDs, such as vitamin deficiencies and calcium/phosphorous imbalances (Dillitzer et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2013; Freeman & Michel, 2001; Taylor et al., 2009). Moreover, one US-based study found that the commercially available RMBDs examined did not undergo feeding trials to evaluate their effects. The authors stated that this limited their ability to evaluate the bioavailability of ingredients or nutrient interactions (Mehlenbacher et al., 2012). Moreover, critical reviews of research on RMBDs have concluded that the evidence of nutritional health benefits is low (Davies et al., 2019; Schlesinger & Joffe, 2011). A second and more prevalent message is documented in a large number of research articles that focus on public health and safety, is the increased risks of pathogenic microorganisms present in RMBDs, which pose concerns for human and animal health (Bottari et al., 2020; Finley et al., 2006; Finley et al., 2008; Fredriksson-Ahomaa et al., 2017; Giacometti et al., 2017; Hellgren et al., 2019; Mehlenbacher et al., 2012; Morelli et al., 2019; Nüesch-Inderbinen et al., 2019; Runesvärd et al., 2020; Van Bree et al., 2018). According to numerous studies, zoonotic bacteria, such as Escherichia coli, Clostridium, Salmonella, Listeria, and Campylobacter, pose risks when handling raw meat products during dog food preparation as well as the risk of canine faecal shedding. In particular, the risk to young children or those who are immunocompromised from these microorganisms is reported to be disproportionately high (Davies et al., 2019). In addition to bacterial pathogens, other concerns include the risks of non-bacterial pathogens, such as helminths and protozoa (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hinney, 2018; Overgaauw et al., 2020; Van Bree et al., 2018). A third concern around RMBDs that contain bones is that they may result in gastrointestinal injuries or fractured teeth in dogs (Freeman et al., 2013). However, there is little empirical research exploring the health impacts of bones in the context of RMBDs for dogs. Finally, there are several recent studies stemming from Dog Risk, an independent and university-based research group at the University of Helsinki, Finland, that support some owner-reported health benefits of RMBDs

for dogs (M Hemida et al., 2021; Hemida et al., 2023; M. Hemida et al., 2021). Although these studies provide important context for this study by demonstrating the dominant scientific approaches to RMBDs, they do not capture the perspectives or motivations of dog owners who feed RMBDs.

2.2.2 Owner perspectives: motivations to feed RMBDs

Despite concerns stemming from veterinary and animal science research, the popularity of RMBDs is increasing among dog owners around the world (Dodd et al., 2020). Therefore, the growing body of research on owners' perspectives around RMBDs forms the basis of this critical review and provides a foundation for understanding motivations for feeding RMBDs. This research, also conducted predominantly by animal and veterinary scientists, is made up of predominantly quantitative survey-based studies in different national contexts, including the United States (US), the UK, Italy, France, Brazil, and Norway (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Hoummady et al., 2022; Maehlum & Hetényi, 2024; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2017; Viegas et al., 2020). The studies consistently found that the most important factors for choosing to feed dogs RMBDs were health; a lack of trust in commercial pet food; perceived naturalness; the dog's carnivorous or animal nature; and palatability. Moreover, in terms of dietary information, raw feeders were found to be less likely to follow recommendations from veterinarians and are more likely to seek advice from family and friends or online communities than dog owners who feed conventional pet food (Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2017). While some studies included free-text comments from survey participants (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022), the data are still limited in capturing dog owners' understandings and meanings of these concepts.

As mentioned, canine health is reported to be one of the main reasons owners choose to feed RMBDs. Despite the concerns around nutritional balance highlighted in scientific research (see Section 2.2.1), a global study conducted in English-speaking countries found that owners view both commercial and homemade RMBDs as highly nutritious (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020). Moreover, owners perceive RMBDs to provide several health benefits, improving skin problems and allergies, coat health, dental disease, digestion, and muscle mass (Bulochova & Evans, 2021b; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022). In particular, the longer time required for pets to eat the food was perceived as a benefit (Morelli et al., 2019), although it is unclear why this might be the case. Free-text comments collected in some studies provide some data, such as coat quality, better teeth, and stool consistency (Bulochova & Evans, 2021b; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022), however, the meaning of these terms and contextual reasons for their importance is lacking.

These survey-based studies also report owner perceptions of commercial pet food. For example, an Italian survey found that dog owners who fed RMBDs perceived commercial pet food as undesirable due to a lack

of ingredient information, the inclusion of additives and carbohydrates, the speed at which dogs consumed meals, and palatability (Morelli et al., 2019). In a UK-based survey, owners who fed RMBDs perceived 'cooked conventional diets' as posing a risk for 'skin problems and allergies, coat health, dental disease and oral hygiene, general digestive system health, anal sac clearance, and dog behaviour' (Morgan et al., 2022, p. 4). Additionally, several studies also report a lack of trust in commercial pet foods and manufacturers more generally, including concerns about ingredient quality and how pet food is processed (Bulochova & Evans, 2021b; Dodd et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019), as well as a lack of trust in commercial pet food companies (Michel et al., 2008). Given these concerns, RMBDs are perceived to offer owners more control over ingredients (Morelli et al., 2019). Of the studies reviewed, Bulochova and Evans' (2021b) qualitative netnography analysed online comments about food safety from pet owners and provided more nuance regarding what owners mean by the control over ingredients, including examples of what pet food is made of and a desire to incorporate meat bought from local butchers as this was seen as being of superior quality. However, given that this study data was comprised of online comments, there was little scope for gaining deeper understanding as could be achieved through interviews, for example.

Another perceived benefit of RMBDs is that they are more 'natural'. While the term 'natural' is ambiguous and was often undefined in the surveys reviewed – it could refer to perceptions of natural food or natural dogs. Food containing natural ingredients, for example, was found to be the most important marker of quality for Italian pet owners (Vinassa et al., 2020). Owners who feed RMBDs were also found to express concerns about additives and preservatives in pet food, which could be one motivation for 'natural' pet food (Morgan et al., 2022). However, studies have also suggested that 'naturalness' is relevant in connection to understandings of canine eating. For example, the dogs' perceived 'carnivorous' or 'animal' nature is deemed an important motivator for owners who feed RMBDs (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Morelli et al., 2019; Viegas et al., 2020). For example, 93 per cent of owners in one study chose RMBDs as they believed them to be a more 'species-appropriate' diet whereas 67 per cent of respondents believed that processed foods were bad for pets (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a). Since respondents were able to select multiple answers, both understandings of natural food and natural dogs are likely important for owners who feed RMBDs, yet it is still not clear how these concepts are connected. Therefore, the ambiguity around the term 'natural' is a limitation of these studies, especially given regulatory inconsistencies around the definition of 'natural' pet food (Buff et al., 2014). Another ambiguous term connected to consumer understandings of how dogs eat is 'palatability', which is often used in quantitative studies to refer to canine preferences (Morgan et al., 2022; Morelli et al., 2019). These surveys have therefore implied that whether dogs like food matters to owners but they do not explain why owners might perceive their dogs to like raw meat diets, thus overlooking the intersubjective relations that structure food choice.

In addition to perceptions of the benefits of RMBDs, surveys also highlight owner perspectives of the risks of raw feeding. While self-report studies indicate that many raw feeders do recognise the need for appropriate food safety practices, many perceive RMBDs as either low or no risk to human or animal health (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022; Viegas et al., 2020). Bulochova and Evans (2021b) qualitative netnography of owners' online comments suggests that there was awareness of harmful pathogens and parasites for both humans and pets. However, there were also understandings that the carnivore digestive system is 'designed to cope with pathogens' (Bulochova & Evans, 2021b, p.12, excerpt from online comment). Moreover, Morgan et al. (2022) found that a common theme in free-text comments was that the risks of pathogens and bacteria could be reduced through appropriate hygiene measures. While owners report the importance of food safety practices, such as storing dog food and human food separately, cleaning the food preparation area, and hand washing, these studies also indicated that not all respondents implement these practices or do so inconsistently (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a; Morgan et al., 2022). In addition to hygiene practices in the home, Bulochova and Evans (2021b) also found that some pet owners perceived supermarket meat to be safer than pet food because it was meant for human consumption, although it is not clear why this is the case.

In summary, studies on owner perspectives suggest that owners who feed RMBDs are motivated by their dog's health, control over ingredients, naturalness, and their dogs' carnivorous nature. While outlining various motivations for feeding RMBDs, these survey-based studies are limited due to a lack of depth and understanding of how dog owners understand or make sense of these concepts, as well as how these concepts might interact with one another in the context of everyday feeding. This is evidenced by the ambiguity of the term 'natural', for example, as well as the diverse ways in which health and wellbeing are conceptualised. The meaning and relevance of these concepts could therefore be better understood through in-depth qualitative research, as I will elaborate in the next subsection.

2.2.3 The limitations of animal science literature

As indicated in the previous subsection, research on RMBDs stems predominantly from the fields of nutrition and animal sciences. Scientific approaches have highlighted concerns regarding nutritional health and safety and have expanded understandings of motivations for feeding RMBDs. Yet, as I outline below, these studies are methodologically and conceptually limited.

First, quantitative survey-based studies on owner perspectives can inform us about *what* dog owners say they are concerned about or value but do not provide in-depth understandings of meaning or *why* they believe these aspects are of importance. In fact, despite calls for developing understandings of the social and cultural aspects of human-pet food consumption (Michel, 2006), there is still very little in-depth

research across animal science literature on pet diets. I therefore argue that a qualitative methodology is better suited to uncovering constructions of meaning in context (Creswell, 2018). As discussed further in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2), a qualitative analysis around human-dog feeding in the context of RMBDs could provide deeper understandings of concepts, such as 'naturalness' or 'animal nature'.

Second, very few studies have explored the connection between human dietary choices and the choice to feed dogs RMBDs, let alone divergent dietary practices between humans and dogs. To my knowledge, only a handful of quantitative studies have collected statistical data on raw feeders own dietary preferences. A Norwegian study found that over 90 percent of respondents who fed RMBDs to mostly hunting dogs were omnivore and 3.6 percent were vegetarian or vegan (Maehlum & Hetenyi, 2024). Moreover, a global study by Empert-Gallegos et al. (2020) on owner perspectives around raw feeding collected data on omnivore, vegan, vegetarian and other owner diets for all respondents, but their analysis did not distinguish between raw and commercial cooked feeders, thus preventing the identification of raw feeder's own dietary choices. Through my own calculations, their study data suggests that 3.1 percent of vegetarian and vegan respondents fed RMBDs (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020), which is similar to Maehlum and Hetenyi's (2024) findings. This is interesting given that a study which explores vegetarian diets for dogs found that only 1.6 percent of vegetarians and vegans feed their dogs plant-based diets (Dodd et al., 2019). In addition to the limited depth of understanding provided by quantitative surveys on owner motivations to feed RMBDs, there is a tendency to exclude practices considered to be marginal or statistically insignificant in pet feeding research (Taylor & Hamilton, 2014). This restricts both the study of diversity in human-dog feeding practices and 'alternative' diets, which, by default, are not the dominant feeding practices. Despite the small population of plant-based owners who feed their dogs RMBDs, these owners are conceptually relevant because they open a window into understanding complexity and difference across human-dog diets.

Third, in addition to the information gap on raw feeders own dietary practices, there is also very little analysis available on how values, such as health, naturalness, animal welfare, and the environment, translate or are understood across human-dog diets. A US-based study by Lenz et al. (2009) indicated that raw feeders are strongly driven by ideological rationale, such as the impact of pet food on the environment and are more likely to select organic products for themselves. There are, however, shortcomings to this survey-based study since although it includes a variety of owner beliefs (health risks, environmental impact, pet care, organic) and owner practices (consumption of raw foods, organic foods, vegetarianism, recycling), unfortunately these values and practices are not systematically analysed, which makes it difficult to assess how they interact or possibly conflict with one another. Interestingly, while the environment was the most important factor for raw feeders in Lenz et al., (2009) study, a survey conducted with Norwegian hunting dog owners found that environmental factors were the least important factor in choosing to feed RMBDs

(Maehlum & Hetenyi, 2024). This suggests that contextual and cultural factors may be important. Moreover, the concern for the environment, or lack thereof, is particularly important given that recent research has suggested that the demand for 'premium' pet food containing 'human-grade' meat is driving up the environmental impact of pets by placing pet food in direct competition with the human food system (Okin, 2017). To my knowledge, no studies have explored raw feeders' perspectives around animal welfare for farmed or wild animals consumed as part of RMBDs, which is surprising given that they are often marketed as 'ethical' alternatives to conventional kibble. In summary, previous quantitative research on owner perspectives around raw feeding is limited in that it does not sufficiently explore relationships between human diets and dog diets, either in terms of divergent practices or how values translate across the human-animal divide. The study presented in this thesis therefore aims to investigate relational values and human-dog feeding in order to both expand and deepen previous research on RMBDs and human-animal feeding more broadly.

2.2.4 Summary of section

The first section of this chapter has critically reviewed animal science literature to highlight the limitations of previous research on raw feeding from the disciplines of nutrition and animal sciences. It outlines veterinary perspectives on RMBDs which highlight concerns about nutritional health and safety. Quantitative surveys reveal that pet owners largely perceive RMBDs as both nutritious and safe. However, there are also broader motivations than health and safety, including trust, naturalness, and palatability. While the handful of studies available, that explore owner perspectives, provide an understanding of the perceived risks and benefits of RMBDs, they are limited by their survey designs, which cannot capture in-depth understandings of meaning in context. Moreover, they largely overlook the relationships between human diets and dog diets, or how raw feeding is embedded in social relations. Therefore, I argue that an in-depth study of human-dog feeding as described here should explore relational approaches to dog-owner diets, food values, and ethical perspectives. To this end, the second section of this chapter outlines interdisciplinary qualitative social science research on meat consumption, parent-child feeding, and human-animal relations in order to better understand the values and relations that shape human-animal feeding.

2.3 Social science literature

In this thesis, I argue that dog feeding is not just about ensuring dogs are fed nutritional and safe food. Rather, dog feeding is embedded in social and relational dynamics that unfold in different cultural contexts. In light of recent developments around the humanisation and commercialisation of pet food (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1), this thesis aims to expand understandings of complexity and difference in human-animal feeding. To this end, it bridges social science literature on food and feeding which conceptualises animals

as the eaten but not as eaters of food and human-animal relations literature, which develops diverse understandings of pets in the context of familial relations but has paid very little attention to the topic of feeding.

This section is structured according to the themes of meat eating and conscious omnivorism, mother-child feeding, and human-animal relations. The literature reviewed in each sub-section provide important contributions to conceptualising human-dog feeding but also face specific limitations, such that all three sections are required to provide a comprehensive understanding of human-dog feeding relations and alternative diets. First, I examine social science literature on meat consumption (Section 2.3.1), which outlines individual values and belief systems that shape decisions to consume or avoid meat. While this research explores human relations with animals and the environment, most approaches assume that humans are eaters and animals are the eaten, thus overlooking the role of dogs-as-eaters in the context of feeding relations. Second, given the lack of sociological literature on human-dog feeding relations, I explore sociological research on mother-child feeding (Section 2.3.2). I stress here that I do not intend to conceptually equate dogs to human children, nor tack animals on to existing theoretical frameworks without considering the position of animals (Taylor & Sutton, 2018) but am drawing on thematically adjacent literature with an awareness of the issue of theoretical anthropocentrism. Despite this concern, mother-child feeding literature is useful for understanding human-dog feeding because it provides relational understandings of responsibility, vulnerability, tensions, and negotiations when feeding human family members, such as children, in the context of the industrial food system. Third, in order to specifically consider the position of animals, I turn to human-animal relations literature (Section 2.3.3), which provides diverse and nuanced accounts of human-dog relations in the context of contemporary pet keeping. However, much of the empirical research reviewed does not explicitly focus on the topic of feeding, but on other relations with non-human animals, such as training, healthcare, playing, and sleeping arrangements (for exceptions, see a small body of literature on pet feeding in Section 2.3.3.3). The chapter contributes to the conceptual development of human-dog feeding relations by bridging food studies with human-animal studies literature. This paves the way for conceptualising complexity around meat consumption and dogs-as-eaters in human-dog feeding relations.

2.3.1 Meat eating and conscious omnivorism

In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the negative animal welfare and environmental impacts of industrial factory farming (Willett et al., 2019). Consumers are arguably becoming more conscious of ethical issues due to the increased visibility of meat-production processes through surveillance technologies and dissemination of information regarding farmed animal welfare in the media (Arcari, 2018). The contested nature of industrially produced meat has resulted in two proposed solutions. First, it

has been suggested that the production and consumption of food from animals be reduced by adopting plant-based diets (Morris et al., 2021; Willett et al., 2019). Second, in the last two decades, another narrative around 'ethical meat' has gained traction, which proposes that only factory farmed meat be avoided. Changing the ways in which meat is produced to align with ethical ideals reinscribes the edibility of non-human animals with increasing demand for products labelled free-range, organic, grass-fed, welfare certified, hormone-free, and environmentally friendly (Arcari, 2018). However, there are many critics who highlight that 'happy meat' discourse masks the continued exploitation of farmed animals (Arcari, 2018; Cole, 2011). Therefore, I aim to develop understandings of how 'alternative' meat consumption and vegetarianism might operate alongside one another in human-canine households. To this end, I critically review psychological approaches for understanding rationalisations of meat eating (Joy, 2010; Joy, 2012) as well as sociological literature that foregrounds social and cultural complexity around (ethical) meat eating (Bruckner, 2018; Evans & Miele, 2012; Oleschuk et al., 2019).

2.3.1.1 Carnism and neocarnism

In order to conceptualise why some vegan and vegetarian dogs owners feed their dogs RMBDs, this sub-section explores social psychologist Melanie Joy's influential concept of 'carnism', which presents meat eating as a cultural practice. Carnism is an 'invisible belief system' that 'conditions us to eat certain animals' by naturalising food choices and taking away perceptions of choice (Joy, 2010, p. 19). Joy explains how carnism functions through the 'three Ns of justification', implying that eating animals is normal, natural, and necessary (*Ibid.*). Thus, in carnist societies, meat eating is the traditional norm and becomes difficult to question. Conversely, vegetarians are seen as deviating from this norm and have to justify their choices. Meat eating is also naturalised, such that it is seen to have a biological basis in nature. Finally, the necessity of eating meat is foregrounded as important for health and economic growth (Joy, 2010). Increasing knowledge of meat production processes and animal welfare means that denial is more difficult to sustain, yet justifications for meat eating continue to develop (Joy, 2012; Stewart & Cole, 2009).

In a later article, Joy (2012) argued that these carnist justifications have adapted into new ideologies, which she calls 'neocarnism'. The function of neocarnist ideologies, Joy cautions, is that they seek to invalidate veganism by providing rational carnist justifications that do not exclude but are in fact based on ethical reflections – 'the solution is not to *stop* eating animals, but to change the way we eat them' (*Ibid.*, original emphasis). Based on the justification that eating animals is normal, one neocarnist ideology, which Joy calls 'compassionate carnism', seeks to address animal welfare concerns through 'humane' meat. The naturalisation of eating animals is further entrenched through 'ecocarnism', a second neocarnist ideology, which addresses environmental concerns. Industrial agriculture, rather than animal agriculture, is problematised, resulting in the legitimacy of consuming 'sustainably-raised' animals. Finally, eating

animals is necessitated through 'biocarnism', which underscores the importance of human health (Joy, 2012). Therefore, meat eating is conceived as not only normal, natural, and necessary, but also an ethical alternative to the impracticalities of veganism (Arcari, 2018; Joy, 2012).

In the context of dog feeding, it is possible that dog owners may employ carnist discourses in order to provide justifications for feeding their dogs meat. This was the case in sociologist Erika Cudworth's (2016, p. 239) research, where dog owners 'normalized and naturalized a meat diet for dogs by drawing on arguments for biological difference and physiological necessity' (see also Section 2.3.3.3). However, it is not clear what kinds of discourses *raw* feeders might draw on, since there are different value systems underpinning RMBDs. Especially for vegans and ethical vegetarians, who are likely to hold strong values around animal welfare and the environment, it is possible that they might employ a range of neocarnist discourses to justify feeding practices.

2.3.1.2 (Ethical) meat consumption

While carnism foregrounds meat eating as a cultural practice, there is a growing body of empirical research exploring the consumption of what is often called 'ethical meat' or 'conscious omnivorism'. Most of this research focuses on meat for human consumption, however recent studies have also drawn attention to humane dog food (Baker, 2024). While I am aware of philosophical support for ethical meat (Scruton, 2004; Singer & Mason, 2006), quantitative social psychological studies on the attitudes of 'conscious omnivore' consumers (Rothgerber, 2015a, 2015b), and critical research which focuses on the commodification of animals in 'happy' meat narratives (Arcari, 2018; Baker, 2024; Bruckner, 2018; Pilgrim, 2013), in this review I focus on qualitative social science literature that foregrounds social and cultural complexity in consumer perspectives, as this is most relevant to research on human-dog feeding (Bruckner, 2018; Oleschuk et al., 2019).

Oleschuk et al.'s (2019) qualitative sociological study explored Canadian consumer attitudes to meat consumption, providing an analysis of cultural repertoires that participants used to make sense of meat eating. Combining cultural and psychological approaches, their research builds on understandings of the psychological strategies used to justify meat eating (Joy, 2010; Piazza et al., 2015). The authors outline what they call identity-based repertoires and liberty repertoires that participants drew on to make sense of meat eating. The first identity-based repertoire highlighted gendered positions of 'a muscular, masculine meat-eating body in contrast with a thin, feminine body that restricts meat and favours plant-based foods' (Oleschuk et al., 2019, p. 346). A second identity-based repertoire demonstrated that meat sustained cultural traditions and identities, often invigorating a sense of community belonging. Third, they identified a liberty repertoire of consumer apathy, which 'frames consumption as legitimately apolitical and sometimes even unthinking' (*Ibid*., p. 351). Given the inevitability of market forces, respondents often disengaged from

problematic issues surrounding meat and perceived themselves as unable to use individual consumer choices to drive meaningful change. Finally, a second liberty repertoire of consumer sovereignty was identified, which emphasised the 'right to make autonomous choices in the marketplace', upholding the conceptualisation of the consumer as 'autonomous, self-determining individuals' (*Ibid*., p. 354). These perspectives suggest a broader repertoire of discourses around meat eating that situate individual approaches within social and cultural contexts, including communities and the broader food system. This is important if we are to understand both the individual drivers but also structural and discursive factors shaping food choice. While this study focuses on meat eating, in my research on dog feeding, it is possible that plant-based dog owners may draw on cultural repertoires to maintain their own as well as their dogs' consumption practices.

Studies on ethical meat eating are also becoming more popular in the context of research on alternative food networks (AFN), which is of relevance given the rise of alternative pet food movements (AFPM) (Baker, 2024; Nestle, 2008). Bruckner et al., 2018's qualitative research involving interviews and body mapping explored producers and consumers' (who self-identified as carnivores conscientious of animal welfare) conceptualisations of 'happy meat' in Austrian AFNs. Consumers presented understandings of farm animals as living organisms rather than as commodifiable resources, despite their relative distance from animal agriculture. As noted by Bruckner et al. (2018, p. 42), 'the symbolic animal matters, even when physical encounters are rare'. They highlight bodily connections to notions of the 'good life' by eating ethical meat, suggesting a form of 'metabolic continuity', whereby 'dead meat is reimagined as a living animal whose life is metabolically linked to the human body' (Bruckner et al., 2018, p. 41). Finally, drawing on Kathryn Gillespie's (2011) notion of 'disconnected connection', they suggest that consumers handling and preparing meat are connected to animals – but as objects rather than as subjects (Bruckner et al., 2018, p. 43). This analysis is particularly interesting because it offers a different way of conceptualising nonhuman animals in meat consumption from the well-known term 'absent referent' coined by ecofeminist Carol Adams (2010), which states that animals become materially and symbolically absent once they are transformed into food. Rather than thinking through absence and presence as totalising concepts, Bruckner et al. (2018) foreground the complex and at times contradictory perspectives around animal welfare involving both relations of connection and disconnection with non-human animals in AFNs. Their work is particularly useful for disentangling the material and symbolic connections and disconnections to non-human animals that can form through 'happy' meat consumption and shows how symbolic connections, which are often all that is available to consumers who are distanced from the spaces of animal production, can be partial and potentially veil lived materialities. However, while providing a rich account of animal welfare, Bruckner et al. ignore how other values may interact or conflict with these concerns. Moreover, while taking a step towards conceptualising non-human animals as subjects, the assumption of human-as-

eater remains, thus overlooking the potential for non-human animals, such as dogs, to become ethical consumers.

2.3.1.3 Summary of section

This section has explored the concept of ethical meat within the context of ethical and sustainability concerns related to industrial farming. The ethical meat movement, marked by terms such as 'free range' and 'organic', seeks to align meat production with humane practices, though critical animal studies scholars argue it still perpetuates and masks the continued exploitation of animals by positioning non-human animals as commodities for human consumption. Melanie Joy's concept of 'carnism' (2010) is central to understanding why meat-eating persists as a cultural norm, with justifications like the 'Three Ns' (normal, natural, necessary) reinforcing this practice. Joy's later work introduces 'neocarnism' (2012), which rebrands meat-eating as ethical by promoting 'humane' meat and environmentally sustainable practices. I suspect that, in the context of dog feeding, plant-based dog owners may draw on carnist or neocarnist ideologies to alleviate moral tensions involved in feeding their dogs RMBDs, given it is likely they hold ethical values around animal welfare and environmental sustainability.

Subsequently, I reviewed empirical sociological and psychological studies that delve into the cultural and social complexities of meat-eating, discussing how consumers justify their choices through various discourses. While useful for showing how meat-eating is framed within cultural repertoires, I critiqued this research for oversimplifying consumer choices and emphasised the need to view choices within the structural and discursive constraints of society, rather than as purely individual decisions. To echo Cudworth, '(Joy's work) underestimates the ability of systemic social relations to reproduce themselves' (Cudworth, 2016, p. 229). Thus, in order to explore complexity around meat eating within social feeding relations, the next section draws on social and relational approaches to feeding in food studies literature that addresses mothering ideologies and the complexity of navigating responsibilities around mother-child feeding.

2.3.2 Social relations and mother-child feeding

As highlighted in the previous sub-section, the rationalisations for (ethical) meat eating as outlined in social psychological literature require more nuanced accounts when explored in the context of everyday consumption practices that foreground social relations. However, despite acknowledging relations with non-human animals and the environment, the research reviewed above largely provides accounts of individual food choices and overlooks the complexity involved in feeding dependents. The sociological literature on mother-child feeding reviewed in this section understands feeding as much more than just nutrition. Importantly, it conceptualises relational understandings of dependency and vulnerability as well

as tensions and negotiations that arise when feeding human family members, such as children, which some argue have become more heightened in the context of growing awareness about the industrialisation of the food system. Furthermore, in many families, dogs do have a status that is akin to children in the sense that they are vulnerable and need to be taken care of and are deeply enmeshed in families' day-to-day lives. I do not intend to equate dogs to human children, nor tack animals on to existing frameworks about human children without considering the position of animals. However, I found this literature extremely useful because of the themes that were raised and the theoretical lens that they provide and engage with it with a deep awareness of the potential trap of theoretical anthropocentrism (Taylor & Sutton, 2021). First, I explore sociological literature on 'intensive mothering' and 'natural mothering' ideologies, arguing that a synthesis of the two is required in order to comprehend raw feeding relations (Section 2.3.2.1).[7] Second, I review empirical studies which explore mothering ideologies in the context of food consumption. In particular, I focus on a body of research from sociology and geography that has highlighted how meat consumption is not an individual phenomenon but unfolds within social relations that often involve feeding human family members (Section 2.3.2.2).[8]

2.3.2.1 'Intensive' and 'natural' mothering ideologies

In the last thirty years, a growing body of sociological literature has developed understandings of mother-child feeding relations and the gendered aspects of food consumption. Much of this research stems from two overlapping but distinct ideologies around mothering: 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) and 'natural mothering' (Bobel, 2002). These ideologies are important for understanding how child feeding practices are shaped by shifting notions of what it means to be a good mother and provide a useful starting point for conceptualising the values of 'good' pet parenting that could be shaping dog feeding practices. In this section, I outline some of the key values that support these ideologies and show how intensive and natural mothering ideologies differ according to attitudes around expert advice, which is important given constructions of RMBDs as an *intensive* but also *alternative* dietary practices.

Coined by US-based sociologist Sharon Hays in her much-cited work *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), 'intensive mothering' is said to have become the valorised norm of white, middle-class

[7] While I am aware of a vast body of ethics of care literature that is rooted in notions of motherhood (Held, 2005, Noddings, 1984, Tronto, 2020) and has also been applied in recent research on mother-child feeding (Koskinen, 2023a, 2023b), I do not review this literature here in any detail as these ways of conceptualising care were not a strong theme in the data. Furthermore, gender was not a main frame for analysis.

[8] The reader will notice that some of this literature refers to the concept of 'risk'. I have not reviewed the broad literature on 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) related to evolving societal perceptions of risk as the focus in this study is on individuals' everyday behaviours and how they exhibit understandings of control. I discuss notions of risk that were present in participants' responses, as detailed in the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 5.

motherhood in cultural contexts, such as the US, UK, Australia, and Canada. Intensive mothering is described as a 'gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children' (Hays, 1996, p. x). According to Hays, intensive mothering is child-centred, expert-led, emotionally-absorbing, labour-intensive and financially expensive. As the central caregiver, mothers are tasked with providing care and must respond to the child's needs and desires, even above their own. In this way, children and child-rearing are treated as sacred and require 'protection from the contaminating logic of our rationalized market society' (Hays, 1996, p. 122). Notably, the internalisation of and responsiveness to expert advice and childrearing recommendations is a cornerstone of intensive mothering ideology and has been demonstrated in empirical US-based research on child feeding, which will be explored later in this section (Afflerback et al., 2013; Mackendrick, 2014). While premium RMBDs suggest a trend towards pet owners increasing more labour, time and financial resources in pet feeding than 'complete and balanced' conventional kibble diets (see section 2.2.2), previous empirical research has indicated that raw feeders are distrusting of traditional expertise, such as the pet food industry and veterinary professionals. Thus, I turn to scholarship on natural mothering, which overlaps in many ways with intensive mothering but can help to better conceptualise raw feeders' relationships with experts and their positioning as an 'alternative' to conventional kibble feeding.

Sociologists argue that a parallel shift towards natural, holistic, and intuitive parenting occurred in the US around the 1970s, which continues to be prevalent today (Bobel, 2002). While there are many overlaps between intensive mothering and natural mothering, in that they are both individualist approaches, natural mothering is distinguished by three specific characteristics, including simple living, attachment parenting, and cultural feminist theory (Bobel, 2002). There is a strong environmentalist agenda behind natural parenting that follows the principle of minimised consumption, such that proponents of natural mothering 'seek meaning in "doing it oneself," freed from the constraints of institutions and experts who claim to know best' (Bobel, 2010, p. 49). According to Bobel (2010, p. 105), natural mothers adopt a 'posture of resistance' and 'rail against systems of control in the form of institutions and so-called experts'. The value of 'natural' processes is not viewed as being in binary opposition with modern 'artificial' technologies, but rather, natural mothers interrogate and question the benefits and risks of these technologies (Guignard, 2015). The allure of nature and the natural, then, is that it is 'separate from and unpolluted by human manipulation' (Bobel, 2010, p. 127). The binary separation of culture and nature in natural mothering ideology is, argues Bobel, what makes it so attractive since static conceptions of nature are perceived to be impervious to co-optation by the individual. In interviews with natural mothers in the US, they identified discourses around the 'natural' through statements such as 'I trust in the process of life' and that babies are 'programed' to sleep and eat when needed (*Ibid.*). This is an interesting contrast to intensive mothering ideologies which centralise the child's individualised needs and taste preferences (Afflerback et al., 2013).

I suggest, therefore, that intensive mothering centralises a responsiveness to the child's individual subjectivity whereas this may be more obscured through discourses of 'naturalness' in natural mothering ideology.

In sum, this section has provided an overview of two child-centred ideologies that individualise maternal responsibilities around child rearing. Where they differ most prominently, I argue, is in their orientation to what is deemed the 'mainstream'. While intensive mothering upholds normative ideals of white middle-class motherhood through the absorption of conventional expert advice, natural mothering, while remaining the purview of white middle-class mothers, is characterised by an opposition to mainstream culture. Although these approaches have been applied to many different aspects of child rearing, the next section outlines how these two approaches have resulted in the conceptualisation of the 'organic child' and 'sustainable family' in the context of food consumption.

2.3.2.2 Feeding the 'organic child' and the 'sustainable family'

Consumption is one of the primary ways through which ideologies of motherhood are expressed (Cook, 2009; Cairns et al., 2013). Sociological perspectives on mother-child feeding in the US and Canadian contexts have employed the concept of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) to explore maternal responsibilities around reducing risks to their children and making informed decisions regarding health and food safety (Afflerback et al., 2013; Brenton, 2017; Mackendrick, 2014)[9] and ethical food consumption (Cairns & Johnston, 2018; Cairns et al., 2013). A helpful framing for understanding this is what Joslyn Brenton (2017) calls an 'intensive feeding ideology', which includes activities such as:

> (S)hopping at multiple grocery stores for the healthiest foods, finding ways to stretch the family budget to buy organic food; navigating nutritional information and expert feeding advice; negotiating food with children; and teaching children how to develop a taste and preference for particular foods. (Brenton, 2017, p. 867)

In the context of health and food safety, sociologist Norah MacKendrick (2010) demonstrates how intensive mothering plays out in individual responsibilities to avoid exposure to contaminants in consumption practices – a process which she calls 'precautionary consumption'. Empirical studies have found that US-based mothers negotiate risks and seek to avoid contaminants by choosing 'natural' and 'ecological' alternatives (MacKendrick 2014; Afflerback et al., 2013). While consumers hold differing understandings of the term 'organic' in different contexts, organic agriculture aims to minimise external inputs and avoid

[9] While there is a body of sociological research on the maternal body as a vector of chemical exposure (see MacKendrick, 2014), in this review I include literature that explores feeding discourses and identities rather than the materialities of pregnancy or breastfeeding, for example, which is gendered for obvious biological and social reasons, which are of less relevance in the context of human-dog feeding.

synthetic fertilisers and pesticides (Lyons et al., 2001). Afflerback and colleagues (2013) found that their sample of US-based mothers fed organic baby foods and formulas in order to minimise their babies' exposure to processed foods and pesticides. Moreover, their analysis suggested that knowledge and control over ingredients and what was entering their babies' bodies was important. Moreover, while much attention has been given to the mother's decision-making, empirical research has also documented how perceptions of the child's preferences actively shape food choices (Afflerback et al., 2013; Cook, 2009). For example, Afflerback et al. (2013) documented mothers' interpretations of babies' preferences for breastmilk, formula, or solid foods, which was based on observations of their behaviour, such as seeming to be happy, consuming or rejecting food, or expressing preferences for certain foods. Interestingly, they reported that homemade baby food afforded mothers flexibility to incorporate tastes that they themselves were familiar with as well as those that they believed their babies enjoyed. What these studies highlight particularly well is the ambivalence of child subjectivities; as Cook (2009, p. 33) explains, '(f)ood situates the child as both subject and object – as a person or being with likes and dislikes yet as a thing to be nourished'.

In addition to natural alternatives, which seek to protect children from impurities in the industrial food system, food scholars have also argued that intensive mothering ideologies include social responsibilities that promote the collective good through ethical consumption (Cairns et al., 2013; Cairns and Johnston, 2018). Ethical eating discourses encourage consumers to make 'good' consumption choices, such as organic, free-range, and fair-trade, according to extensive knowledge about these foods and their production practices (Cairns and Johnston, 2018). Drawing on the concept of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), Cairns and colleagues' (2013, p. 98) analysis of mothering and ethical consumption in the Canadian context develops the concept of the 'organic child', which they describe as an 'idealized notion of a "pure" child that is kept safe from the harmful impurities of an industrialized food system'. Importantly, however, ethical consumption extends the focus of responsibility beyond protecting the physical wellbeing and purity of the healthy child to also include a responsibility to protect a healthy planet. This is achieved through the socialisation of children as ethical consumers in order to 'promote healthy and sustainable futures' (Cairns et al., 2013, p. 106). For mothers, this can result in a tension at the intersection of mothering and ethical consumption, where feeding the organic child is presented as a tool for social and ecological change while at the same time reinforcing the individual responsibility of mothers to enact that change (Cairns et al., 2013).

While the 'organic child' figures at the centre of intensive mothering ideologies, Guignard's (2016) research in the Francophone European context proposes a more pluralistic approach that draws on natural parenting. They suggest that 'nurturing the sustainable family' takes on different priorities that, while still important, decentre the child and shift discourses away from the mother to the family unit, including fathers. According

to Guignard (2016, p. 60), compared to the centrality of risk, health, and purity in notions of the 'organic child', their concept of 'nurturing the sustainable family' places focus on 'holistic notions of local sustainability, fairness in international trade, social justice, convenience, pleasure in taste, and feeding children'. The purpose of this review is not to determine which ideological framing is better than the other, but to underscore the cross-cultural instability of what is considered appropriate care (Faircloth et al., 2013).

One aspect of ethical consumption that has not been discussed so far in the context of parent-child feeding is how concerns about animal welfare are navigated in meat feeding practices (Evans and Miele, 2012; Cairns and Johnston, 2018). Evans and Miele's (2012) research explored food consumption practices across several European countries, focusing on connection with non-human animals. They found, similar to Oleschuk et al. (2019), that community ties and traditions sometimes outweighed ethical commitments to non-human animals. While Evans and Miele (2012) highlighted that commitments to animal welfare can often be in tension with family care practices, Cairns and Johnston's (2018) study on meat and ethical consumption provides more nuanced insights by showing how meat plays a central role in notions of 'good mothering'. They identified a tension that mothers face: on the one hand, they are expected to raise informed child consumers who understand where their food comes from; on the other, they must shield their children from the uncomfortable realities of animal slaughter. This research is illuminating, as it uncovers complex identities that mothers navigate between being a 'good mother', raising an 'informed child consumer', and preserving the 'innocent child'.

2.3.2.3 Summary of section

By exploring the social dynamics of mother-child feeding and constructions of intensive and natural mothering ideologies, this section has conceptualised relations of dependency and vulnerability in the context of social and relational feeding dynamics. It demonstrated an expansive list of responsibilities mothers face as well as the complexity involved in decisions around providing children with 'good' food. Reviewing empirical studies on natural and organic foods that are seen as a means through which to protect the 'sacred' child and consume ethically, this literature suggests that mothers are tasked not just with protecting the healthy child but also a healthy planet.

Since there is very little sociological literature on human-dog feeding, this review of just a selection of literature on mother-child feeding provides a useful starting point to conceptualise human-dog feeding relations. However, the dominant focus in the studies reviewed above obviously remains on human relations. In order to consider the position of the animal, I stress that there are particularities in canine-human relationships and researchers should tread carefully so as not to directly transfer theoretical understandings of mother-child feeding to human-dog feeding. First, the caring responsibilities of pet owners differ from those for children, since the pet parenting relationship is one of sustained dependence

rather than gradual independence as the child becomes an adult. Second, literature on mothering and ethical consumption emphasises the responsibility of mothers to educate the ethical consumers of the future (Cairns and Johnston, 2018; Cairns et al., 2013). Since, it is highly unlikely that dogs will come to directly purchase their own food, these educational responsibilities are less relevant in the context of this thesis. Indeed, the relationship between parent and child may not be directly transferable to owner and dog, however the values and responsibilities outlined here are useful to carry forward for understanding human feeding relations with dogs. Having now outlined conceptualisations of human feeding relations focusing on parents and children in sociological literature, the final section in this chapter draws on sociological literature on human-animal relations in order to illuminate relations of human-animal similarity and difference that can be applied to dog feeding.

2.3.3 Human-animal relations

In contemporary society, there are many different types of relations between humans and non-human animals. Literature from human-animal studies often highlights a tension in what is deemed the dominant perspective in Western countries of human-animal relations today (Carter & Charles, 2011; Stewart & Cole, 2009). This maintains that some animals are seen as companions, welcomed into our homes as members of family units, and afforded a degree of subjectivity and visibility. Others, however, are farmed or used in laboratories in the production of meat and medicines, where they are denied subjectivity and are thus invisibilised. Not only is this ambivalence intriguing on a conceptual level for scholarly enquiry, but it also has extreme material consequences for millions of animals since objectification and invisibilisation are often connected to increased exploitation and violence (Carter & Charles, 2011).

This is an important backdrop upon which to understand human-dog feeding relations since dogs are relatively visible and subjective beings compared to other animals that are also present as food in the feeding process. These take the form of invisible and objectified farmed or wild animals that can be conceptualised as 'absent referents' (Adams, 2010) in practices of feeding dogs meat. Drawing on the work of Eva Giraud, it is important to be attentive to both narratives of entanglement and responsible relations as well as an 'ethics of exclusion' (Giraud, 2019). This 'pays attention to the entities, practices, and way of being that are *foreclosed* when other entangled realities are materialized' (Giraud, 2019, p. 2, original emphasis). Therefore, a critical understanding of human-dog feeding relations should neither assume the subjectivity or visibility of any human or nonhuman animal. Rather, it should seek to provide analytical space to explore the discursive and material processes of inclusion and exclusion in social life.

Understanding how owners who themselves follow plant-based diets feed their dogs RMBDs may not only explore values related to food but also those regarding non-human animals consumed as food. The previous

section on mother-child feeding literature explored relations of vulnerability and dependency in practices of feeding but has not been able to conceptualise dogs-as-eaters. In order to foreground the position of animals this sub-section reviews social science literature on canine-human relations. First, I explore discussions around pet parenting and conceptualisations of the canine consumer. I argue that these constructions remain humanistic and preclude understandings of how living and eating with dogs may encourage reflections across the human-animal divide. Second, I draw on research which understands human-animal relations as co-constituted, which might inform how feeding may shape relations with dogs. Finally, I review a small but growing body of interdisciplinary literature from sociology, philosophy, and anthropology on pet feeding. I note here that there is a heavy focus in this review on Western understandings of human-animal relations given their relevance for the study locations of the UK and Australia, but these by no means represent the diversity of relations with non-human animals in other cultures.

2.3.3.1 Pet parenting and the canine consumer

During the last 30 years, we have witnessed what is often referred to as the humanisation of pets, in which pets are further incorporated into homes and families and new social and legal structures have been formed to improve their welfare (Fox & Gee, 2016). Pet humanisation often goes hand in hand with anthropomorphisation, understood as the ascription of human-like attributes to pets, such that they are regarded as family members or human substitutes (Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008). At the same time, the process of pet-making is intricately entwined with the commodification of nonhuman animals. Critical pet studies scholar Heidi Nast argues that we are living in an era characterised by the 'hypercommodification of pet-lives and love' (Nast, 2006b, p. 306), in which pet animals 'can be anything you want them to be' (*Ibid*., p. 302). Thus, while some argue that dogs are increasingly seen as child substitutes (Haraway, 2003), others are more sceptical of their 'anthropomorphic malleability' (Nast, 2006b). Moreover, scholars have argued that shifting conceptions of care for pets are manifesting in alternative forms of companionship (Fox & Gee, 2016). Thus, exploring shifting canine-human relations can pave the way for understanding human-dog feeding relations.

The humanisation of dogs goes hand in hand with a shifting perception of animals as objects or possessions (Belk, 1988) to animals as social actors (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Charles & Davies, 2008). Interpretative research on consumption and pets in the late 1980s and 1990s presents pets as a symbolic project, and thus, extensions of the self and expressions of the consumer's self-identities. Russell Belk's influential paper titled 'Possessions and the Extended Self' (1988) asserted that pets are possessions and 'an objective manifestation of the self' (Belk, 1988, p. 159). Yet, this perception of animals as objects/possessions to be used was later contrasted with the view that animals are beings to be interacted with (Hirschman, 1994; Sanders & Hirschman, 1996). Hirschman characterised animals as companions, which enable 'bonds of

intimacy' (Hirschman, 1994, p. 629) that can be on par with other humans. Subsequently, dogs are seen by many as substitutes for children (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Hickrod et al., 1982; Hirschman, 1994; Sanders, 1993).

The entanglement of dogs as children and, by extension, as consumers is highlighted in Jessica Greenebaum's (2004) study on consumption and human-canine relations, in which shopping for pets was found to be a means of them as family members. Her study of a small bakery in the United States called Fido's Barkery indicated anthropomorphised relationships with dogs, who were constructed as child substitutes or 'fur babies'. It is noteworthy that dogs were not conceptualised as objects of consumption, but rather dogs and their owners co-constructed an ideal image of the family (Greenebaum, 2004). Despite this, their degree of subjectivity is obscured as the study does not explore or recognise the unequal distribution of agency in the human-canine relationship.

While humanisation is dominant in understandings of human-pet relations, scholars have drawn attention to diverse and complex relations with pets (Blouin, 2013; Bouma et al., 2021; Fox & Gee, 2016, 2019; Hill, 2024). Sociologist David Blouin's (2013) qualitative research conducted with dog owners in the US, for example, reveals a typology of three orientations towards dogs. In addition to 'humanistic' emotional attachments formed between pet parents and dogs, they suggest there are also 'dominionistic' and 'protectionistic' orientations towards pets. Dominionistic orientations see animals as objects that have a lower status than humans (Blouin, 2013) – echoing the 'animals as possessions' stance in early research on animals and consumption (Belk, 1988). Conversely, the protectionistic orientation refers to having a strong attachment to one's own dogs, in addition to a concern for other nonhuman animals that are not their own. In contrast to anthropocentric humanistic attitudes, protectionistic orientations are 'biocentric', suggesting that animals have inherent value rather than what they can provide for the improvement of human welfare. In this way, animals are constructed as 'subjects, but not as people' (Blouin, 2013, p. 298) and are valued for both their similarities and, crucially, their differences to humans. The protectionistic perspective echoes the critical work of animal studies scholar Rebekah Fox, who recognises the need to 'value beings for their own intrinsic worth, autonomy and difference rather than on the basis of their similarity to humans' (Fox, 2006, p. 527). Moreover, Fox and Nancy Gee's (2016, 2019) empirical research in the UK suggests recent shifts towards alternative forms of companionship. This emphasises aspects of animal 'naturalness', often distinguishing animal identities from humans (Fox & Gee, 2016). What is important to recognise is that pets take on a multitude of social roles. From a critical perspective, pet studies scholar Heidi Nast cautions their 'anthropomorphic malleability'. Pets, she argues, 'supersede' children; they are 'more easily mobilized, require less investment, and to some degree can be shaped into whatever you want them to be' (Nast, 2006a, p. 302). Yet, Nast calls into question the wider implications regarding care and wellbeing,

particularly if pets do not conform to these constructed ideals since they can then be 'de-clawed, euthanized, or given away' (*Ibid*.). Thus, it is necessary to bear in mind the uneven relations of power between dogs and their owners.

Human-animal studies scholars have critiqued both humanisation and difference approaches, since top-down identity constructions remain fundamentally anthropocentric and reinscribe the human/nature divide, albeit in different ways. The entanglement of pets in social life and the degree of subjectivity they are afforded as members of human families can be seen as an improvement to their care and well-being (Fox & Gee, 2016). However, when viewed more critically, the notion of humanisation assumes that pets are accorded family status on the basis that they 'perform normative (human) family roles' (Power, 2008, p. 536), such that owners are constructed as 'pet parents' who look after their 'fur babies'. Scholars have argued that conceptions of the human (Mullin, 2007) and the family (Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Power, 2008) remain static in humanisation approaches. This is paradoxical, since despite, or indeed because of the inclusion of pets into human families, these anthropomorphic identities serve to extend the category of human into nature rather than evaluating and dismantling the human/nature binary (Fox, 2006; Plumwood, 2002). Moreover, understandings of human-animal relations are oversimplified, since while similarities may be recognised, aspects of difference go overlooked. As feminist scholars have highlighted, acknowledging the 'distinctness and difference' of animals is an important part of developing respect for the non-human world (Plumwood, 1993, p. 6). Thus, relations of anthropocentric anthropomorphism impose top-down constructions onto canine companions that may improve their welfare but could be detrimental to relations with other nonhuman animals who are not viewed as 'family'.

While difference approaches are deemed important for foregrounding the inherent value of non-human animals, they have also been cautioned for essentialising animal actions according to 'biological' and 'natural' behaviours (Fox, 2006; Power 2008). While critical sociological research on human-animal relations has argued that discourses of animalisation can fall into danger of essentialising animal actions according to biological or natural behaviours (Fox, 2006; Power, 2008), the reasons why this is problematic are not always clarified. In sociology, biological essentialism is seen as problematic because it gives little weight to social or cultural explanations of difference (Peggs, 2012). In the context of canine-human feeding, narratives of 'naturalness' could obscure social relations of power and the processes of domestication that have come to demarcate the divide between the human and the natural (Mullin, 2007).

2.3.3.2 Co-constituting relations

The recognition of both aspects of similarity and difference complicates simplistic assumptions about owners' relations with dogs. The liminality of pets is evidenced in Rebekah Fox's (2006) empirical research with owners, who combined both anthropomorphic understandings with reductive notions of instinctual

behaviour. As such, pets were at times constructed as 'human' family members and at others, as 'animals' with different instincts, needs and behaviours. Moreover, the 'intimate embodied nature of the human-pet relationship' (*Ibid*., p. 535) can challenge anthropomorphic and essentialist notions of animal subjectivity. This suggests that constructions of meaning in food and feeding practices may not be unidirectional, but rather constitute a 'lived intersubjectivity' involving 'two beings sharing a messy, awkward, loving relationship' (*Ibid*.) that may encourage reflections across the human-animal divide.

The permeability of the human/animal species boundary and messiness of living alongside pets has been explored in empirical research on more-than-human families (Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Power, 2008) and posthumanist households (Smith, 2003) as sites for human-animal cohabitation. Stemming from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Cultural Studies, the theoretical goals of posthumanism are to reconceptualise human and nonhuman relationships along lines of agency (Haraway, 2008; Latour, 1993). In their research with house rabbits, Julie Ann Smith (2003) proposes a 'performance ethics' approach, which acknowledges the limits of domestic animal agency while calling for attentiveness to the performances of animals' own natures. Their work has been drawn on by scholars such as Emma Power (2008) and Cudworth (Cudworth, 2011, 2021, 2022), who acknowledge both power and agency in canine-human relations. Despite the privileging of humans through systems of social relations, which Cudworth (2011) calls the 'anthroparchy', the home may be a site 'where the eating of non-human animals is rejected; where relations of care and conviviality might enable the relative flourishing of humans and animal companions and where practices are negotiated and human boundaries challenged' (Cudworth, 2021, p. 427). Therefore, it is possible that feeding animals might destabilise and reconstitute human-animal relations (Mullin, 2007).

This sub-section demonstrates strides towards understanding dogs as active participants in social life as well as the structures of power that ultimately limit their subjectivity. The posthumanist approaches outlined above foreground narratives of entanglement that seek to overcome human exceptionalism and blur the nature/culture divide. Yet, food and feeding relations are noticeably lacking in sociological, geographical, and anthropological research on canine-human relations. As such, much of this literature distinctly overlooks broader human-animal relations that involve not just dogs and their owners, but also farmed and wild animals consumed as dog food. This may be due to epistemological and methodological speciesism that renders some activities, such as feeding, and some animals, such as food animals, as less important of consideration than others. Thus, this subsection forms part of a broader critique of canine-human research that overlooks other non-human animals.

2.3.3.3 Social and ethical aspects of pet feeding

While I argued in Section 2.2 that pet food research is predominantly conducted within the disciplines of animal and consumer sciences, there is a small but growing body of work on the social and ethical aspects of pet feeding in the disciplines of geography, philosophy, sociology, social psychology and anthropology (Baker, 2024; Cudworth, 2016; Hilton, 2015; Krafft, 2023; Milburn, 2017, 2022; Mullin, 2007; Nestle, 2008). The topics explored include the modern pet food industry (Nestle, 2008; Wrye, 2012); pet food marketing and humane dog food (Baker, 2024); the ethics of pet feeding and meat consumption (Milburn, 2017, 2022, Rothgerber, 2013, 2014; Cudworth, 2016); and anthropological studies on wild eating and raw feeding (Mullin, 2007; Kraft, 2023). While understandings of the pet food industry and marketing provide important context, and this research is drawn on in the discussion in Chapter 7, for the purpose of this review on feeding relations, I focus on studies on the ethics of feeding pets' meat and anthropological research on raw feeding.

First, the ethics of feeding meat to pets has been approached from philosophical (Milburn, 2017, 2022), social psychological (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014) and sociological approaches (Cudworth, 2016). Moral philosopher Josh Milburn (2017) describes an 'animal-lovers paradox', which suggests that people with a deep affection for animals contribute to the suffering of non-human animals consumed by their pets as food. Milburn draws on empirical research conducted by social psychologist Hank Rothgerber (2013, 2014), who found in two quantitative survey studies that vegetarians who feed conventional meat-based kibble to their pets experienced what he calls 'the vegetarian's dilemma'. This dilemma is said to stem from conflicts between the desire to promote their pets' wellbeing with animal welfare and environmental concerns. While this research has advanced our understanding of human identities and beliefs in connection with divergent human and pet diets, 'the vegetarian's dilemma' narrowly focuses on a single tension between two assumed core values: the affection for animal companions and the harm of animals consumed as food (Rothgerber, 2013; Milburn, 2017). It is also notable that Rothgerber (2013) suggests that vegetarians might reconcile this dilemma by feeding their dogs plant-based diets. Not only am I doubtful that value tensions can be made fully compatible with one another, but empirical data also suggests that the majority of vegetarians still feed their dogs meat-based kibble (Dodd et al., 2019). What this implies is that there may be more values at play, which only adds to the complexity of feeding dogs meat. Indeed, sociologist Erica Cudworth's qualitative research on feeding dogs meat-based food in the UK points towards this complexity in her analysis of what she calls gradients of ethical choices for vegan and vegetarian owners. Despite experiencing visceral reactions, such as disgust, vegan and vegetarian dog owners naturalised feeding their dogs meat by drawing on notions of biological difference and physiological necessity (Cudworth, 2016). Although this research provides a more nuanced account of the various values and tensions that shape

feeding dogs conventional meat-based kibble to dogs, current research on vegan and vegetarian identities and attitudes to pet feeding cannot explain why people who follow plant-based diets themselves would choose to feed their dogs *raw* meat-based diets. Thus, the values and possible tensions involved in feeding dogs alternative RMBDs can be further investigated by a case study that focuses on raw feeding.

There is very little social science research that addresses alternative pet diets or raw feeding. Anthropologist Molly Mullin explored how the relationship between wildness and domestication manifests in pet feeding, arguing that 'domestication stories' are used to legitimise consumer choices by providing knowledge that is 'seemingly less shaped by corporate interests' (Mullin, 2007, p. 278). The notion of the 'wild', she explains, 'can be a means of reacting against anthropomorphism and consumerism' (*Ibid*.), which suggests that raw feeding may also be connected to tensions around commercialisation. While her research explores pet food laboratories, pet food industry forums, and foxhounds, of most interest here are her rich observations of the raw feeding movement around the early 2000s, which she refers to as 'wild feeding'. First encountering raw feeding through research with breeders, she provides an interesting interpretation of raw feeding as a way to 'emphasize the uniqueness of the breed':

> '(I)n keeping with the endangered species analogy and the notion of the breed as less domesticated than others, it made sense that fanciers might see the animals as so different from other dogs that they needed to be fed a completely different kind of food' (*Ibid*. p. 291).

Canine identities and notions of difference were therefore thought to be important to dog breeders who fed RMBDs. While drawing together the often-overlooked conceptions of wildness and domestication in much pet food research, these now slightly outdated perspectives of breeders and pro-raw veterinarians, such as Dr Ian Billinghurst and Dr Tom Lonsdale, could be expanded by exploring contemporary understandings of dog owners who feed RMBDs. Finally, a recent undergraduate dissertation in anthropology by Anna Krafft (2023) involved ethnographic research with raw-feeding dog owners in Bristol, UK. In an interesting observation that suggests that raw feeding reflects various values, Krafft argued that raw feeding should be reconceptualised as 'raw(?)feeding' in order to highlight the ambiguity surrounding 'rawness'. Emphasising owners' experiences of a tension between petness and wildness, she argued that raw(?)feeding was a 'responsive mode by which owners navigate and support their dog within ongoing processes of (in)dividualisaiton and validity' (Krafft, 2023, p. 6). This analysis is highly relevant in the context of plant-based raw feeders because it suggests that, in addition to tensions between their own dietary identities and feeding pets raw meat, they may also be navigating tensions connected to relations with their dogs around humanisation, individualisation, and notions of the wild.

2.3.3.4 Summary of section

This section has explored literature from the field of human-animal relations, focusing on pet parenting and constructions of the canine consumer, co-constituting relations, and pet feeding. I highlighted the intertwined trends of the humanisation and commercialisation of pets which shape much of this literature. However, the evolving perception of pets has led to alternative forms of companionship, which emphasise animals' differences from humans. A second body of research shifts from unidirectional constructions of pet parenting to emphasise the mutual influence of both pets and owners in co-constituting relations, which is particularly useful for understanding how human and animal identities may be negotiated and reconstituted through feeding practices. Finally, this section reviewed a small body of research on pet feeding, which highlights how biological discourses are important in the way dog owners navigate ethical considerations around feeding kibble meat-based diets to pets. Moreover, anthropological research on raw feeding explores how wild feeding can serve to emphasise a pet's unique identity and distance them from their domesticated and commodified status, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the appeal of alternative pet diets.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has paved the way for understanding alternative diets and human-dog feeding relations by drawing together interdisciplinary literature from animal and veterinary science and social science. The first section of the chapter critically reviewed research on RMBDs from animal and veterinary science literature. While I outlined scientific research that underscores concerns around nutritional health and safety, the main focus of this review was on a growing body of quantitative surveys which capture dog owners' perspectives around feeding RMBDs in different national contexts. These studies provide some information about dog owners' reported motivations to feed raw but offer little understanding of why these aspects are important or what they understand by concepts such as 'naturalness' and 'health'. Moreover, while two studies provide breakdowns of the diets raw feeders follow, very little is known about relational food choices and values across human and dog diets in the context of raw feeding. The critical review therefore informed this research by identifying research gaps in terms of qualitative approaches that explore human-animal relations associated with feeding dogs RMBDs.

To better understand alternative diets and human-animal feeding relations, the second section of this chapter explored literature across the fields of social psychology, food sociology, and human-animal studies, which were structured according to the themes of meat and conscious omnivorism, mother-child feeding, and human-animal relations. Bridging these diverse bodies of literature was deemed important because each provided a unique contribution to the understanding of human-dog feeding relations. First, I outlined social

psychological literature on (ethical) meat consumption which foregrounded the individual values and belief systems that shape decisions to consume or avoid meat. These approaches largely consider that humans are meat eaters and animals are eaten as meat, thereby limiting an understanding of dogs-as-eaters or human-dog feeding relations. Second, I explored sociological research on mother-child feeding in order to think about how we might conceptualise the responsibilities and dependencies involved in feeding those who require care. This literature highlighted the complexity of feeding relations, including tensions and negotiations involved in child feeding, but I argued that dogs cannot simply be tacked onto existing theoretical frameworks that involve human relations. Therefore, the final section reviewed sociological literature on human-animal relations in order to consider the position of animals. This literature provides complex accounts of the varied relations between human and non-human animals, in which dogs are conceptualised as consumers but not as eaters. This is rectified by a very small but growing body of research exploring pet feeding, which highlights ethical issues around feeding meat and alternative diets but does not address the two in conjunction. In the next chapter, I outline the methodological groundwork for this qualitative study that investigates human-dog feeding relations.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introduction and literature review chapters, this thesis seeks to conceptually expand understandings of human-dog feeding relations by focusing on complexity, diversity, and difference. To do so, I adopt an interpretative research epistemology and draw on insights from qualitative research from the fields of food studies and human-animal studies. This study involves two case studies that explore values and human-animal relations between humans who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs in the UK and Australia. To my knowledge, this is the first qualitative study on human-dog feeding conducted in two different national contexts. This chapter lays out the case study research design, qualitative methodology, and mixed qualitative methods used to collect data. The selection of methods for this research was contingent and responsive to ongoing developments around university restrictions to in-person research during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a flexible research approach for this study. Next, I outline the process of 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2021) which was employed to analyse the data. Finally, the chapter outlines ethical considerations for conducting qualitative research with human and non-human animals.

3.2 Designing two interpretative qualitative case studies

As outlined in Chapter 2, much previous research on dog feeding has been conducted using quantitative survey-based methods, which aim to generate generalisable information about the attitudes and practices of dog owners. I argued that survey data is limited since it does not capture diverse and in-depth understandings of the concepts and attitudes in question. For example, Dodd et al. (2019) found in their study in English-speaking countries that the most commonly reported concern among plant-based dog owners was regarding the welfare of farm animals in the production of meat-based pet foods, such as kibble. However, since no definitions of animal welfare were provided in the survey, the *meaning* of animal welfare to individual respondents is not known. Qualitative research methods are better suited to understand the multiple meanings of individual experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, survey-based methods are limited in understanding contextual factors. To continue with the example of animal welfare, why might animal welfare be important for an individual? How do understandings of farm animals or farming systems shape understandings of animal welfare? What about their relationship with their dog; does this make a difference to how they conceptualise farm animal welfare in the context of dog feeding? These questions are only a short list of potential contextual factors that shape human-dog feeding relations, but the point here is that context matters. Finally, while survey-based approaches aim to reveal human

attitudes about dogs or dog food, a third limitation is that they largely overlook the complex relations and tensions that emerge from living and, in this case, eating alongside non-human animals. From a constructivist standpoint, this matters because research methods do not just capture and describe but also reproduce the phenomenon in question (Taylor & Hamilton, 2014). For example, critical human-animal studies scholars Nik Taylor and Lindsay Hamilton have argued in the veterinary industry, there is a preference for evidence-based medicine that relies heavily on quantitative methods. However, no methods are value-neutral and the prioritisation of some methods and results over others is always political (*Ibid*.), which will be further explored in considerations for policymakers in Section 8.3. As I argued in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), the social and ethical aspects of canine-human feeding are largely overlooked in animal science research, which predominantly focuses on health and safety.

Considerations about in-depth understandings, contextual accounts, and complex relations between humans and non-human animals led me to select a qualitative case-study research design for this thesis, consisting of two cases that focus on feeding relations between dogs and humans in the UK and Australia. A case study is a research strategy often used to investigate a 'contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Case studies are suited to answering 'how' and 'why' questions and are therefore better suited to understanding complex social phenomena in context than survey-based research. While case studies can be used for both qualitative and quantitative research (Gerring, 2007; Liamputtong, 2020; Rossman & Rallis, 2017), here I focus on qualitative case study research.

The selection of an extreme case and interpretative analytical approach provides rich, complex, and in-depth understandings of human-dog feeding that have previously not been acknowledged in quantitative research. Qualitative research may not be statistically generalisable, but through the development of theory which can be extended to other cases, it is analytically transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 1994). In this way, the themes developed in this thesis could be used to explore relational feeding dynamics involving different actors or in exploring other relations with pets beyond food (see Section 8.2 for considerations for future research). Moreover, an important part of case study research is identifying what the case in question is a case of by distinguishing between the phenomenon of interest and the investigated unit (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 1995). In this thesis, the investigated unit is the relations between plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBDs. Thus, the bounded relations are between dogs, humans and food in the context of the home and the broader food system (Fig. 1).

For this study, I selected dog owners who themselves follow plant-based diets (vegan, vegetarian, and flexitarian) and predominantly feed their dogs RMBDs. This choice was in part owing to the exclusionary tendencies in quantitative research, which often disregard outlying results and exceptional cases (Taylor &

Hamilton, 2014, p. 257). I identified that despite being present in study data, albeit in small numbers, plant-based raw feeders were not discussed in previous studies (see Dodd et al. 2019; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020). In order to capture diversity in human-dog feeding relations, the case selection for this study followed purposive sampling, which involved deliberately selecting individuals or events because of the information that they can provide that might not be obtained as effectively through other sampling strategies (Padgett, 2016). I purposively selected unusual or extreme cases (Gray, 2018; Neuman, 2013), which is also referred to as 'outlier sampling', described by Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 81) as 'selecting cases near the "ends" of the distribution of cases of interest'. Extreme cases are useful because they open up our understanding of social life and provide new perspectives (Neuman, 2013). Therefore, plant-based raw feeders were not only selected because their perspectives have not been recognised in previous research (although this is the case) but also because their understandings might generate new insights around human-dog feeding that have so far been overlooked, in particular around feeding diversity and ethical complexity.

By ethical *complexity*, I do not mean that plant-based dog owners are the only dog owners making ethical food *choices*. The need for this clarification came to my attention when recruiting participants for this study and a social media group administrator replied to my request to post details about my project with a thought-provoking postscript. It read, 'P.S. There are a large number of us human meat eaters who also make ethical choices when sourcing our own and our pets' food'. Indeed, I could have explored diverse feeding practices by including dog owners who feed RMBDs and follow various diets or plant-based dog owners who feed plant-based, kibble meat-based, or RMBDs. The reason I include this anecdote is to underscore that I do not believe that plant-based dog owners are the only dog owners making ethical *choices*. However, plant-based raw feeders in particular open up questions about ethical *tensions*, resulting in a better understanding of how dog owners navigate complex decisions around what to feed their dogs, especially in light of certain ethical values that seemingly contradict what they feed their dogs. Moreover, in selecting plant-based raw feeders, I assumed that their perspectives might challenge, complicate (or even reinforce) several dominant narratives in human-dog feeding, such as the humanisation and commercialisation of pet food as well as dominant norms around meat consumption in Western cultural contexts. Despite the prevalence of the humanisation of pet food hypothesis, especially in industry discourse, Banton et al. (2021) found that the owners of dogs fed grain-free dog food were more likely to follow a grain-free, vegetarian, vegan, ketogenic, or no-processed foods diet. However, it was unclear to the authors why vegetarians or vegans would be more likely to choose grain-free food for their dogs. Therefore, I suspected that investigating the values, identities, and relations of plant-based raw feeders with their dogs might generate more in-depth and nuanced understandings of complexity, diversity, and difference that have not been sufficiently conceptualised in pet feeding literature.

Having outlined the decision to focus on plant-based raw feeders, I now turn to the study's locations of the UK and Australia. Despite the vast amount of research highlighting scientific perspectives around raw feeding, the handful of quantitative studies that capture consumer motivations to feed RMBDs have been conducted in a single country (see Section 2.2.2) or, in the case of global studies, do not systematically analyse cultural differences (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020). The UK and Australia were selected as study locations for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons. As is common in all research, access has played a role in the selection of these cases (Tight, 2017). The practicalities of my Joint PhD Programme meant that I was able to spend time at both the University of Nottingham, UK, and the University of Adelaide, Australia, and had access to participants in both locations. Moreover, two English-speaking cases were deemed manageable for the 4-year programme. As will be reflected on in more depth in the next section (see Section 3.3.3), this does not mean that access to the communities in question was without difficulty. Despite the convenience sampling, this does not limit the usefulness of the case studies, which can draw out social and cultural dynamics around human-dog feeding (Michel, 2006). As mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2), there is a higher prevalence of raw feeding in Australia than in the UK. A recent survey by Dodd et al., (2020) found that among English-speaking countries, raw feeding is most prevalent in Australia, where 88.4 per cent of respondents included raw meat in their dog's diet and 16 per cent fed raw exclusively. In the UK, 66 per cent of Brits included raw meat in their dog's diet and 11 per cent fed raw exclusively (Dodd et al., 2020). Therefore, this study exploring two English-speaking countries, the UK and Australia, is the first to qualitatively examine contextual cultural and social factors driving food choices in the context of raw feeding. Multiple case studies are beneficial because they can further exemplify the issues of concern, however, I stress here that these qualitative interpretations are not strictly generalisable from the UK to Australia (or vice versa) because the contexts of either case are different (Liamputtong, 2020; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2006).

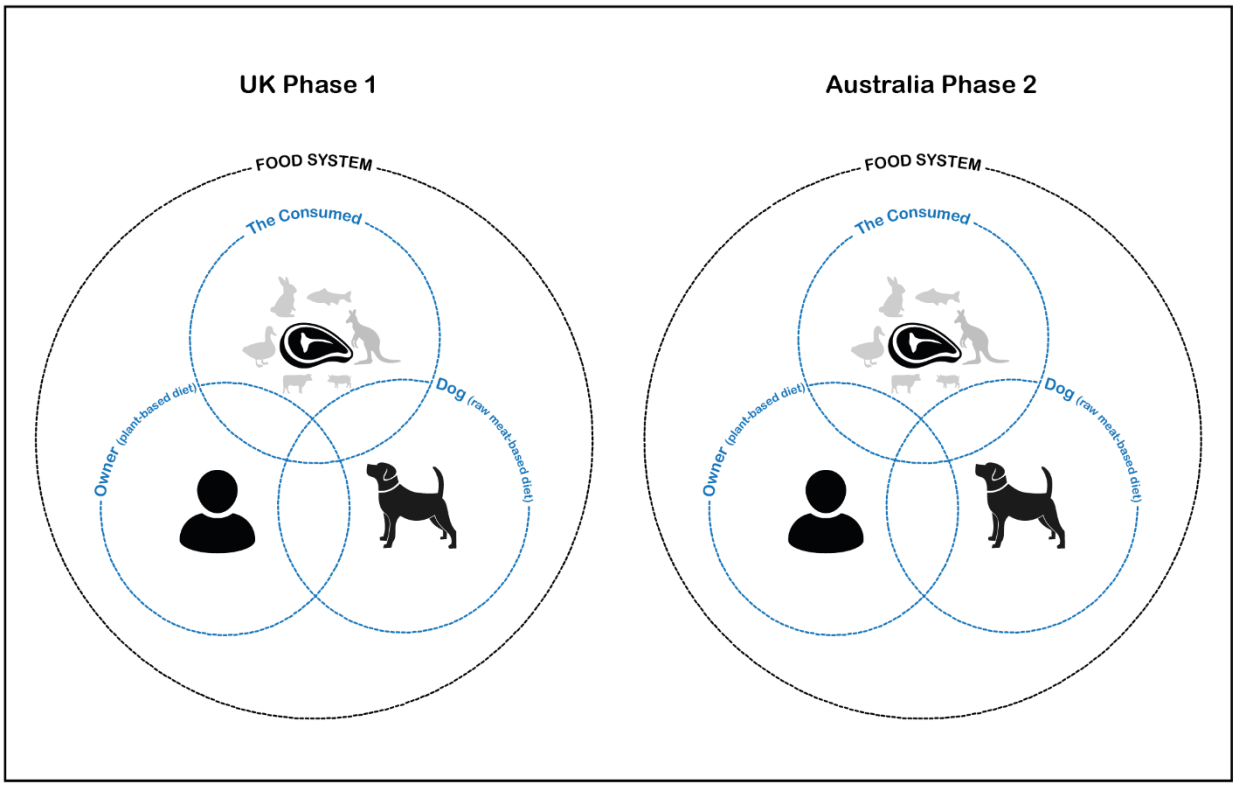

Figure 1: Case selection for multiple case-study design

3.3 Mixed qualitative methods and data collection

This section outlines the rationale behind the use of mixed qualitative methods in this thesis and describes the processes of data collection. The selection of methods for this research was contingent and responsive to ongoing developments around university restrictions to in-person research during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a flexible research approach for this study. Data collection combined talk-based semi-structured interviews with creative more-than-talk methodologies which are becoming increasingly important considerations in the development of species-inclusive methods (Sutton, 2021; Taylor et al., 2018). This section demonstrates how semi-structured interviews were augmented by visual food diaries that aimed to explore meaning in-depth, capture abstract values around food and feeding, as well as draw attention to non-human animals and the everyday and routinised context of the home.

3.3.1 More-than-talk methods: participant-generated visual food diaries

Building on developments in visual methods in both food studies and human-animal studies, this research incorporates participant-generated visual food diaries that capture photos and videos of both human and dog food and visualise dogs-as-eaters. Visual methods and diaries are well established in these fields; thus, employing them to explore human-dog feeding relations aims to bridge methodological approaches across

these disciplines. This novel methodological contribution is further discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.4). Moreover, the decision to use visual methods alongside talk-based online interviews also aligns with the 'functional' and 'reflective' aims specific to this research, as conceptualised by Bear et al. (2017). This study explores relational values around food and feeding as well as human-animal relations, focusing on both humans and dogs, as well as other non-human animals consumed as food.

There is a long tradition of using diary methods in social and health sciences as a flexible tool for collecting rich data (Alaszewski & Alaszewski, 2006; Bartlett, 2015; Roe, 2006). More recently, diary methods have also been used in research since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, during which access to in-person research was restricted (Clarke & Watson, 2020). In food studies, diaries capture the seemingly mundane, routine acts of everyday eating (Hall, 2011; Hall et al., 2020). Visual and photo-based methods are also a popular choice for food scholars studying values, beliefs, and perceptions, such as mothers' values around food choice (Johnson et al., 2011; Wentworth, 2017) and meat consumption identities (Randers et al., 2021). Moreover, visual methods such as diaries are also gaining traction in human-animal studies, in order to decentre the human and explore human-animal relations (Bear et al., 2017; Charles, 2016; Cudworth, 2018; Hamilton & Taylor, 2017).

The primary functional aim of using visual food diaries was to foster participant reflection on food and feeding and explore relational values in the context of the home. Given that data collection took place while there were ongoing restrictions to in-person research due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project drew on visual ethnographic approaches that are respectful of context and intersubjective knowledge production (Pink, 2007). The photos and videos taken by participants in their homes were thus viewed not as objective data but as tools to explore lived experiences of human-dog feeding. By highlighting what is often seen as routine acts of eating and feeding (Hall et al., 2020), the visual diaries sought to facilitate communication and uncover tacit knowledge and values (Pain, 2012). For example, Randers et al., (2021) used participant-generated photo diaries to prompt discussion on food and identity dilemmas during in-depth interviews. Similarly, visual methods in family feeding studies suggest a capacity to incorporate the perspectives of various family members (Wentworth, 2017). In this way, visual food diaries aimed to capture and stimulate in-depth reflections on human-dog feeding relations. A secondary functional aim was to situate feeding within the broader context of human-dog activities, like walking and play. I particularly wanted to capture mealtimes to facilitate temporal access to the lived experiences of feeding relations (Clarke & Watson, 2020). While I considered walking interviews with dog owners (see Cudworth, 2018), visual diaries offered greater specificity, allowing mealtimes to be captured in the home. Additionally, the photo and video diaries enabled the exploration of meal variability (Bartlett, 2015), since anecdotally I was aware that many raw feeders do not feed their dogs the same food every day.

Beyond these functional aims, the reflexive aim of using visual methods was to nurture more equitable research relations between the researcher and human participants and to visibilise dogs in the research process. Previous research on dog owners' motivations for feeding RMBDs has been conducted using quantitative survey-based methods which involves researchers pre-selecting aspects of interest to them (see Section 2.2.2). The strength of participatory diary techniques is that they can provide participants with greater control over the research process (Bartlett, 2015), which I deemed necessary especially given that trust has been documented as a contentious issue within these communities (Bulochova & Evans, 2021b, Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2017). In addition to establishing more equitable research relations with human participants, this research also draws on 'more-than-human' methods which seek to de-centre the human, surpass textual accounts of social life, and explore fluid human-animal relations (Bear et al., 2017; Cudworth, 2018). In recent years, scholars interested in the study of human-animal relations have critiqued social research methods, particularly talk-based methods, as being anthropocentric as they privilege human accounts of social life (Bear et al., 2017; Buller, 2015; Carter & Charles, 2011; Cudworth, 2018). Thus, mixed qualitative methods are becoming more prevalent, including interviews, observation, diaries, and walk-and-talk methods (Alger & Alger, 1999; Cudworth, 2018; Fox, 2006; Power, 2012). While the perspectives captured using visual methods remain human-centred to an extent, capturing human-animal relations can provide spaces for nonhuman animal interaction in human activities to make their preferences known and exercise choices (Alger & Alger, 1999). Visibilising these relationships is therefore a step towards capturing 'values in relation'.

3.3.2 Talk methods: online semi-structured elicitation interviews

As described above, the visual diaries were conceived as functional and reflexive methodological enablers, rather than independent data, and were embedded in semi-structured elicitation interviews (Glaw et al., 2017). There is a long-standing precedence for this approach in diary research, often called the 'diary, diary-interview method' (DDIM) (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977), which positions participants as 'proxy observer(s)' (Latham, 2003), whose observations are then further explored in an interview setting.

While the visual diaries intended to act as a precursor to encourage reflection (Gibson et al., 2013) and stimulate discussion during the interviews (Orban et al., 2011), they also formed a starting point for interactive reflection between myself as the researcher the participants during the elicitation interviews. Photo and video elicitation interviews elicit different kinds of information during an interview than interviewing alone (Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002). Qualitative semi-structured interviews involve an exchange of dialogue around a range of topics, themes or issues, following a fluid and flexible structure, in which knowledge is regarded as situated and contextual (Mason, 2002). By starting with the participant-generated photos and videos and giving participants a choice over the order of photos discussed, participants

were afforded greater control over the interview discussion. This structure still enabled me to focus on human-dog feeding relations while leaving possibilities for participants to add new meanings to the study focus (Galletta, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are well suited to capture complexity due to the reciprocity developed between the participant and the researcher. These interactions enable the researcher to 'probe a participant's responses for clarification, meaning-making, and critical reflection' (Galletta, 2013, p. 24). Moreover, because the interviews were conducted online, this improved accessibility to participants across the UK and Australia; however, they potentially excluded those without access to a networked computer or mobile. While group deliberations around ethical values might have been explored through focus groups, I opted for individual interviews to provide a safe space for critical reflection, allowing diverse ethical values and tensions around raw feeding to emerge, avoiding the potential of focus groups to neutralise extreme views (Hennink et al., 2011).

3.3.3 Recruiting participants and collecting data

Recruitment and data collection were conducted in two Phases: Phase 1 UK (October 2022-February 2023) and Phase 2 Australia (May 2023-July 2023). I recruited participants who were self-identifying vegans, vegetarians, and flexitarians who predominantly followed plant-based diets over the age of 18 and who owned dogs and fed them exclusively or predominantly RMBDs. They also spoke conversational English and had access to a computer and/or smartphone. To recruit participants, I employed concurrent online and offline recruitment strategies using social media channels, recruitment flyers in local pet stores, and snowball sampling. For online recruitment, I posted flyers on Twitter and in raw feeding, dog feeding, and vegan/vegetarian Facebook groups (see Appendix 1). I suspected that Facebook groups would be a good avenue for social media recruitment since empirical research has suggested that raw feeders are seeking online sources of information about canine nutrition and frequently use social media (Morgan et al., 2017; Morelli et al., 2019). However, the diversity of online and offline recruitment strategies aimed to seek a diversity of participants, including those who are not members of these online communities. For offline recruitment, I sought consent from relevant companies and responsible personnel to post flyers in several pet stores and raw pet butchers around several locations in the UK and Adelaide (see Appendix 1). Most of the pet shops and specialist raw pet butchers in the UK were located regionally in the Midlands and South East England, which resulted in a disproportionate number of participants residing in these areas. One limitation is that I did not recruit any participants from Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland, making this an England-based portion of the study. In Australia, flyers were only posted in Adelaide, which could have skewed recruitment towards Adelaide-based participants, however, all Australian participants were recruited online from social media.

Considering the importance of building transparency and trust between researchers and research participants (Gelinas et al., 2017), I sought permission from the moderators of Facebook groups to post flyers. I had difficulty gaining access to some groups due to moderators' concerns that research requests would overrun other content in the group or that the study may cause offence to group members, which may have affected the participants I was able to reach. Online recruitment was more successful in Australia than in the UK, which may have been because reimbursement was provided for Australian participants, which is seen as best practice in the Australian context but was not offered to UK participants. Australian participants received a $20 pet shop gift voucher (approximately £10) for their time. This token gift was deemed proportional to the time spent participating in the study and the value was not deemed significant enough to influence participation in the study. However, given the difference in recruitment rates between Australia and the UK, where no reimbursement was offered, this may have had some impact.

The social media posts included a link and paper flyers with a QR code that took potential participants to the respective University of Nottingham and University of Adelaide hosted web pages, which contained further information about participating and contact details (see Appendix 1). The websites were expected to increase participation rates because they provide participants with easy access to information as well as affording the study more credibility; this was seen as particularly important given the issues with trust outlined above (see Section 3.3.1). The QR codes were generated using a European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant QR code generator and no personal information was collected during this process. Snowball sampling was also employed at the end of each interview, by inviting participants to discuss the research with contacts they thought might be interested, who could then voluntarily contact me or my supervisors.

During the recruitment process, I received emails from 18 potential UK participants and 22 potential Australian participants. In total 14 people were excluded from the study: 10 did not respond to my responses to their emails or withdrew, 3 Australian participants were animal professionals and 1 was not a raw feeder. The exclusion of animal professionals in Phase 2 Australia was due to the high inclusion of animal professionals in Phase 1 UK, which could have biased the data. In total, 26 dog owners who reported following plant-based diets and predominantly fed their dogs RMBDs were recruited to the study: 12 participants in the UK and 14 in Australia. As can be seen in Table 2 below, more women were recruited than men, particularly in Australia, which largely reflects previous surveys on pet feeding conducted in different national contexts (Anturaniemi et al., 2019; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Knight, 2023; Maehlum & Hetényi, 2024; Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2017; Vinassa et al., 2020). I suspect this might be due to the entanglement of meat and masculinity in Australia and lower numbers of male vegetarians and vegans (Stanley et al., 2023).

Table 2: Overview of participants for Phase 1 UK and Phase 2 Australia

Code Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Own diet	Occupation	No. of dogs	Dog breeds
Phase 1 UK						
P1UK_P01 Henry	M	57	Flexitarian	Research microbiologist	2	Collie Mixed (unknown)
P1UK_P02 Nikhil	M	39	Vegetarian	Actuary	1	Cocker spaniel (show)
P1UK_P03 Louise	F	31	Vegetarian	Nurse	1	Maltese Terrier
P1UK_P04 Kay	NB	31	Vegan	Not-for-profit organisation	1	Shetland Sheepdog
P1UK_P05 James	M	38	Flexitarian	Funeral profession	1	Patterjack Terrier
P1UK_P06 Ava	F	24	Vegan	Undergraduate student in biology	1	Mixed
P1UK_P07 Lisa	F	65	Vegetarian	Veterinary physiotherapist*	3	Shetland sheepdog
P1UK_P08 Paula	F	60	Vegetarian	Education in health and social care	6	Australian Kelpie (working) Mixed Kelpie/Sheepdog
P1UK_P09 Sara	F	50	Vegan	Canine nutritionist and behaviourist*	1	Greyhound
P1UK_P10 Miles	M	32	Vegetarian	Data scientist	1	Poodle
P1UK_P11 Drew	M	65	Vegan	Small business owner, founder of animal charity*	1	Mixed (unknown)
P1UK_P12 Freya	F	25	Vegan	Postgraduate research in social sciences	1	Labrador (working)
Phase 2 Australia						
P2AUS_P01 Lucy	F	56	Vegetarian	Marine biologist, dog trainer, small business owner (dog related) *	12	Australian Kelpie
P2AUS_P02 Isla	F	37	Vegetarian	Childcare professional	2	Australian Kelpie American Bulldog
P2AUS_P03 Marine	F	43	Vegetarian	Healthcare administration	2	Greyhound
P2AUS_P04 Evie	F	29	Vegetarian	Government	2	Staffordshire Bull Terriers
P2AUS_P05 Steph	F	33	Flexitarian	Warehouse assistant	1	Mixed Labrador/Rottweiler

P2AUS_P06 Lynda	F	59	Vegan	Small business owner (dog related) *	2	Mixed King Charles Spaniel/Dachshund
P2AUS_P07 Dana	F	30	Flexitarian	Electrical engineer, dog breeder*	2	Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers
P2AUS_P08 P09** Romi (F) Jason (M)	F M	35 39	Flexitarian Vegetarian	Arts manager Product manager	2	Whippets
P2AUS_P10 Mona	F	47	Vegan	Small business owner	2	German Shepherd Mixed (unknown)
P2AUS_P11 Tina	F	41	Flexitarian	Horticultural scientist	2	Pointer Mixed (unknown)
P2AUS_P12 Isa	F	28	Vegetarian	Speech therapist	1	Labrador
P2AUS_P13 Kris	F	33	Vegan	Graphic designer	2	Greyhounds
P2AUS_P14 Harvey	M	26	Vegetarian	Nurse, postgraduate in paramedicine	1	German Shepherd

* Indicates animal professional or related industries

** Indicates partners living in the same household who both participated in a joint interview

Participants who agreed to take part in the study were asked to take one food diary photo or video per day over three days in the week running up to the interview. This task required capture technologies such as smartphones, which were an inclusion criterion for participation. The selection of photos/videos to be included by participants followed the parameters of 'event-based sampling' (Bartlett, 2015, p. 17), whereby the participant information sheet (see Appendix 1) and correspondence emails suggested that participants might like to think about capturing food preparation or their dog eating. They were encouraged to show what they would 'normally' do, and the information shared emphasised that aesthetics was not important (however, see reflections in Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1). In order to transfer files securely, participants were sent individual OneDrive folders from the University of Nottingham OneDrive and the University of Adelaide OneDrive respectively, where they uploaded their photos/videos before the interview. Only the participant and I had access to each folder, and I immediately transferred the files to password-protected folders on OneDrive that were only available to me and my supervisors.

The visual food diary task was followed by an online semi-structured interview that lasted between 1-2 hours on average and took place on Microsoft (MS) Teams. By engaging creatively in the feeding process prior to the interview, the diaries were then used as prompts to aid the discussion, which enabled participants to articulate their views in the context of their own feeding practices (Bartlett, 2015). The research interview involved a series of questions that were grouped into topics, including introductions, food diary discussion, raw feeding background, food values, and concluding the interview. The food diary elicitation involved

asking participants which photos or videos they would like to discuss, which they usually presented in the order of the data collected. I prompted them to share reflections about this experience and any feelings they had. As is common in qualitative research, I started with less probing or sensitive questions, such as participants' background with raw feeding, before progressing onto more specific food values which I suspected might be more sensitive at times (Braun and Clark, 2021). The discussion around food values included questions about animal welfare, sustainability, and healthy eating across human and dog diets (see Appendix 2 for the research interview schedule).

I took great care to ensure the privacy of my human participants was protected. MS Teams automatically records both visual and audio data, so I used a software called Audacity to immediately strip out the video element, which was then deleted. Only the audio element was stored on OneDrive. The audio files from MS Teams were first transcribed using the University of Nottingham's Automated Transcription Service and then edited by myself drawing on Braun and Clark's (2022, p. 165) notation system for orthographic transcription. The transcripts were marked at necessary points with the name of the food diary file (e.g. P1UK_P01_P01 which refers to Phase 1 UK_Participant 1_Photo/video 1) to aid the analysis. If the food diary consisted of a video file, I transcribed any audio verbatim and marked this on the transcript. Once this task was completed, the audio Teams files were deleted. The privacy of both dogs and humans in this study was addressed by pseudonymising their names in the interview transcripts and removing any other personal information.

3.4 Reflexive thematic analysis

Since this thesis is about the values, identities, and relations between dog owners, dogs, and animals consumed as food, it seems only fitting that my own subjective values, identities, and relations are explicitly situated in the way I have analysed the data. For this reason, I decided to follow Braun and Clarke's (2022) well-known reflexive thematic analysis (TA) approach. TA is a highly flexible research method for data analysis that identifies and analyses patterns of meaning, or themes, in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p. 1948). Reflexive TA goes beyond descriptive and exploratory aims as it recognises coding as an interpretative analytic process which uncovers both semantic (surface) meaning and latent (underlying) meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Moreover, reflexivity involves reflection on how personal, methodological, and disciplinary choices and location all shape the production of knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Pre-empting the question 'why reflexive thematic analysis' requires briefly outlining other approaches and my own relationship to the data analysis.

TA is not a singular method, but rather there is a plurality of TA methods following specific research logics and philosophies (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2019) have categorised a typology of TA

methods which can be placed along a continuum: 1) coding reliability approaches; 2) codebook approaches, and 3) reflexive approaches. A major difference between coding reliability and reflexive TA is their research logic: while coding reliability TA has a post-positivist orientation which values 'objective, generalisable, reliable and replicable knowledge', reflexive TA has a qualitative orientation which emphasises 'researcher subjectivity as a resource for research and of meaning and knowledge as partial, situated and contextual' (Braun, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 39). Given the social constructionist epistemology that shapes this project, I do not see the aims of this research to uncover pre-existing 'truths' but rather generate themes through interpretative analysis which is both partial and subjective to my role as a researcher.

In addition to my epistemological alignments with reflexive TA, there were pragmatic considerations around flexibility owing to the multiple case study research design and my own positionality in this cross-cultural research (Hennink, 2008; Liamputtong, 2010). Since data collection was conducted in two phases (Phase 1 UK and Phase 2 Australia), the recursive and non-linear process of reflexive TA was deemed necessary for working with and across two datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For example, I transcribed interviews from Phase 1 UK while they were being carried out and then started to analyse them while I was conducting interviews for Phase 2 Australia. This meant that there was an iterative process, whereby the analysis from Phase 1 shaped the data collection for Phase 2. Moreover, as an English speaker who grew up in the UK, some themes seemed self-evident in the UK context whereas they became more questionable in the Australian context, with which I was less familiar. This issue has been raised by other qualitative researchers conducting research in different national contexts, such that the insider position might mean that a researcher might 'become too familiar with the material and miss – or, contrarily, over-emphasise – aspects of their own cultural context' (Wendt, 2020, p. 242). For example, aspects of trust, regulation, and human-grade meat (presented in Chapter 5) were prevalent in my analysis of interviews with Australian participants, but I had not picked this up as noticeably in the analysis of the UK data. From this comparison of the data, the theme of trust in suppliers emerged as the context in which UK participants discussed trust. Without this iterative process between the two data sets, I suspect I would not have arrived at these different themes. While reflexive thematic analysis offers flexibility in the sense that codes are fluid, open, and malleable (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), this example demonstrates that reflexivity blurs the boundaries between analysis and data collection. If I were to do this study again, I might start by collecting and analysing data in the context that was least familiar, in this case, Australia, in order to take these learnings back to the context which was more self-evident, in this case, the UK.

Finally, the quality of data guides the sample size, not the quantity. Braun and Clarke (2021b) have critically questioned the principle and use of saturation in research by clearly distinguishing reflexive TA from neo-

positivist coding reliability TA. Coding quality does not stem from consensus between coders but rather from a situated and reflexive engagement with data. Therefore, meaning does not reside within data, but rather 'at the intersection of the data and the researcher's contextual and theoretically embedded interpretative practices' (*Ibid*., p. 210). Consequently, it is upon the situated and interpretative judgement of the researcher in relation to the goals of analysis to stop coding and move on to theme development with the potential to revise coding again.

I used a six-phase reflexive TA to explore patterns of meaning across the two datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The six reflexive thematic analysis phases include familiarising yourself with the dataset (phase 1), coding (phase 2), generating initial themes (phase 3), developing and reviewing themes (phase 4), refining, defining and naming themes (phase 5), and writing up (phase 6). Computer software NVivo and Mural were used to *assist* with the analysis, not to perform the analysis in this research (Liamputtong, 2020). After uploading all the de-identified interview transcripts to NVivo, I created six coding folders to record the analysis for each of the six phases separately. This enhanced my reflexivity since I could easily and quickly retrieve previous iterations of codes and themes and compare how these had developed over the course of analysis. Below, I outline how I used reflexive TA by illustrating a worked example of the theme of *individualising care* (presented in Chapter 4, Section 4.3), explaining the choices I made.

During the non-systematic phase of familiarising myself with the data (phase 1), I encountered what Braun and Clarke (2022) refer to as a tension between familiarity and immersion, on the one hand, and distance and critical engagement, on the other. At times, I struggled to differentiate between the data and my analysis of the data. For example, I was drawn to participants' discussions about their dogs liking raw food or disliking certain foods, which could be described as surface-level content. Here, Braun and Clarke's (2013) concept of 'analytic sensibility' was helpful in shifting to a more interpretative position which was carried through the further stages of analysis. As a scholar interested in expressions of non-human animal agency, my initial interpretation of these statements was that these conversations were about choice and individualisation, which was likely informed by my prior engagement with a body of sociological literature exploring agency in posthuman approaches to human-animal relations for the literature review in this thesis (see Section 2.3.3).

The next step in 6-phase TA is coding, which is a systematic process involving an exploration of the 'diversity and patterning of meaning from the dataset' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 53). The output of the coding process is the codes themselves, which form the smallest unit of analysis in reflexive TA. A code is 'an analytically interesting idea, concept or meaning associated with particular segments of data' (*Ibid*., p. 53). The coding process followed a blended approach consisting of both inductive and deductive orientations to the data, which shifted as the analysis developed (*Ibid*., p. 56). To start with, the coding

process followed a more inductive orientation, since I was interested in capturing participants' experiences, perspectives and meanings of dog feeding. Some early examples of inductively derived codes in the worked example were 'my dog likes', 'dogs need meat', and 'dogs can't choose'. However, as the coding progressed, there were also more deductive orientations to data, in which theory provided an 'interpretative lens' to make meaning of the data (*Ibid*., p. 57). Here, I explored sensory food science and animal science literature that referred to 'palatability' (Morgan et al., 2022; Morelli et al., 2019) as a way of framing canine preferences in terms of the subjective pleasantness of food and the amount of food a subject eats (Blundell & Stubbs, 1999). While the term palatability provided a useful springboard for thinking about preferences at this stage, this concept did not sufficiently represent the relational aims of this analysis around intersubjective food choices.

Phase 3 of generating initial themes involved shifting analytic attention from the codes to larger meaning patterns, i.e. themes. In reflexive TA, a theme captures a pattern of shared meaning with its own central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I started by clustering together candidate codes into themes. The earlier examples of codes 'my dog likes the food', 'dogs need meat', and 'dogs can't choose' all seemed to cluster around choice, that is, both the presence and absence of choice in different ways. Here, it seemed clear that choice was the central organising concept and related to the research questions in that it spoke to a patterned understanding of human-animal relations. In order to generate (phase 3), develop and review themes (phase 4), I collated codes using visual mapping in an electronic software called Mural (see Appendix 3, Item 1). While Mural has been used in collaborative and participatory research (Pedó et al., 2022; Venter & de Vries, 2023), less attention has been paid to using Mural for the purpose of qualitative data analysis. The benefit of using Mural for this study was that it enabled me to visually represent codes and themes, as well as the relationships between them. I could also move the themes around and edit as I went along, affording me a sense of flexibility that is important for reflexive TA. One drawback, however, is that the interconnectedness and overlaps between themes were difficult to represent visually as I found the connectors between 'bubbles' were clunky and more time-consuming than drawing freehand.

Next, I reviewed the tentative themes developed in phase three against the data across the dataset in order to explore whether there were richer or more nuanced patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 97). It was during this stage (phase 4) that the boundaries of some themes needed to be refined. To follow the example of the theme 'the dog's choice', I had also clustered the code 'dogs need meat' around this theme. However, I realised that, while connected to choice, this code fit better with other codes that were organised around the central concept of needs, such as 'dogs are carnivores' and 'vegetarian diets are unnatural for dogs'. At other points, themes needed to be expanded or narrowed (*Ibid*., p. 99). For example, reviewing the sub-theme 'dogs can't choose' outlined in phase 3, I realised this needed to be contextualised since they were

perceived as being able to choose in some contexts and not others. For example, dogs were not seen as being able to choose to be vegetarian as this was a (human) ethical value. Therefore, I narrowed the sub-theme to 'dogs can't choose to be vegan'. At this stage, the number of themes was significantly reduced (see Appendix 3, Item 2). The exclusion of certain themes, while interesting, was because they were not as relevant to my research questions and the aim was to find a logical, connected narrative or overall story (*Ibid*.).

After reviewing themes, I refined, defined and named themes (phase 5) (see Appendix 3, Item 3), which merged with writing (phase 6) as I wrote theme definitions at the start of each empirical analysis chapter section. A theme definition outlines the 'scope, boundaries and core concept of the theme' (*Ibid*., p. 108). During the visual mapping activity, the analysis took on a more deductive orientation that was driven by theoretical understandings of mother-child caring relations in sociological literature (see Section 2.3.2). I noticed that the theme of choice was often connected to other themes such as 'responsibility' and 'needs', which are well documented in this literature. I wanted each theme to represent the analysis through the lens of care, and therefore decided to name the theme 'the dog's choice' as 'individualising care'. The term 'individualising' captured understandings of choice and palatability but went further in a relational sense, by highlighting that choice is not a static condition but a process of negotiation between dog and owner. Finally, the theme 'individualising care' consisted of the refined sub-themes 'raw meat is the dog's choice' and 'dogs can't choose to be vegan' in order to illustrate a narrative around choice; that is, while dogs were seen as capable of performing preference, such as expressing likes and dislikes, they were not seen as having the agency to make moral decisions, such as choosing to be vegan. In this way, the central organising concept is still 'choice', but the boundaries of the theme provide more nuance as to how choice is understood and navigated in canine-human relationships around food. The results of Phase 6 of writing up are demonstrated in this section as well as in the empirical chapters of this thesis (Chapters 4-6). Please see below for a summary of the worked example provided in this section (see Table 3).

Table 3: Worked example of the theme 'individualising care' using 6-phase reflexive TA

Phase 1: familiarisation with the dataset	**Phase 2: coding**	**Phase 3: generating initial themes**
Notes: Discussions about dogs liking raw food or disliking certain foods, descriptions of dogs' behaviour around mealtimes e.g. excitement Is this connected to choice? What does this say about agency?	*Initial codes:* 'My dog likes' 'My dog gets excited about their food' 'Dogs need meat' 'Dogs can't choose'	*Initial theme:* The dog's choice *Initial sub-themes:* 1. My dog likes their food 2. Dogs can't make choices Does this capture something meaningful?
Phase 4: developing and reviewing themes	**Phase 5: refining, defining and naming themes**	**Phase 6: writing up**
Refining boundaries: The code 'dogs need meat' does not fit around the central organising concept of 'choice' in the initial theme 'the dog's choice'. Fits better with the theme 'species-appropriate diets'. *Narrowing themes:* The sub-theme 'dogs can't make choices' should be narrowed to 'dogs can't choose to be vegan'.	*Lens:* Used lens of care to define and name themes around the central organising concept of care *New theme:* Individualising care – highlights the relational nature of the theme rather than static conceptions of choice.	*Narrative of the theme:* Individualising care *Sub-theme 1:* My dog likes their food BUT *Sub-theme 2:* Dogs can't choose to be vegan Illustrates the scope and limits of dog owners' understanding of canine choice and how this shapes their conception of care.

3.5 Ethical considerations for qualitative research with human and non-human animals

Given the relational approach to this research in both the conceptual foundations and methodological scaffolding, it is also pertinent to consider the ethics of conducting qualitative research involving both human and non-human animals. I intend for these considerations to build on a small but growing body of social science research that explores the ethical issues surrounding qualitative research with non-human animals (Collard, 2015; Cudworth, 2018; Hamilton & Taylor, 2017; Hill, 2022; Kuhl, 2011; Lonkila, 2021; Oliver, 2021; Szydlowski, 2022; Turnbull & Van Patter, 2022; Van Patter & Blattner, 2020).

In my view, ethics is neither a fixed act nor a prescriptive set of rules, but rather an ongoing, collaborative and dynamic process. In order to outline the ethical considerations underpinning this research, I have adapted Pascoe Leahy's (2022) temporal structuring device that considers ethics before, during, and after

the interview. This section reflects on ethical considerations made about both human and non-human animals across institutional ethical review, fieldwork, and data analysis. I emphasise, however, that while these stages of research are temporally distinct, they are ethically interconnected and embedded. Moreover, I assert that the exclusion of non-human animals from consideration in *human* research ethics applications is systemically problematic and while explicit ethics do not constitute the entirety of ethical reflections, they often form a starting point for these reflections – especially for novice researchers such as myself. In hindsight, I argue that the invisibility of animals in institutional ethical review for human research hindered my own ethical reflections regarding human-animal research.

3.5.1 Before data collection: institutional ethical review and informed consent

Formal institutional ethical review was conducted during the initial stages of this study and forms what Pascoe Leahy (2022, p. 778) calls 'explicit ethics'. The study received ethical approval from the University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (H-2022-048) and 'favourable ethical opinion' (which is equivalent to approval) from the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee (SSP REC) at the University of Nottingham (2122-PGR-33). Navigating ethical reviews at two different universities added further complexity to the process of research ethics as I had to accommodate variable and at times conflicting norms across different institutional and national contexts.

One variation was in the potential to include non-human animals in institutional ethical review. If the *human* in Human Research Ethics Committee was not already explicitly anthropocentric, there was no requirement to consider non-human animals in the University of Adelaide's human research ethics review process. In my School's application at the University of Nottingham, non-human animals were included in a list of 'Trigger Criteria' that would potentially route the application to the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science ethics committee. As also noted by qualitative researchers, I was wary of being caught between these two review processes: one which was better suited to qualitative research and another which did consider animals but for use in experimental scientific research (Gillespie, 2020). Moreover, while the visual methods proposed were subject to a high degree of scrutiny by both research committees in light of privacy concerns for the human participants, there was no mention of ethical considerations for non-human animals in any of our correspondence. This speaks to growing acknowledgement among social science researchers that institutional ethical review processes for human research do not consider non-human animals as research subjects, if at all (Collard, 2015; Cudworth, 2018; Oliver, 2021; Szydlowski, 2022; Van Patter & Blattner, 2020).

In research with humans, informed consent is seen as a key principle that respects people as autonomous subjects. However, I was left with the question of whether it was both necessary and possible to gain

informed consent from the dogs in this study. Human participants were initially informed about the research through recruitment posts, flyers, university-hosted web pages, and then the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form sent via email (see Appendix 1). These included information about the project aims, details of the researchers, and concrete outlines of what taking part would involve, including risks and benefits of the research, and data management. It was emphasised that participation in the project was voluntary. While I conceptualised dogs as participants in this research, considerations around canine consent were tricky to navigate in the review processes. Van Patter and Blattner (2020) point to the principle of voluntary participation, which states that 'animals cannot be forced to participate in research' and researchers should engage in 'ongoing embodied assent and mediated informed consent from a human representative' (Van Patter & Blattner, 2020, p. 179). While I recognised that canine participation in the study, particularly the visual feeding diaries, would be mediated through their owners, I stated in my ethics applications that direct consent would not be sought. However, at the time of completing institutional ethical reviews, these considerations remained largely conceptual and became more complex once I entered the field.

3.5.2 During data collection: mitigating harm during fieldwork

While the institutional ethical review process encouraged me to reflect on and anticipate possible issues that might arise during the research process, they were not sufficient to ensure continued ethical practices across the study or to predict unanticipated events for both human and canine participants. In addition to 'explicit ethics', Pascoe Leahy (2022, p. 778) argues that research also consists of 'subtle ethics', which she states, 'infuse the unofficial aspects of qualitative research'. Here, I consider the discordance between explicit considerations of potential risks to participants and the researcher in institutional ethical review and the subtle ethics that unfolded during the phases of data collection. For example, I had anticipated that human participants may face time inconveniences for completing the feeding diaries and attending online interviews. In order to mitigate these potential risks, I asked for one photo/short video per day and emphasised in my communication with participants need not spend too much time on the feeding diaries. Nevertheless, I sensed performative dynamics among some participants who asked whether the feeding diaries were 'good enough' or demonstrated what I needed, which is often reported in diary research (Bartlett, 2015).

What I had not anticipated, however, were incidents involving emotional or physical reactions stemming from reflecting across human and dog diets during the diary task, which was reported to me by a participant during our interview. I believe that the sensitive information that was revealed to me was in part enabled by the rapport and trust established during the interview and went beyond what the participant had explicitly consented to both before and during the interview. Following a 'subtle ethical approach to negotiating

consent' (Pascoe Leahy, 2022, p. 786), I contacted the participant after our interview seeking consent to discuss the issue in this thesis, which was understandably declined. This highlights a tension between mitigating further harm and facilitating agency, where I felt it was important to reflect on the potential negative impacts of qualitative research on human-dog feeding while respecting the autonomy of the individual to not share certain information. In keeping with the dynamic process of ethics, this event prompted me to amend my ethical review applications as well as the participant information sheet, adding 'The feeding diary activity may encourage reflections about your own diet. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage, please stop the activity' (see Appendix 1).

The feeding diaries also presented ethical tensions at the intersection of canine inclusion and potential harm or inconvenience to dogs. Observing that some dogs seemed to be staged or posed in the food diary photos, I was concerned whether the inclusion of dogs in the research was voluntary (Fig. 2). The use of food as a means of participation had the potential to reinscribe asymmetrical power relations between dogs and their owners (Power, 2008). However, reports from participants highlighted a tension between how methods may both capture and generate implicit dynamics of power between humans and dogs. For example, Nikhil (UK) commented: 'there was no staging, if you like, apart from getting her to sit for a little bit for a photo, erm, but we make her wait for her food anyway a little, you know, for a few seconds at least' (Fig. 2). Nikhil's comment suggested to me that this was feeding-as-usual. Nevertheless, I added further instructions for participants asking them to take photos/videos of 'how they would normally feed' and emphasised that I was not looking for aesthetic or staged photos. Upon reflection, one small measure I believe I should have employed is explicit instructions on the participant information sheets to limit disruptions to dogs, such as 'please do not move or disturb your dogs to take the photos/videos'. Despite this, research which is reliant on human participants to mediate relations between the researcher and their dogs means that the potential to mitigate harm is not fully in the researchers' control.

Figure 2: Food diary photos of Poppy (left, shared by Louise, UK) and Flora (right, shared by Nikhil, UK) waiting for their food

3.5.3 After data collection: privacy and representation

In light of important questions emerging in social science research about the privacy and representation of non-human animals, I questioned whether I should visibilise or conceal animals in visual images as I would with humans (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017; Hill, 2022; Turnbull & Van Patter, 2022). The implications of privacy, however, sit in tension with the aims of visibilising animals in this research highlighted earlier in this chapter (see Section 3.3.1) and the broader project of challenging anthropocentrism in social research methods (Cudworth, 2018; Hamilton & Taylor, 2017), such that I decided to leave dogs' faces and bodies visible in this thesis. I did, however, blur any identifying information, such as covering the name of a dog on their bowl in the example above (Fig. 2).

One way of addressing this tension is to look at the how animals are represented in social research. The politics of representation, says Giraud (2019, p. 151) involves questioning 'which forms of representation and constructions of animal subjectivity are affectively (and by extension ethically and politically) productive'. Consequently, visibilising animals was seen as an important step towards representing dogs-as-eaters. Moreover, Turnbull and Van Patter underscore the importance of the sociocultural contexts in which research is taking place and suggest that researchers consider 'how certain details might be taken up and travel, and the implications in terms of broader material-discursive practices which ultimately shape the lived realities of individuals (human and nonhuman)' (Turnbull & Van Patter, 2022, p. 156). This sentiment has been echoed by Oxley Heaney et al. (2023), who have reflected on the 'complex interplay between ethical considerations, the interest of researchers, and the reactions of the audience'. Put simply, context and audiences matter. These considerations around the representation of dogs also extended to the visibilisation of the animals consumed as food in this research. While it is possible that some of the images of raw meat would cause discomfort to some audiences – myself included – I have decided to include them

in order foreground animal realities and power dynamics (Oxley Heaney et al., 2023), and in particular, shifting social and cultural aspects of meat consumption in the form of dog food. As Oxley Heaney et al., (2023) assert, ‘our discomfort and distress are temporary while the consequences for the more-than-human animals are far-reaching’.

In sum, this section has shown that ethical considerations in qualitative research with human and non-human animals are both temporal and relational. It has explored aspects of informed consent, mitigating harm, representation and privacy for both human and canine participants at various stages of this research. Drawing on Pascoe-Leahy’s (2022) structuring device of before, during, and after the interview, I emphasised the processual nature of research ethics. Moreover, I have underscored the need for further development of ethical considerations with non-human animals, if we are to increase their visibility in social life through qualitative research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the building blocks of how this research was conducted and provided rationale for why these choices were made, reflecting on their benefits and limitations throughout the chapter. These decisions resulted in a thesis that involves a qualitative in-depth exploration of how plant-based dog owners who feed RMBDs in the UK and Australia discussed human-dog feeding relations in photo/video elicitation interviews, which took place during 2022-23. Despite restrictions to in-person research in light of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the participant-generated photos and videos and online semi-structured interviews provided rich data. The data was analysed using reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2022) to generate the overarching themes of care, control, and identity that will be explored in the subsequent chapters in this thesis (Chapter 4-6). Finally, the chapter explored ethical considerations for conducting qualitative research with human and non-human animals, which is both relevant for this project but also for researchers interested in conducting empirical research on human-animal relations.

Chapter 4 – ‘I decide what’s best for my dog’: how understandings of ‘intensive pet care’ shape owners’ views on appropriate dog feeding

4.1 Introduction: from canine nutrition to intensive pet care

The notion that science decides what is best for dogs is a cornerstone of the commercial pet food industry (Mullin, 2007). Ideologies of nutritionism are pervasive in much scientific discourse around dog feeding, such that the notion of ‘complete and balanced nutrition’[10] is almost synonymous with pet food (Nestle, 2008; Wrye, 2012). In animal science, these nutrient profiles have become a key measure of nutritional adequacy by which pet foods are scientifically assessed. In Chapter 2, I showed how feeding RMBDs to dogs is often discouraged in animal and veterinary science research based on concerns of nutritional inadequacy (see Section 2.2.1). I argued, however, that nutrition is a narrow lens through which to view dog feeding as it presents functional scientific understandings of health that foreclose relational and social understandings of wellbeing. A major drawback of this focus on nutrient profiles, argues pet food scholar Jennifer Wrye (2012), is that pet food is invisibilised and eating is decontextualised. From a sociological perspective, what people choose to eat and what they choose to feed their dogs is not just about fulfilling nutritional needs but is intricately social – it can tell us much about feeding relations between dogs and their owners as well as the social contexts in which feeding takes place.

In contrast to ideologies of nutritionism, this chapter develops an analysis of how dog owners’ decisions around human-dog feeding are guided by ideologies of care that rest on situated and contextual understandings of canine-human relations. Drawing on qualitative analysis of interviews with plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBDs, this chapter analyses how participants constructed expectations around appropriate dog feeding, resulting in what I call ‘intensive pet care’. As discussed in Chapter 2, when I talk about care, I am referring to a novel concept developed in this thesis called ‘intensive pet care’, which draws on sociological literature on intensive mothering (see Section 2.3.2) and human-companion animal relations (see Section 2.3.3). Intensive pet care describes normative understandings of ‘good’ pet parenting, which expects owners to invest large amounts of time, money, emotion, and knowledge into their consumption practices in order to nurture their pets, respond to their preferences, and meet their needs.

[10] Pet foods labelled ‘complete and balanced’ are formulated by manufacturers according to nutrient profiles recommended by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO), in the case of Australia, or the European Pet Food Industry Federation (FEDIAF), in the case of the UK.

The analysis in this chapter provides three accounts of 'intensive pet care' that rest on distinct relational identities between owners and their dogs; these themes are *nourishing care*, *individualising care*, and *species-appropriate care*. In order to explore each of these themes and illustrate points, I present brief extracts from interview transcripts, as well as photo images and spoken excerpts from the video diaries. After exploring each theme, I briefly summarise the analysis and link this to wider literature, although the empirical chapters (Chapter 4 to 6) are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Since the data from UK and Australian participants is presented together in the body of the chapter, I highlight the relevance of cultural understandings of intensive pet care in the conclusion (Section 4.5).

First, *nourishing care*, which rests on the owner-as-provider and dog-as-dependent identities, sheds light on how dog owners viewed raw feeding as part of their responsibility to protect their dogs' health and wellbeing and provide what they deemed to be the best possible diet. Moreover, participants underscored the importance of investing resources in their dogs' nutritional wellbeing, particularly since there was scepticism around traditional channels of nutritional advice, such as veterinarians. Second, *individualising care*, which rests on the dog-as-agent and owner-as-responder identities, highlights how participants' perceptions of their dogs' preferences also shapes food choices, based on the values of canine autonomy and individuality. In contrast to the construction of dependent dogs under nourishing care, dogs were viewed as agents with the capacity to perform preferences. Despite this, participants drew distinctions between the capacity to perform preferences and make ethical decisions regarding food – the latter was portrayed as a distinctly human capacity. The species distinctions drawn here marked a pivot away from the former themes towards *species-appropriate care*, which rests on the owner-as-human and dog-as-animal identities. Narratives around animality, dogs' carnivorous natures, and wildness constructed dogs as distinct from humans with specific biological and behavioural needs. Based on these ideas, vegan or vegetarian diets were seen as inappropriate for dogs, whereas they were portrayed as biologically appropriate for omnivorous humans.

While the themes of *nourishing care* and *individualising care* in many ways mirror analyses from sociological literature on feeding human children (see Section 2.3.2), the analysis in this chapter diverges by exploring how dog owners navigate species differences in understandings of 'good' pet parenting. One of the most interesting interpretations lies at the intersection of canine needs and human values, whereby the perceived species-specific needs of dogs took precedence over their owners' ethical and environmental values that they held for their own plant-based diets. This only underscores the power of 'intensive pet care' ideologies in shaping alternative food choices, which should be taken into consideration by animal healthcare professionals and animal welfare organisations when communicating with dog owners around food and feeding (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3.2).

4.2 Nourishing care

The theme of *nourishing care* highlights the ways in which dog owners envisaged raw feeding not merely as nutrition, but as part of a broader responsibility to protect their dogs' health and wellbeing through the provision of what was seen as good food. In keeping with the ideology of 'intensive mothering' (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2), nourishing care rests on the relational identities of owner-as-provider and dog-as-dependent, whereby the dog is in some ways constructed as a 'sacred child' (Hays, 1996). I explore understandings of nourishing care under the following sub-themes: *providing the 'best' diet* and *knowledge and expertise*. First, the chapter outlines how the values of variety and balance were deemed important in order to provide the 'best' possible diet and owners took personal responsibility for how diets are formulated. Moreover, while raw feeding was described as requiring a great deal of effort and time, this level of investment was constructed as the norm to which all pet owners should aspire. Second, despite taking on personal responsibility to nurture their dogs, there were mixed views around the required knowledge and expertise needed to formulate raw meat diets 'correctly'. In keeping with previous research on owners' perspectives around RMBDs (Morgan et al., 2017; Morelli et al., 2019), there was some scepticism about veterinary advice, which would be considered a traditional avenue of knowledge around pet health. Instead, participants emphasised their own expertise around canine health and wellbeing. Notably, the anxieties and concerns expressed by some participants around whether they were feeding their dogs correctly underscores the emotional burdens and pressures of nourishing care.

4.2.1 Providing the 'best' diet

The sub-theme *providing the 'best' diet* reflects two aspects of intensive pet care: the provision of good food and an investment of time and money in resources. One of the ways in which dog owners perceived they could provide their dogs with best possible diet was to formulate the diet themselves, thereby taking on personal responsibility. While there was attention to nutrient profiles, it should be noted that focus was placed on providing a variety of whole food ingredients to ensure balance over time rather than complete food for each meal. This suggests a more food-centric approach to raw diet formulation than presented under ideologies of nutritionism, which are pervasive in commercial pet foods (Wrye, 2012). However, analysis of the data suggests different degrees of responsibility over formulating the diets and variation of ingredients depending on whether participants fed pre-prepared commercial raw food or followed a DIY model.

The provider identity, which is central to the theme of nourishing care, was most notable among DIY raw feeders. For instance, Lucy (Australia, vegetarian) explained in our interview discussion, 'if I want (the dogs) to have a variety of meat sources, lovely fresh meat, I have to provide it for them'. There was also a

sense that DIY raw feeders were providing their dogs with the best possible diet, such as Kay (UK, vegan) who said 'I think (a raw meat diet)'s the best just in general and Willow gets the best all the time'. Some participants emphasised their dogs' dependence on them for food, highlighting their role as a 'human caregiver' (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia) or their 'dog's protector' (Dana, flexitarian, Australia).

In contrast to kibble, which was seen as feeding the same food every day, one of the ways in which owners could express care for their dogs was by providing variety. While variety was a shared value across almost all participants, notions of responsibility over diet formulation differed among those who fed pre-made commercial mixes and DIY raw feeders. One of the described benefits of pre-made mixes is that they were seen as being 'complete and balanced', but the 'animal protein', such as rabbit, chicken etc., could still be varied with each meal. DIY raw feeders, on the other hand, expressed a degree of scepticism around the nutritional completeness of pre-made raw mixes. Consequently, they took on additional responsibilities over formulating raw meat diets themselves. For example, Kay explained, 'if I'm putting it all in, I know that what she's getting is what she needs'. To give an example of the sheer number of ingredients involved in a Kay's DIY raw diet, which was not uncommon across DIY participants, an excerpt from their video diary is provided below:

> I started off by putting in a chicken wing and then some tripe. The tripe was stuffed with spinach and blueberries. I then added some ground beef. It's really important to give a variety of proteins. I then added some offal mix from Paleo Ridge. A dog needs to eat around five percent liver and five percent other offal each day to be healthy. I then added some chicken breast that had been cubed. For supplements, she had this ground antler to give her extra calcium, some extra liver, some PlaqueOff which softened the tartar on their teeth so that they will come off more easily with the bones. I then added some spirulina, some Verm-X, which is a natural wormer and some cod liver oil. I think the cod liver oil really helps keep her coat nice and shiny. I then mix it together and that was her meal. (Kay, vegan, UK)

In addition to displays of responsibility for diet formulation, another interesting aspect of this diary excerpt is that it highlights a shift away from nutrient profiles to foods or ingredients. In keeping with previous research on RMBD formulation (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), DIY recipes were reported to be sourced online or developed with canine nutritionists, and participants paid particular attention to weighing ingredients in order to ensure they kept to required percentage formulations (Fig. 3).

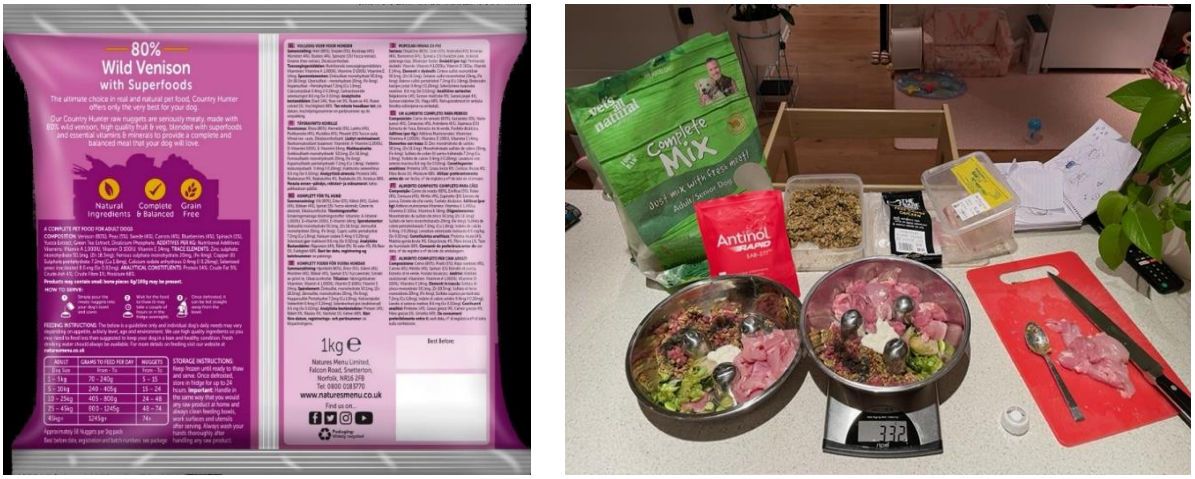

Figure 3: Food diary photos of pre-prepared commercial RMBD packaging (left, shared by Miles, UK) and DIY raw diet with scales (right, shared by Romi, Australia)

Ideologies of intensive pet care and provider-dependent identities were also linked to time, research, and financial investment to feed RMBDs. Putting 'effort' into dog feeding had positive connotations and many participants conveyed feelings of pride and satisfaction at being able to provide for their dogs. These emotions often took precedence over the discomfort or guilt I had expected participants to feel around handling raw animal parts (although this will be further explored in Chapter 6).

> I feel proud when I look at that (food diary image), that I feed my dog such good quality food. Looking at that, you know, lovely condition. It's weird saying that because there's no way I'd eat it, but you can see that it is in really good condition, fresh, healthy meat and bones and like, yep, my dogs get the best of everything. So I'm proud that I would make the effort to make sure that they got stuff like that. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia)

> I guess I feel satisfied that I'm feeding, I'm feeding them fresh food. (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia)

> I want to be able to give them the best […] if that means me spending a little more time and effort and a little bit more money, that doesn't bother me because, you know, they bring me so much joy. (Dana, flexitarian, Australia)

The provider identities expressed above are notable in the context of 'intensive mothering' literature, which suggests that the 'selfless' mother is privileged over other adults, thereby demarcating the boundaries of 'good' and 'bad' care (Vincent, 2009). In the context of dog feeding, two groups of people were positioned as failing to live up to the expectations of intensive pet care; family members (usually male) and kibble feeders, who did not meet these expectations of care, as can be seen in the excerpts below.

> My husband won't go to all the trouble that I do for a lot of their meals. (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia)
>
> My ex didn't have the patience, or you know, effort to put into (feeding). (Steph, flexitarian, Australia).
>
> So, kibble to me would be like convenience junk food. Just like everything just piled in the one bag together of the cheapest possible ingredients that they can get away with and say that it would be a complete diet for a dog. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia)
>
> (Kibble)'s not food. It's a convenience item for the modern-day human. It's just really unfair for the animals. It's not an appropriate diet. And it's because it's convenient, because you can get home and open the bag and fill up a cup and throw it into a bowl and you've fed your dog. (Romi, flexitarian, Australia)

Interestingly, these excerpts demonstrate an entanglement of dog food in hierarchical expectations of 'good' pet parenting. Feeding kibble was not seen as nourishing care, and was often described as 'cheap' or 'lazy'. Moreover, in excluding kibble from the category of food altogether, Romi's comment that kibble is simply a 'convenience item for the modern-day human' frames kibble feeding as selfish in contrast to the selfless act of raw feeding. While there was some acknowledgement of cost and time constraints facing dog owners, such comments also have an exclusionary function, positioning kibble feeders, who some might consider 'conventional' feeders, as other.

In sum, this section explored the sub-theme of *providing the 'best' diet*, which demonstrates how dog owners take on personal responsibilities to formulate their dogs' diets themselves and invest time and money into their dogs' food. Shifting the focus from nutrient components, this analysis shows that whole foods and variety were valued by participants in this study. DIY diets in particular were seen as a path to 'good' pet parenting because they afforded participants greater avenues of flexibility and control to ensure a balanced diet over time. In this way, dogs were constructed as dependents and owners as providers. The importance of these constructions of responsibility becomes more apparent in the next sub-section, which explores how participants navigated expertise around appropriate dog feeding.

4.2.2 Navigating expertise

The sub-theme of *navigating expertise* outlines the ways in which participants used narratives around knowledge and learning in order to further emphasise the provider identity and interrogate nutritional expertise. Many participants were critical of expertise regarding dog diets among veterinarians and the pet food industry, instead framing themselves as expert owners and emphasising their own capacity to learn

about canine nutrition. Since a core aspect of 'intensive mothering' is that it is expert-led (Hays, 1996), one interpretation is that raw feeders are more aligned with the ideology of 'natural parenting', which suggests a degree of resistance to experts and institutions (Bobel, 2010). However, despite these tensions, I argue that veterinary expertise was still highly valued by many participants, but there was a shift towards the advice of popular veterinarians, or 'holistic vets', who were described as supportive of raw feeding practices.

Similar to previous quantitative research on owner motivations to feed RMBDs (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), participants questioned veterinary expertise on canine nutrition. My qualitative analysis, however, provides deeper understanding of how raw feeders understood and navigated expertise. Participants expressed two intersecting contentions around veterinary expertise. First, they deemed veterinary education around canine nutrition to be insufficient – notably, this view was common among dog owners in both the UK and Australia. Second, the training veterinarians receive on companion animal nutrition was seen to be biased due to entanglements in the interests of commercial pet food companies.

> (Vets) just don't understand (raw feeding) I don't think. I know a lot of vets don't do like nutrition or don't cover a broad range of nutrition in their degrees, which, you know, is fine, but also don't bash my feeding if you've not completely studied it. (Ava, vegan, UK)

> When you're doing your vet training at university, you're given extremely minimal teaching on animal nutrition. So, it doesn't particularly make you qualified to give nutritional advice because you don't have the training in it. (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia)

In the excerpt above, Harvey explained that he came to this understanding through talking to friends who were veterinarians, but it is also noteworthy that information about veterinary education is often discussed on raw feeding social media pages, in which Ava explained she was an active member.

In addition to perceptions of insufficient training around canine nutrition, veterinary and commercial pet food industry interests were seen as being inappropriately entangled due to sponsorship, with participants often using scientific language such as 'biased' and 'neutral'. For example, Lisa, who was a veterinary physiotherapist in the UK, drew on her own training experience, stating,

> I also know from my time at the Royal Veterinary College that a student vet gets one day on nutrition. They get one day's lecturing on nutrition, and it's normally sponsored by Hills or Canin. So, they're gonna get a very biased viewpoint. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> I don't think I've ever really trusted a vet with nutritional information because they don't get a lot of nutrition teaching to them, and when they do, it's sponsored by like Royal Canin, which is a dry food company. (Kris, vegan, Australia)

Despite this scepticism around the veterinary profession as a whole, there were mixed experiences of interactions with veterinarians, ranging from negative encounters due to their raw feeding practices, as well as a willingness to seek veterinary advice in order to improve their dogs' health. For example, Ava relayed the emotional dynamics of vet visits, saying 'I just feel really disheartened because you think you're there to help, you're not there to scold me' (Ava, vegan, UK). Some owners recounted experiences where they had followed veterinary advice, with mixed outcomes, often leading them to turn towards raw feeding as a 'last resort'. For instance, James described the experience of his dog Archie's giardia, an infection of the small intestine, which he reported resulted in symptoms, such as vomiting and diarrhoea. Following the advice of his vet, James explained he switched Archie to Royal Canin gastrointestinal puppy food, which did not appear to resolve the problems. He described Archie's discomfort but also conveyed a sense of helplessness:

> I didn't know what to do. I just kept going to the vet and trying all these different supplements and stuff to sort of like, you know, help him have a happy tummy. And it would really stress me out. And it really stressed him out as well. (James, flexitarian, UK)

After the prescribed diet did not alleviate Archie's symptoms, James claimed that switching to a raw diet cleared up a lot of these issues, stating 'the more he had it, the better he was' (James, flexitarian, UK). However, there were also examples of positive relationships with veterinarians. Isa, for example, whose dog developed suspected food allergies from an RMBD, switched to gastrointestinal food following advice from her veterinarian. She described this as anxiety inducing but also recounted having a good relationship with the veterinarian and working with them to re-formulate a plan to reintroduce certain foods. The collaborative ideals between vets and dog owners expressed through these discussions are captured in a statement from Paula saying, '(the vets have) got the qualifications and the knowledge. But I want them to work with me. I don't want them to tell me' (Paula, vegetarian, UK). Interestingly, participants often drew distinctions between 'conventional' and 'holistic' veterinarians, many of whom have published well-known books on dog feeding. Some names of 'holistic' veterinarians mentioned often during interview discussions were Dr Ian Billinghurst, Dr Tom Lonsdale, Dr Conor Brady, Dr Karen Becker, Dr Rodney Habib and Dr Nick Thompson. What this suggests, is that expert advice is not rejected outright, but rather questioned and interrogated under intensive pet care.

As mentioned, many participants viewed themselves as owner-experts. Some presented themselves as experts in contrast to less knowledgeable raw feeders. Interestingly, others constructed themselves as 'learners' on an ongoing journey of learning. Expert identities were maintained by distancing themselves from 'other' raw feeders who were not seen to have adequate knowledge – and by extension, were not meeting the social expectations of intensive pet care. This was often couched in binaries of right and wrong ways of doing raw feeding. For instance, Ava from the UK said, 'when most people hear raw feeding, they do just assume it's not balanced nutritionally, which actually I'm sure a lot of people are getting wrong because they just feed like two proteins and that's it' (Ava, vegan, UK). Lucy from Australia stressed that '(dogs) can't just eat meat. They've gotta eat a proportion of their food as vegetables and a proportion of their food is offal and a portion is bone and then a proportion of supplements and vitamins and everything' (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia). This was also connected to limited education around raw feeding, such as Romi who stated,

> Just because you're feeding (dogs) raw, fresh food doesn't mean you're doing it correctly. So, I think there's a risk that that's also for education, that's you know, not everyone's gonna get it right. So certainly not everybody that feeds bought in fresh food is doing it correctly. (Romi, flexitarian, Australia).

In this way, variety was a means of expressing nourishing care, while those who did not provide enough variety were seen as doing raw feeding incorrectly. Unsurprisingly, many of those who conveyed this sense of expertise were DIY raw feeders, who, as has been shown in Section 4.2.1, take on more personal responsibility for preparing ingredients than those who feed pre-prepared raw foods. However, there was awareness among some participants that nourishing dogs was a journey of learning and highlighted the time they invested in researching raw feeding.

> I guess it's been a journey about what's the best to feed dogs […] I'm always learning, and I don't know everything. I just see it as a journey to do the best I can. (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia)

> I guess the kibble, the kibble question, I feel like I've learned a lot and I've been able to investigate a lot myself. (Romi, flexitarian, Australia)

In contrast to the 'expert' identity which, once again creates hierarchies of 'good' care, the journey of learning can be interpreted as a more fluid, and perhaps, inclusive approach.

4.2.3 Summary of section

Under the theme of *nourishing care*, this section outlined how dog owners' ideals around intensive pet care, by protecting their dogs' health, providing a 'good' diet, and questioning expertise while holding

knowledge around dog diets in high regard. The narratives in this section are in keeping with intensive mothering ideology regarding investments of time, emotion, knowledge, and money into consumption practices (as summarised in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2). Moreover, the expectations owners held for themselves were defined in relation to how dogs were constructed. Echoing previous research on intensive mothering and mother-child feeding, nourishing caring relations around raw feeding relied on discourses of infantilisation, whereby dogs were constructed as delicate and, to use Cook's phrase, a 'thing to be nourished' (Cook, 2009, p. 331). However, while much intensive mothering research focuses on the decision-making of the mother, it has also been highlighted that children's preferences actively shape these decisions (Afflerback et al., 2013; Cook, 2009). It is this focus I now turn to in the next section on individualising care.

4.3 Individualising care

In addition to notions of nourishing care, the analysis of participants' narratives demonstrated an attentiveness to dogs' individual preferences, suggesting that dog owners also valued canine individuality. I argue that the ideal of *individualising care* is embedded within intensive pet care ideology, but rests on an altered construction of dogs as agents rather than dependents. While individualising care foregrounds canine individuality, it is still inherently relational. Consequently, owners described how their dogs' preferences came to shape their consumption practices, highlighting the relationship between raw *feeding* and raw *eating*. Nevertheless, there were perceived limits to canine capacities to exercise certain choices – in particular, dogs were not seen as being able to choose to be vegan.

This section outlines two sub-themes. First, *raw meat is the dog's choice* refers to narratives around dogs' preferences for certain foods (usually raw) and dislike for others (usually kibble). In addition to their extensive knowledge of their dogs' preferred foods, participants' also highlighted how they sought to respond to their dogs' performances of preference, which is important for canine-human intersubjectivity. In this way, dogs were constructed as agents and owners as responders to their dog's likes and dislikes. Second, while canine subjectivities were acknowledged in the context of preferences, participants did not deem dogs capable of making value-based dietary choices – with veganism being viewed as a value system. The sub-theme of *dogs can't choose to be vegan* highlights the view that feeding dogs vegan or vegetarian diets is an imposition of 'human' values on dogs. This is interesting in the context of discussions in human-animal studies around non-human animal agency (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.2) because it highlights the perceived limits of canine autonomy around food choice.

4.3.1 Raw meat is the dog's choice

Narratives of choice were prevalent in participants' descriptions of the benefits of raw feeding, where canine subjectivities were expressed through descriptions of their dogs' likes and dislikes. Disliking foods was most notable in the descriptions of dogs eating kibble diets, which motivated participants to switch to a raw meat diet. Compared to the previous theme (Section 4.2), in which feeding kibble can be interpreted as a failure to meet expectations of nourishing dogs, dogs were instead constructed as agents able to communicate an embodied disinterest in kibble, evidenced by statements such as 'she's just not been that bothered' (Nikhil, vegetarian, UK) or 'she's never really been that fussed' (Louise, vegetarian, UK). One participant remarked that his dog 'was just so disinterested in (kibble) […] he would just kind of have a sniff of it and then walk away and he wouldn't really eat anything' (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia). This behaviour was not just exhibited with kibble, but also with other alternative diets that participants had tried which better aligned with their own ethical values. Kay, who followed a vegan diet, explained, 'I did try her on some insect stuff at one point, as I think that is more ecologically friendly, and she wouldn't eat it. So that was that done' (Kay, vegan, UK). This is interesting because the decision to switch from kibble or other alternative foods to raw meat diets was grounded in a responsiveness to perceptions of their dogs' preferences, which is distinct from constructions of nourishing care which foregrounds provider identities.

In addition to disliking kibble, the decision to feed RMBDs was supported by statements which drew on notions of their dogs' preferences. One of the questions posed to all participants was what their dogs would choose to eat if they had a choice. In response to this, many were adamant that their dogs would choose a raw meat diet, with statements such as 'oh, definitely the raw food' (Lynda, vegan, Australia) and 'the raw meaty bones, of course' (Sara, vegan, UK). Some participants constructed hypothetical choice experiments, such as Steph who claimed, 'I guarantee you, yeah, if I have the biscuits for Rusky, if I have the raw food for Rusky, he's definitely gonna wanna eat the raw' (Steph, flexitarian, Australia). Initially, I suspected that these convictions might be performed responses that reflected the owners' own ideals. However, these claims were backed up with descriptions of their dogs' body language. One common perception was that dogs were excited when eating a raw meat diet, which was seen in stark contrast to other diets they had eaten in the past. For example, Sara explained that her dog demonstrated a 'tail wag at the processed pet food' but when she introduced offal and raw hearts to her meaty bones meal, she performed 'a completely different dance', stating 'she would become totally obsessed, like, totally happy […] she would spin and she would just be so happy' (Sara, vegan, UK). Similarly, Freya described her dog's reaction to his raw food as 'pure excitement [...] so I like to make it exciting for him and like he'll just be like wiggling his bum like the whole time. Like he just loves it' (Freya, vegan, UK). Descriptions of excitement were also

connected to understandings of 'resource guarding'[11] by Kris, who explained that when eating raw meat, her dogs would 'be visibly a lot more excited […] and they would also resource guard higher. So, they seem to perceive it as a much more higher value food than if you're just giving them dry food' (Kris, vegan, Australia). In this way, the prevalent perception that dogs liked raw meat was substantiated by observations of their dogs' behaviour around mealtimes.

In addition to understandings of how dogs express food preferences, my analysis also suggests that canine-human intersubjectivity was seen to improve both canine *and* human wellbeing. Adding nuance to dog owners' feelings of pride and satisfaction explored in Section 4.2.1 around providing nourishing care, the theme of individualising care foregrounds descriptions of relational wellbeing stemming from their dogs' excitement, which was described as improving their own wellbeing.

> It just makes me happy that I've been able to finally find a source of nutrition for him that he likes, and he gets excited about. (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia)

> So, I remember just seeing how much she enjoyed it and I remember within a week, I mean I was getting whole chickens and I was sawing them up, ripping them up and yeah, I was, I loved it. I loved it because I loved how much she loved it. (Sara, vegan, UK)

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the different aspects of care analysed were not always distinct and often intersected with one another. A good example is Harvey's comment above, which reveals a combination of nourishing care, in that he believed he could provide a good diet, and individualising care that also attended to his dog's embodied performance of preference. The excerpt from Sara above is also particularly interesting since, despite being vegan, the discourse around 'sawing' and 'ripping' takes on an animalistic or carnal tone. This blurring of the human-animal divide through the animalisation of human behaviour will be discussed further in Section 4.4. What this points to, however, are the different ways in which dog owners attempted to know their dogs through observations of their body language.

Demonstrations of knowing dogs were especially prevalent in discussions around dogs' favourite foods. In contrast to the notion of humans knowing what's best for dogs as explored in the theme of *nourishing care* (Section 4.2.2), an experimental approach to *individualising care* was responsive to canine behaviours rather than human experts. I believe this was augmented by the degree of flexibility and variety that can be achieved when sourcing individual ingredients, particularly for DIY raw diets. Participants recounted their

[11] While there are different understandings of the term 'resource guarding', it is often used in animal behavioural science to describe '(t)he use of avoidance, threatening, or aggressive behaviours by a dog to retain control of food or non-food items in the presence of a person or other animal' (Jacobs et al., 2018, p. 10).

dogs' favourite raw foods, including salmon, sardines, venison, beef, ox tripe, rabbit eats, and rabbit feet – all animal-based foods.

> I know they would eat salmon if that's all they could have. (Tina, flexitarian, Australia)
>
> Sometimes she has a preference for like the furry rabbit ears and like rabbit feet, she loves those. (Ava, vegan, UK)
>
> Sardines. She's crazy about sardines. (Kris, vegan, Australia)
>
> That looks like the venison sausage, actually. That's his favourite […] he'll do anything for venison, really. He's obsessed with it. (Freya, vegan, UK)
>
> I think her favourite is probably beef. Or she likes, we get ox mince or ox tripe. (Nikhil, vegetarian, UK)

In addition to emphasising canine subjectivity, several participants also described their responsiveness to their preferences to be realised. Ava explained for example, 'it's been a learning curve for all of us. She knows what types of meat she dislikes and I know not to buy that anymore' (Ava, vegan, UK). In this way, Ava constructed her dog as an agent, but in order for agency to be realised, Ava had to be receptive to failure and willing to adapt. Another example was provided by Louise who underscored a balance of interdependent decision-making which reflects both nourishing and individualising care, explaining 'I've always been quite like read around a lot and tried to find out what sort of like combination of food is good for her and you know, just try and see what works for her and also I think you've gotta be led by your dog as well'. (Louise, vegetarian, UK). The notion of being led by your dog opens up a path of learning that is attentive to canine performances of preference which is more individualising and situated than human research or expertise described in Section 4.2.2.

4.3.2 Dogs can't choose to be vegan

While dogs were conceptualised as agents in terms of their capacity to express preferences and shape food choices, there were perceived limits to the kinds of choices that dogs could make that served as a reminder that their owners are ultimately responsible for decisions around feeding. In contrast to their owners' decisions to follow plant-based diets, dogs were seen as having limited or no capacities to make value-based food choices, which invalidated the feeding of vegan diets to dogs and reinforced support for raw feeding. Ethical choices, such as choosing to be vegan or vegetarian, were constructed as human values, which is significant as it demarcates dogs' subjective capacities regarding their integration into social life (this will be discussed critically in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.3).

Despite following vegan and vegetarian diets themselves, participants did not legitimise feeding vegetarian and vegan diets to dogs because it was seen as an imposition of human values. These views were couched in the language of choice, whereby humans were constructed as capable of having ethical values that they implemented through vegan and vegetarian dietary choices whereas dogs were denied moral agency. This is evidenced in an excerpt from Steph who said, '(b)eing a person I, you know, I am capable of, you know, more moral and ethical dilemmas […] actually having the capability to make my own food how I want it, whereas an animal doesn't have any of those abilities'. Moreover, the comments below were somewhat contradictory given that dogs were seen as having a choice concerning raw meat consumption but then not having a choice regarding vegan diets.

> Personally, I'm very much against this, you know, veganism for dogs. It's not right, it's not fair and yeah, they don't have a choice. (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia)

> The trouble is we have we make all the decisions for our dogs, don't we? If they made the decision, they're not gonna have a vegan diet, are they? They're going to have a meat diet. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> Like I said to me, feeding a dog vegan food would be unethical because they do not have a choice. Like if you're just providing them vegan food, they don't have that choice to say, you know, I want to eat something else. (Steph, flexitarian, Australia)

Here, the realities of human decision-making regarding canine feeding were underscored, suggesting that dogs only have a choice if it is ultimately aligned with what their owners think is best for them.

4.3.3 Summary of section

The theme of individualising care foregrounds dog owners' attentiveness to their dogs' individual preferences when making decisions about canine food choices. These considerations predominantly focused on understandings of their dogs' likes and dislikes – unsurprisingly, raw meat was often seen to be preferred by dogs over other foods. Of course, these responses may have been performative (i.e. influenced by the fact that I was there observing them) since this study was about raw feeding, but the analysis shows how these claims were grounded in ongoing observations of their dogs' behaviours, such as displays of excitement. Moreover, the control participants reportedly had over the formulation of ingredients in RMBDs (see Section 4.2.1) enabled them to respond to these understandings of their dogs' preferences. Therefore, in contrast to nourishing care which focuses on *raw feeding*, individualising care foregrounds canine behaviours around *raw eating*.

While dogs were subjectivised in their performances of preference, the limits of individualising care became evident in discussions around vegan diets for dogs, which were seen as inappropriate due to the common understanding that feeding a vegan diet is imposing 'human' values onto dogs. On the face of it, this appears to challenge 'humanisation of pet food' narratives, which suggest that trends in human diets spilling over into pet diets is unethical because it limits canine subjectivity. However, when one looks deeper at how canine choice is constructed, these discourses also reinscribe anthropocentric notions of agency that are often seen as synonymous with intentionality and reasoning (Meijer & Bovenkerk, 2021; Motamedi Fraser & Fraser, 2024).

The analysis in this section adds nuance to two different bodies of literature from veterinary science and human-animal relations. First, it offers a more complex understanding of the 'palatability' of foods as presented in veterinary science literature on RMBDs (Morgan et al., 2022; Morelli et al., 2019) by highlighting the intersubjective relations that structure canine food choice. It shows how the realisation of canine choices is entangled in relations of power, in which the human owner is ultimately responsible for what their dogs eat, and choice is afforded so long as their owner considers it appropriate. Second, while social science literature on human-animal relations has drawn attention to the recognition of non-human animal individuality and differentiation as a way to move beyond anthropocentric notions of care (Fox & Gee, 2016; Fox, 2006), in this analysis we are reminded of the confines of domestic animal agency in the context of food and feeding (Smith, 2003; Power, 2008; Cudworth, 2011).

To summarise the chapter so far, the analysis has explored expectations of nourishing care and individualising care in human-dog feeding relations. Under nourishing care, owners were presented as providers and dogs as dependents, emphasising the power dynamics involved in care through feeding. In contrast, individualising care afforded greater agency to dogs; owners formed caring identities as responders to canine preferences. Despite this, canine choice was limited to performances of preference rather than what were deemed human capacities to express certain values through food choices. The next and final section explores a different construction of care which, instead of notions of dependency or choice, draws on biological needs-based discourses.

4.4 Species-appropriate care

The theme of *species-appropriate care* refers to understandings of dogs' physiological needs and 'natural' behaviours that shape food choices. One of the main characteristics of species-appropriate care rests on the differences between dogs and humans, not on an individual but species level. This attentiveness to species differences was seen as an important aspect of care, often superseding human values and practices. The following section first explores the idea that *dogs are carnivores*, which highlights references to food chain

taxonomies and biological attributes of dogs and humans around food and eating, such that dogs were viewed as carnivores and humans as omnivores. One of the most interesting findings is that the species-appropriate logic was also employed to justify plant-based diets for humans; rather than constructing veganism as an individual choice, as is more aligned with individualising care, plant-based diets were presented as appropriate on a biological, species level. Second, expressing 'natural' behaviours extended understandings of species-appropriate care beyond nutritional needs to also incorporate behavioural needs, underscoring that dog feeding is not just about nutrition about also wellbeing. This was evidenced through enrichment activities which were perceived as enabling dogs to express what were deemed to be 'natural' feeding behaviours. Here, notions of animality and wildness were fundamental for maintaining the canine-human distinction.

4.4.1 Dogs are carnivores

The sub-theme *dogs are carnivores* describes an emphasis on the biological differences between dogs and humans with the use of the terms 'species-appropriate' or 'biologically appropriate'. The form of species-appropriate care offered through feeding RMBDs was grounded in understandings that dogs are carnivores and humans are omnivores. Participants perceived RMBDs as species-appropriate diets for dogs, making connections to dogs' ancestry with wolves. In this way, raw feeding was also described as an ancestral diet, which connected dogs temporally to the past and spatially to connotations of a wild, pre-domesticated dog, as indicated in the excerpts below.

> Dogs in the wild, you know, they descended from wolves. I suppose what would their diet have been? Well, it would have been you know it's meat, they're basically carnivores aren't they, that's my interpretation anyway. You could say the same about humans. You know the older humans that, but I suppose we're more omnivores, aren't we? (Henry, flexitarian, UK).

> (A raw diet)'s just like real food, I guess. Something that they would eat in like a species-specific diet if they were in the wild. Yeah, I just feel it's, I guess, more nutritious than just eating a little biscuit all the time. (Steph, flexitarian, Australia)

> I call them my little wolves, and I know we've domesticated them, but they're physiologically not that different from the wolf. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

The construction of raw meat as 'real food' uses notions of the wild to reinforce raw feeding as species-appropriate care. The implicit assumption behind this is that kibble is fake food at best, or at worst, not food at all.

Under species-appropriate care, vegan diets for dogs were not just limited by canine-human intersubjectivities, as outlined in Section 4.3.2, but were presented as dangerous for dogs based on dogs needing meat to survive. In this way, vegan diets were perceived as a threat to canine wellbeing in terms of both choices and needs. Feeding a dog a vegan or vegetarian diet was not understood to be an act of care; on the contrary, for some, it was an act of abuse. This was exemplified by participants who shared the dilemmas they experienced by feeding their dogs meat but did not see another possible alternative.

> If I felt I could ethically feed them a vegetarian meal, I'd feed them more of a vegetarian diet, I would. But they are obligate carnivores. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK).

> I don't wanna have animals killed for me to eat, but plenty of animals are killed for my dogs to eat […] how I reconcile it in my head is that the dogs have to have meat to live. It would be dangerous to make them vegetarian. So, if I wanna have dogs and I wanna have them healthy and do the best for them, they have to have meat. No questions. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia).

> At the end of the day, they are, yes, they might be able to eat plant material. But they're not on the same, you know, on the scale between omnivorous and, like, herbivore, so, yeah. They're not the same as us, so they need meat, and I think that's abusive to them […] you can't put your way of eating onto another species (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia)

In order to emphasise the appropriateness of RMBDs for dogs and plant-based diets for humans, participants drew on scientific discourses that highlighted canine physiology as being distinct from human physiology and drew focus to the body. There was a perception that dogs, as carnivores, were designed to eat meat and bones because of understandings of their teeth, claws and digestive system.

> Let's have a look at a dog that they are a carnivore, they've got a set of teeth to rip, tear and shred and kill animals. They've got claws to pull down and they've been given the stomach acid to digest bone. They are a different kettle of fish to us. (Sara, vegan, UK)

> My own diet is obviously vegetarian but it's not a suitable diet for my dog […] because they are carnivores and we are omnivores so for us to eat vegetarian food, that's fine, but their digestive system is designed for meat. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK).

An especially interesting aspect of this analysis of human-dog feeding is that constructions of animality flowed both ways, where distinctions drawn between carnivorous dogs and omnivorous humans served to not only legitimise RMBDs for dogs but also plant-based diets for humans as species-appropriate. For example, Evie (Australia, vegetarian) explained 'obviously my body can't handle meat very well, so vegetarian's what's best for me' whereas she emphasised the inappropriateness of grains in kibble diets by

stating ‘my dog’s body can’t digest that’. The term ‘species-appropriate’ and understandings of the natural, which is often used in raw feeding discourse, spilled over into discussions around plant-based diets. For example, one participant stated, ‘I’m vegan […] because I feel for me, that’s my species appropriate diet’ (Sara, vegan, UK). For Sara, being vegan is about ‘working with mother nature’s laws’. She later explained,

> And you know, this is this is where I look at humans and they just eat the flesh of the animal. They don’t eat the bones. And to me a true carnivore is you eat the bones as well. Now humans have a pH level of four in their stomach acids, animals have pH level 1. Their stomachs, dogs and cats, their stomach acids are a lot stronger. They were designed to break down the bone. So, I don’t think it is my species appropriate diet because I’ve not got the teeth and the claws and the digestive juices to eat a full animal. (Sara, vegan, UK)

This view is interesting because it naturalises human and canine eating, thereby taking away perceptions of choice which are prevalent in understandings of individualising care. Species-appropriate care removes the question of whether RMBDs or vegan diets are ethical and constructs them in terms of biological capacity and necessity. However, when human and dog diets were compared, other participants retained their commitment to ‘ethical’ values. James, for example, did perceive eating meat as posing an ethical dilemma to himself, but this was simplified when applied to his dog. He stated, ‘you don’t have that ethical dilemma because it’s very straightforward. It’s like, this is what my dog needs. My dog is telling me he needs it. And so, I’m preparing it and I’m gonna give it to him’ (James, flexitarian, UK). For other participants, this was more complicated as they experienced distress when preparing meat. Isa explained ‘it also distresses me so much to think that was a living animal’. However, she did not perceive it as acceptable to feed her dog Kori plant-based diets because it ‘not his nature’ (Isa, vegetarian, Australia).

> If he was out in the forest or out in the wild, he would have killed that chicken. And that’s his nature. You know, it’s like, I can't pretend that he's a human that can make these choices because he at the end of the day, he's an animal. He needs to meet those needs. So that’s kind of what I just kept it thinking to myself is like, Kori’s a dog. Those are carnivores, you know. This is the nature of it. (Isa, vegetarian, Australia)

Therefore, the concept of what is natural shaped understandings of dogs’ needs that were prioritised over human values (the concept of naturalness will be further explored in Chapter 5).

4.4.2 Expressing ‘natural’ behaviours

In addition to understandings of species-appropriate care based on physiological distinctions between humans and dogs, raw foods, and bones in particular, were presented as way of enabling dogs to express

their ‘natural’ behaviours through enrichment feeding. In addition to providing nutritional benefits and oral hygiene, bones were seen as beneficial due to connections draw between chewing and the release of serotonin which would improve their dog’s behaviour. Kris claimed that raw-fed dogs ‘exhibit better behaviour’ because ‘chewing on a bone for a dog releases serotonin’ (Kris, vegan, Australia). Similarly, Lynda explained ‘when they chew, it releases serotonin and they’re calm’ (Lynda, vegan, Australia). Sara claimed that when people feed raw, they ‘don’t need behaviourist’s bills because their dogs are happy. They’ve got their serotonin chemicals when they’re chewing on their bones, it’s all being flooded in’ (Sara, vegan, UK).

There were views that transitioning dogs to a raw meat diet resulted in improved canine wellbeing. These narratives often drew on naturalistic discourses around ‘prey drives’ and ‘instincts’ that constructed dogs as predators. Ava and Drew both highlighted that they thought their dogs had become more confident since switching to a raw meat diet. For example, Drew said, ‘certainly to me he’s healthier, more energetic [...] and I would say even slightly more confident perhaps, since he’s changed his diet. I think it’s made him, as a dog, feel better within himself’ (Drew, vegan, UK). The phrase ‘as a dog’ underscores the perception that species-appropriate care is grounded in notions of animality and species identities. Moreover, there were understandings that raw feeding was more in tune with dogs’ natural instincts, as indicated in the excerpts below.

> (Raw feeding) definitely helped with (my dog’s) confidence because she’s tearing into like natural instincts, like when she’s munching down on a bone and that stuff that a dog was bred for, that’s what they do naturally [...] that is, I’ve definitely seen a difference in her behaviour from when we first got her compared to now, because she’s got an outlet in terms of what she can eat. She’s not just being fed a bowl of brown biscuits, she’s actually got to work for her food. She’s getting into this drive that she’s had. (Ava, vegan, UK)

> And (my dog’s) behaviour changed massively. Because what happens is it kicks in their natural instincts, their natural instincts. Hunters, predators, as a dog. (Sara, vegan, UK)

Several participants referred to their dogs as having a ‘prey drive’ in the context of discussions around canine-prey animal interactions outside of the domestic space. Kay explained that their Sheltie Willow was ‘not particularly foodie’ but also had a ‘strong prey drive’, explaining that, ‘she will go for squirrels and ducks and bats and deer and anything. So, we’re doing a lot of work around that’ (Kay, vegan, UK). Similarly, Marnie described her Greyhound Zora’s ‘strong prey drive’, sharing an example of walking at the local park. She explained, ‘there’s ducks and swans. If the prey animal gets too close, Zora will jerk on the lead and she, you know, she’ll be in that state and I’ll have to work very hard to get her out of it’

(Marnie, vegetarian, Australia). What both of the excerpts have in common is the positioning of dogs as predators and other animals as prey, embedded within owners' responsibilities to control 'natural' behaviours through training, described here as 'work'. This highlights a tension between socialising dogs, on the one hand, and respecting their animality, on the other.

One way in which this tension was navigated is through enrichment feeders, which were viewed as enabling dogs to enact 'natural' behaviours but were still confined to the domestic space. Many participants sought to provide stimulation and increase enrichment by using slow feeders, lick mats, mazes, and snuffle mats, which also featured heavily in the feeding diaries (Fig. 4). For some, enriching the dog's eating experience involved controlled the speed at which their dogs ate the food to improve digestion, which has also been found in quantitative research on RMBDs (Morelli et al., 2019). However, my analysis shows there were also motivations around canine behaviour, such as encouraging curiosity or mimicking 'natural' behaviours. The range of views are presented in the excerpts below.

> She is just a really fast eater and I'm very afraid of like twisted gut and bloat. (Ava, vegan, UK)

> And it was because she's a fussy eater, but making it a little bit of a challenge and doing it in a different bowl, I seem, I think, kind of brings interest to her, that she'll come and be like, what's, what's this in? (Kay, vegan, UK – Fig. 4)

> I like to keep them busy. I like to keep them, so we have like snuffle mats where they have to sniff it out and different things just using, using their brains, puzzle toys, stuff like that. And chewing and just slowing down and being able to look at their meal rather than just rushing it down. (Evie, vegetarian, Australia)

Enrichment feeders were also presented as a way of encouraging 'natural' feeding behaviours, such as foraging and hunting. For example, Freya served her dog Bentley's food in a snuffle mat (Fig. 4), explaining, 'I love seeing where people really use what dogs are naturally good at and with him being a retriever, they love using their nose. So, this gives him, I think it's just tiring the brain out a little more' (Freya, vegan, UK). While most understandings of enrichment were couched in the language of wellbeing, for some this was also about recognising human-canine power dynamics in the process of domestication. For instance, Sara, who was highly critical of canine domestication, stated that 'dogs have become our slaves' and emphasised the importance of restoring 'natural' behaviours:

> If we've taken the role of hunting off our domesticated dogs, which is a massive psychological part of their, it's part of their sole purpose is to do some hunting and we've taken that off them by domesticating them, like the least we can do is give them the kill. And give them some sort of

experience of what they would naturally do in the wild. You know, and that's just the best way to feed any animal is always try and replicate it as much as possible. (Sara, vegan, UK)

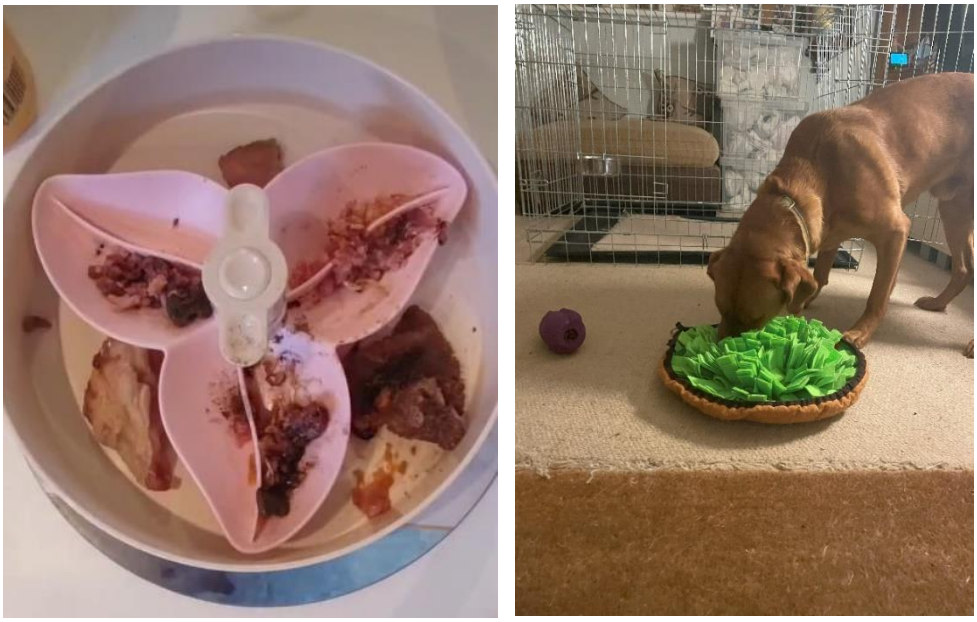

Figure 4: Photo diary photos of enrichment feeders, including a spinner (left, shared by Kay, UK) and snuffle mat (right, shared by Freya, UK)

4.4.3 Summary of section

This section explored the theme of *species-appropriate care*, which is based upon physiological and behavioural distinctions between dogs and humans. Difference is a focal aspect of species-appropriate care and rests on the identities of 'animal' and 'human', which has also been found in empirical research suggesting the emergence of alternative forms of companionship that distinguish human and non-human animal identities (Fox and Gee, 2016). My analysis in the sub-theme *dogs are carnivores* shows how dog owners drew on scientific discourse around food chain taxonomies, presenting dogs as carnivores and humans as omnivores. This was underscored by references to human and canine bodies as physiologically distinct. Moreover, I highlight not just species-appropriate nutrition but also attentiveness to species-appropriate behaviours in the sub-theme *expressing 'natural' behaviours*. Invoking notions of animality and wildness, RMBDs were presented as the best way to meet dogs' behavioural needs and enrich their eating experiences.

These findings can be situated upon a backdrop of human-animal relations scholarship that has highlighted the need to value non-human animals 'for their own intrinsic worth, autonomy and difference rather than on the basis of their similarity to humans' (Fox, 2006, p. 527). Acknowledging difference is seen as an important part of developing respect for the non-human world (Plumwood, 1993). The analysis in this

section certainly demonstrates an attentiveness to difference but must also be cautioned in the context of essentialising animal actions according to 'biological' or 'natural' behaviours (Fox, 2006) that potentially 'erase the significance of particularity, and especially the particular individual' (Motamedi-Fraser, 2024, p. 91). Motamedi-Fraser (2024, p. 2) argues that scientific understandings of 'species' should be conceptualised as 'species stories' – narratives which 'foreground specific qualities as important and imply that they cannot, in any real sense, be transformed'. I will explore this further in the discussion in Chapter 7 (Section 7.2.1).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored plant-based dog owners' constructions of appropriate care around dog feeding that rest on various understandings of canine-human relations. In order to move away from ideologies of nutritionism (Wrye, 2012) which are prevalent in animal and nutrition science literature, I drew on sociological literature on intensive mothering (Section 2.3.2) and human-animal relations (Section 2.3.3) to develop the concept of 'intensive pet care'. Intensive pet care describes the importance owners place on investing time, money, emotion, and knowledge into their consumption practices in order to nurture their pets, respond to their preferences, and meet their species-specific needs. While raw feeding is regarded as a non-conventional practice by many in the veterinary profession and pet food industry, I conclude that dog owners who feed RMBDs in this study are drawing on and reproducing valorised standards of what can be described as 'good' pet parenting.

The chapter explores participants' constructions of intensive pet care through three themes that emerged from analysis of interviews with plant-based dog owners who feed RMBDs in the UK and Australia. First, the theme of *nourishing care* details expectations around the investment of time, resources and knowledge in order to provide the 'best' possible diet for their dogs. Nourishing care is built on a relational caring identity where owners are constructed as providers and dogs as seen as dependents, at times drawing similarities to human children. Participants valued variety, taking personal responsibility for diet formulation and knowledge. However, the analysis suggests distinctions between pre-prepared and DIY raw feeders across each of these aspects where DIY raw feeders were seen as being able to provide more variety, have greater control, and construct themselves as experts, even over veterinarians. It is notable that, while participants interrogated expertise, expert-led nutritional advice was still highly valued and emulated, as evidenced by the use of scientific discourse and the popularity of 'holistic vets'.

Second, the theme of *individualising care* demonstrates expectations to respond to dogs' perceived likes and dislikes, which indicated performances of preference (Smith, 2003). Raw feeding afforded owners the flexibility to respond to their dogs' preferences through experimentation with different ingredients. Above

all, individualising care highlights the value of canine subjectivity, which was grounded in observations of dogs' embodied displays of excitement around eating that was interpreted by owners as an indication of wellbeing. However, the limits of individualising care manifested in distinctions between performances of preference and expressions of values, whereby dogs were not seen as capable of expressing value-based choices. As such, there was a view that dogs would not choose to be vegan. While individualising care rests on the relational identities of owners-as-responders and dogs-as-agents, this serves as a reminder of the intersubjective power dynamic that limits canine autonomy in terms of food choices.

Third, *species-appropriate care* explores expectations to meet dogs' biological needs and attend to their 'natural' behaviours and underscores species distinctions between dogs and humans. By invoking the idea of the wild dog through romanticised notions of their ancestry with wolves, RMBDs were seen as a way of mimicking what dogs would have eaten in the wild, and thereby meeting their nutritional *and* behaviours needs. Owners valued difference and the expression of 'natural' behaviours, which was encouraged through feeding bones, whole animal parts, and enrichment feeding. Moreover, plant-based diets for humans were legitimised not just in terms of individual choice, as might be expected, but also in terms of biological capacities to consume and digest plant matter. Viewed through the lens of intensive pet care, raw feeding can be interpreted as an attempt to meet dogs' species-species needs, which is an additional task required by pet parents living alongside dogs.

One of the overarching aims of this thesis is to explore human-animal relations associated with dog feeding in different cultural contexts. In this chapter, I demonstrated how ideologies of 'intensive pet care' identified in the themes of nourishing, individualising, and species-appropriate care are relevant across UK and Australian participants. What this analysis shows is that intensive pet care is prevalent among plant-based raw feeders in different cultural contexts. In terms of gender, while there were more male human participants in the UK sample, intensive pet care ideologies were emulated by both female and male participants across both contexts. The most interesting distinction, in terms of social groups, was within group distinctions that presented a scale of 'good' to 'bad' pet parenting, which pitted DIY raw feeders as most aligned with intensive pet care ideologies at one end to kibble feeders, at the other. This highlights the diversity of practices in raw feeding communities as well as ongoing questions about perceptions of privilege around 'premium' diets and raw feeding, which I will return to in the subsequent chapters (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2.2).

While all three themes discussed provide understandings of 'good' care, they are distinguished by different relational caring identities, such as provider-dependent, responder-agent, and human-animal. What this shows is that different but intersecting expectations of care hinge on a dynamic construction of the relationship between humans and dogs, which is relevant for academic discussions around human-

companion animal relations (reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3). Moreover, notions of 'animality' challenge the dominant 'humanisation of pet food' narrative in pet feeding literature (see Schleicher et al., 2019). In Chapter 7, I draw on this analysis to argue that we are in fact witnessing the 'animalisation of pet food' (see Section 7.2.1). This analysis, particularly around species-appropriate care, adds depth and nuance to understandings of dogs' 'carnivorous' nature in animal science research on raw feeding (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2) by contextualising this notion alongside understandings of what it means to eat as a human. While not empirically focusing on vegan or vegetarian dog diets, this analysis is also of relevance for discussions around health and ethical considerations of feeding pets plant-based diets (Harsini et al., 2024; Knight, 2023; Knight & Satchell, 2021), since plant-based dog owners are assumed to be the most likely population to transition their dogs to plant-based diets (Dodd et al., 2019). Moreover, I analysed the role of pet parenting ideologies in shaping food choices, which is important for veterinarians and healthcare professionals as it could aid client consultations around nutritional advice in general and RMBDs in particular (discussed in Chapter 8, Section 8.3.2). While understanding the 'natural' animal is highly relevant for scholarship on raw feeding (Section 2.2.2) and human-animal relations (Section 2.3.3), the concept of 'natural' food remains to be explored. Thus, in the next chapter, I take forward the notion of the 'natural dog' and seek to explore how this is entangled in understandings of 'natural food' in the broader context of the food system.

Chapter 5 – ‘Not in my dog’s body’: controlling (im)purity in the modern pet food system

5.1 Introduction: from hazards to mechanisms of control

In the first analysis chapter (Chapter 4), I argued that feeding dogs is not just about meeting their nutritional needs but is shaped by relational notions of being a ‘good’ pet parent. This analysis shifted from functional conceptions of canine nutrition in animal science literature to explore dog owners’ constructions of appropriate dog feeding and what I called ‘intensive pet care’, which rested on distinct understandings of *nourishing care*, *individualising care* and *species-appropriate care*. Thus, I demonstrated how participants’ choices to feed RMBDs were infused with expectations of pet parenting, highlighting the importance of human-animal relations in understanding dog feeding.

In addition to concerns around the nutritional completeness of RMBDs, a large proportion of animal science research has focused on food safety and, in particular, the risks posed to both humans and dogs by foodborne illnesses, such as Salmonella and E. coli, often found to be present in samples of RMBDs (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1). Quantitative studies that explore dog owners’ perceptions of microbial hazards and food safety practices (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2) narrowly characterise risk as microbial hazards and do not take into consideration broader concerns across the whole food chain. Moreover, dog owners are conceptualised as ‘unaware’ or simply ‘lacking in knowledge’ in some studies (Viegas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022), overlooking how they actively navigate and manage these concerns.

Drawing on sociological literature on ‘precautionary consumption’ (MacKendrick, 2010; MacKendrick & Stevens, 2016) and mother-child feeding (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2), this chapter examines plant-based dog owners’ experiences of contamination, and how they understand their ability to manage and control risks around human-dog feeding. I argue that these mechanisms of control ultimately seek to uphold the ideal of the ‘natural dog’, emphasising the purity of canine bodies in response to perceived threats from the modern industrial food system. The analysis shows that participants’ concerns extended beyond maintaining ethical purity or reinforcing their own vegan or vegetarian identities; they were equally focused on preserving their dogs’ symbolic and material purity by carefully regulating the substances allowed into their dogs’ bodies.

There are two important takeaways from this chapter. First, given the focus on microbial risk in animal science research on RMBDs, it is notable that participants in this study were not just concerned about microbial contamination but also chemical contamination across different stages of the food chain. This suggests that broader conceptions of both microbial and chemical contamination are required in pet food safety research (see future reflections in Chapter 8, Section 8.3.1). Second, rather than focusing on *static*

perceptions of risk, a deeper understanding of safety can be reached by focusing on *relational* mechanisms of control. As I will demonstrate in this analysis, perceptions of risk are shaped by how dog owners perceived they could manage them. The appeal of the *raw* in RMBDs, therefore, is not just connected to notions of the wild, undomesticated dog (as explored in Chapter 4, Section 4.4) but also represents a desire for 'natural' and simplified systems of food manufacturing and production over which participants perceived they had more control. Therefore, despite the impossibility of avoiding contamination altogether, the analysis shows how dog owners perceive this can be navigated and managed, while simultaneously maintaining the symbolic ideal of canine bodily purity.

The chapter is structured into three sections, which explore the themes of *gatekeeping microorganisms*, *uncertainty around pet food manufacturing*, and *food production is making us sick*. As with the previous chapter, I draw on excerpts from interviews with participants and present images from photo/video diaries to illustrate these themes. First, the theme of *gatekeeping microorganisms* outlines the ways in which participants understood and navigated concerns around microorganisms at the stage of food consumption in the home. Microorganisms were categorised into 'bad' bacteria, such as foodborne pathogens that were seen as causing illnesses, and 'good' bacteria, such as probiotics that were seen as restoring and preserving health. Interestingly, foodborne illnesses were predominantly seen as a risk to human health whereas dogs were constructed as robust and biologically equipped to deal with bacteria. While there were some concerns among participants for their own health, they expressed a capacity to control bacteria in the home through hygiene and food safety practices. It is important to note here that concerns expressed around personal or cross-contamination were likely heightened by the global Covid-19 pandemic which started in early 2020, since data collection took place in 2022-23. This became evident through participants' use of terms such as 'full infection control measures' and 'full PPE' (personal protective equipment) that became commonplace during this time.

While the home was perceived as a space in which risks could be managed and controlled, protecting the 'natural dog' was more difficult to manage beyond the boundaries of the home. The second section explores the theme of *uncertainty around pet food manufacturing*, which highlights concerns about food processing and how pet food is made. 'Processed' kibble pet food was seen as a potential threat to canine health, as participants were concerned about the unknown quality of ingredients and the lack of transparency in its production within inaccessible factory environments. In contrast, RMBDs were valued for their freshness and relative lack of processing, which enabled participants to better determine the quality of ingredients for themselves. I interpret these views as a call for shorter, simpler supply chains. In particular, Australian participants were concerned about regulatory laxity and used the notion of meat grades to assess quality

and safety. Participants also relinquished some control to trusted suppliers, particularly in the context of food scares, suggesting that personal control can be distributed across social relations.

In the final section, the chapter moves from manufacturing to production, exploring the theme *food production is making us sick.* This theme draws connections to the stage of growing crops or rearing food animals and includes concerns about how contaminants entering the food system move up the food chain to canine and human consumers, thus threatening the ideal of the 'natural dog'. Additionally, my analysis explores understandings of holistic notions of health, in which soil health, plant health, animal health, and human health are interconnected. By feeding RMBDs, participants largely cut out grains from their dogs' diets, which were seen as making dogs sick because of chemical contamination. Organic food production was understood to be the safest way to feed the 'natural dog', and some participants grew their own vegetables as a way of ensuring they had control over how food was grown, but there was also recognition of that the costs of organic food consumption are a barrier for many.

5.2 Gatekeeping microorganisms

The theme of *gatekeeping microorganisms* explores how participants constructed some bacteria as 'good' and others as 'bad' in order to navigate health risks from handling raw meat fed to dogs. This largely occurred at the stage of food consumption and includes participants' understandings of the ways in which bacterial risks could be managed in the home. However, these perceptions were not consistent across human and dog diets; for example, foodborne illnesses were predominantly seen as a risk to human health whereas dogs were constructed as robust and biologically equipped to deal with bacteria. While there were some concerns among participants about their own health, they expressed a capacity to control bacteria in the home through hygiene and food safety practices. The following section is broken down into three sub-themes: *containing personal and social risks*; *dogs are robust*; and *cleansing and restoring gut health*.

5.2.1 Containing personal and social risks

Analysis of the interview data suggests that raw meat was perceived as a risk to human health due to microbial contamination, such as Salmonella and E. coli, which were understood to cause foodborne illnesses. Some participants described raw meat as 'contaminated', 'risky' or 'deadly', and there was an understanding that it poses more microbial risks than processed pet food and raw vegetables. Interestingly, however, there was an additional concern that stemmed from raw meat that was constructed as dog food, whereby dog food in particular was portrayed as 'gross' or 'icky' compared to raw meat consumed by humans.

Some participants were concerned about microbial contamination from raw meat in the context of their own health or human family members. Nikhil communicated that he was concerned about infection because of his health, stating 'I've got to be really careful about infection [...] and if you've got raw food, raw meat lying around, then it's a bigger risk'. Moreover, plant-based participants drew distinctions between the relative safety of preparing raw vegetables compared to the risks posed by raw meat ingredients.

> You can get like bacteria from raw food if I mean raw meat if you're giving like raw veggies or fruits, that's fine obviously. But raw meat is just a bit risky. (Miles, vegetarian, UK)

> There, I think it's also like a for me, a realisation that like, you know, I'm chopping up this eggplant, I'm chopping up, you know, these vegetables. I'm not freaking out about what my knife has touched, but cooking, you know you've got raw chicken on the bench. You know, you're kind of being fastidious about you know sanitising and cleaning and everything the chicken's touched. It's sort of like well now why are we eating this stuff that's potentially deadly? (Jason, vegetarian, Australia)

Miles and Jason reflect the range of concerns among participants around cross-contamination, from raw meat being 'just a bit risky' to 'potentially deadly'. Interestingly, the risk of contamination motivated Jason to transition to a plant-based diet, but he was not concerned about his dog's diet, as I will explore below. Moreover, a heightened sense of personal concern was echoed by James, who explained, 'I'm petrified of food poisoning, so I don't want to touch the food and then touch the countertop and then touch that later and then, you know, rub my face with my hand or whatever' (James, flexitarian, UK). He also contrasted 'raw' and 'processed' dog food, describing packaged kibble as safer than 'icky' raw meat.

Interestingly, it was not just the rawness of meat that posed a safety concern to humans, but rather the symbolic notion that this meat was *dog food*. This was possible to detect among flexitarian participants who did consume some meat themselves. For example, James' concern about personal contamination seemed to be heightened due to the construction of raw meat as dog food, which was seen as 'gross' and unsafe.

> The idea of contamination is very heavy in my mind, whenever I'm dealing with any kind of raw meat, but especially the dog food for some reason. I think that's just like because I've always, you know like we always get told as little kids like ew, it's dog food like, you know, like don't touch it or make sure you wash your hands and all the rest of it. And I think like logically I know that that the way that the raw food is prepared is, you know, potentially even safer than the way raw meat is for humans. So I mean and it and it you know if it's he's never been ill from raw food ever and he has been ill from dried food so it's like I know that there is obviously something that is very very good about it but because like I've just grown up with this idea that dog food is gross and like

> especially raw and you know that kind of if you touch it you'll get contaminated. (James, flexitarian, UK)

I include this longer excerpt from James above because it illuminates the complex entanglement of material reactions, such as disgust and anxiety, with discursive constructions of pet food that, for many, take root in childhood. These concerns are of particular relevance in the broader context of pet food safety, especially amidst the prevalence of pet food recalls, which have challenged the reputation of the commercial pet food industry and catalysed the popularity of alternative diets, such as RMBDs (Nestle, 2008; Wyre, 2012).

On the micro-level, despite some participants viewing raw meat as a risk to human health, there was also an understanding that these risks could be managed through food safety and hygiene practices. Several participants conveyed the high importance of keeping dog food and human food separate during storage, preparation, and cleaning due to concerns about cross-contamination. Practices described included using separate containers, utensils, boards, and wearing gloves. What was more interesting for this analysis, however, were participants' descriptions of their ability to contain microbial risks to a degree whereas others presented views that risks could be almost fully eliminated, as exemplified in the excerpts below.

> But I feel like we've dealt with it quite well and we, you know, we both keep on top of keeping the kitchen clean and we'll make sure, you know, we're careful with our food versus separate, separate utensils and things like that. (Nikhil, vegetarian, UK)

> All of the containers that I store his food in are exclusively used for his food. All of the like preparation equipment is kept in like a different drawer that's only used for his food preparation. Like I don't use the same cutting boards and knives for our food that I do for years. So, everything is kept, is kept as separate as it can be, and it's all very meticulously washed. So, there's essentially no risk of it crossing into our own food. (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia)

Discourses around the idea of being 'careful', as stated by Nikhil above, were common and can be interpreted as participants conveying a porous boundary between potential contaminants and the body, ruling out the notion that raw meat can ever be entirely safe.

In addition to the personal risks that have been outlined in this section, there were also concerns about social risks, particularly stemming from judgement from family and friends around their feeding practices. While the previous chapter (Chapter 4) suggests that participants strived to meet social ideals around 'good' pet parenting, the analysis of social risks in this current chapter also demonstrates concerns around social exclusion based on what may be perceived as deviant or taboo practices. This sentiment appeared to be particularly prominent for James, who said,

I don't have the money to buy an extra fridge. If I did, I would have an extra fridge for Archie and all of his stuff would be separate from mine. But I don't […] but the stuff in the fridge I was like well yeah, it just makes me feel better, safer, less icky when it's in a double locked container, and I also feel like if somebody came to my house and they like, went in my fridge to get like whatever. They might see the raw food, the dog food and think oh ick, I don't wanna eat anything out of that fridge either. (James, flexitarian, UK)

Figure 5: Food diary photo showing inside of fridge and 'double-locked container' (shared by James, UK)

Once again, there was evidence of a heightened perception of risk stemming from the construction of food as 'dog food', thus maintaining not just the physical but also the categorical separation between dog food and human food (Fig. 5). This was epitomised in James' statement: 'I just like don't like the idea of the raw dog food touching like my human stuff'. In my view, these discourses convey a fear of contamination from raw meat as dog food and a boundary of separation between dog food and human food. The material separation of dog food from human food, dog utensils and human utensils, potentially re-inscribes a symbolic human/animal divide.

5.2.2 Dogs are robust

As shown in the previous section, fear of microbial contamination was seen as a larger concern for humans, who were constructed as vulnerable to foodborne illnesses. However, there was an understanding that social and personal risks around microbial contamination could be contained through separation and hygiene measures. In contrast, the sub-theme of *dogs are robust* explores constructions of the dogs' body, which resulted in a common understanding that dogs were physiologically equipped to deal with foodborne

bacteria themselves. This is particularly important given that animal science research highlights that RMBDs also pose microbial risks to dogs (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1).

In discussions around microbial contamination, dogs were constructed as robust, with an emphasis on how dogs' stomachs are naturally 'capable of dealing with' (Lisa, vegetarian, UK), 'equipped to fight off', able to 'handle' (Evie, vegetarian, Australia), 'withstand' (Steph, flexitarian, Australia) and 'withhold' (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia) potential bacteria from raw meat. What all of this language has in common is the notion that dogs are *biologically* capable of consuming raw meat with a low risk of illness. This was emphasised in comparisons between dogs and humans, in which dogs were described as having more acidic stomachs and shorter digestive tracts, which meant they were less at risk of getting sick from eating raw meat.

> My understanding is that a dog's digestive system is actually far more capable of dealing with some bacteria than ours is, so it's not, I've always been aware of it, but I've not had a problem. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK).

> Our stomachs can't handle (meat) like dogs can, sort of thing. Theirs was made to process that sort of thing where like I think that's a big thing that puts people off raw feeding. They think about oh but if a human was to eat raw chicken would get salmonella where dogs' stomachs are made to handle that so shorter digestive tract and it's made to handle that sort of thing. (Evie, vegetarian, Australia).

> The dog's stomach environment is more acidic. Their intestinal tract is shorter, you know they consume (food) way faster than us. So, I'm not too concerned. (Dana, flexitarian, Australia).

These excerpts once again demonstrate naturalising discourses of design that were explored in Chapter 4 in the theme of *species-appropriate care* (see Section 4.4). Drawing on notions of ancestral diets, dogs were not just seen as designed to eat raw meat, but their bodies were also seen as having evolved to manage potential risks of doing so. In this way, the robust dog becomes a boundary through which to manage contamination.

Notions of robust dogs were situated in understandings of their eating behaviours before their domestication with pervasive language around wildness. For example, Steph (flexitarian, Australia) explained, 'dog's stomachs can withstand quite a lot of stuff. I mean in the wild, they'd eat a lot of random crap. So yeah, I'm not that concerned'. Moreover, not only did participants draw species distinctions between dogs and humans to emphasise an attitude of species-appropriate care (as explored in Chapter 4), but they also used these distinctions to dissipate concerns around microbial contamination, as evidenced in the excerpt below.

> In the wild, all the time, they eat the raw white meat, they'll eat the chickens, you know, their organs, all their muscle meat and everything. And they're totally fine because their gastrointestinal system has evolved to be able to withhold all of those, not diseases, but to withhold all of the bacteria that can come with them. They can digest it perfectly fine. Salmonella is essentially like a, not a nil risk, but it's a very low risk to dogs compared to the risk that it poses to us as humans. And I think that that risk is quite negligible in this circumstance. I mean, I feed Harry chicken all the time, never had an issue with it. So, I think to suggest that the diet is not good for him because it has a risk of salmonella is, for lack of a better word, ignorant because it doesn't take into account the species differences between us. (Harvey, vegetarian, Australia)

Moreover, Lucy from rural Australia drew distinctions between Australian raw feeders and raw feeders from other countries, such as the UK and the US. After telling her I had also interviewed UK raw feeders, she stated, 'I'm on a few raw feeding groups on Facebook and I notice that in the UK and in the US as well, they seem to be really scared of germs on raw food'. She shared a photo of dog food preparation, in which she had been chopping up raw chicken frames on a tree stump in her garden.

> But imagine the potential I guess for bacteria and stuff in there ((laughs)), but I think I figure the dogs have got good enough stomach acids and everything that they can cope with that they're not going to get sick from me doing that. But yeah, I know I've found overseas raw feeders are so paranoid about getting germs from raw food and I'm like yeah dogs are pretty tough. They bury bones and dig them up weeks later and manage to survive. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia)

In sum, two mechanisms of control have been identified so far that provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences of microbial contamination. First, personal and social risks for were perceived as possible to contain, especially through food safety and hygiene practices. Second, the notion of robust dogs was found to be a mechanism through which dog owners dissipated concerns since dogs were perceived as quite literally able to digest microbial risk themselves.

5.2.3 Cleansing and restoring gut health

Despite differentiated understandings of the risks of foodborne illnesses for dogs and humans, this analysis also shows positive connotations of bacteria in RMBDs in two different ways. Certain ingredients in RMBDs, such as furry animal ears or supplements, were perceived as able to cleanse or remove undesirable organisms from the dogs' digestive system, such as parasitic worms. For these reasons, they were often described as 'natural' alternatives to medicinal de-worming treatments. Another perceived benefit was that once cleansed, RMBDs would restore gut health, in particular through the introduction of 'good' bacteria. Many participants described the importance of 'good' bacteria, such as probiotics found in yoghurt and

kefir, as well as supplements. The construction of some bacteria as 'good' and supporting dogs' health and vitality is important because it suggests dog owners in this study do not just view microorganisms as a risk, but also as a benefit to canine intestinal health.

Certain ingredients that were reportedly fed as part of RMBDs, such as whole animals or furry animal parts, were described as cleansing, especially in the context of concerns around intestinal worms. Although participants did not discuss how intestinal worms entered the food chain, they did mention the impacts on their dogs' health and sought what was often referred to as 'natural' worming solutions.[12]

> They also get natural snacks. So, say in an afternoon if I'm working from home or they might get it with their evening meal, they might get like a rabbit ear, which is gross. But anyway, rabbit ears or chicken feet or whatever. And so they'll get that, and that is a natural wormer as well. (Paula, vegetarian, UK)

> I do try to get sometimes something with fur on. A lot of people claim it'll help clean out their gut a little bit more […] Just a bit more roughage. It's not always as easy. They often get like an ear, cow ear or something like that that still has the fur on, but that's about as good as it gets. We had a whole pig head a little while ago. (Tina, flexitarian, Australia)

The images below (Fig. 6) depict food diary photos shared by participants that include animal ears. Freya's photo (left) depicts her holding a buffalo ear with her dog Archie waiting to receive it. She explained, 'I'm assuming this is scientifically correct with when they do have the fur on, it's almost like a natural dewormer'. Evie's photo (right) shows a meal, which includes what she called a 'furry roo ear'. Evie stated, 'lots of people do believe in them for the benefits of, I know some people say they help clean out their digestion and there's different nutrients in the fur that's good for them'. What struck me in these excerpts is the diversity in discourses around evidence, with understandings of both scientific evidence and anecdotal belief systems.

[12] The perception that furry animal parts, such as ears, are a natural wormer for dogs is common among members of the raw feeding community. The understanding is that the fur acts as a scourer in the gut, detaching worms from the gut wall and sweeping them through the intestine. To my knowledge, there is no scientific evidence to support this claim and veterinary professionals have cautioned this conception, labelling it as a myth (Vet Voices, 2022).

Figure 6: Food diary photos of animal ears (left, shared by Freya, UK; right, shared by Evie, Australia)

In addition to furry animal parts, participants used 'natural' herbal supplements either in addition to or instead of medical de-worming treatments (Fig. 7). Kay reported giving their dog Verm-X as an extra protective measure in addition to worming pills, explaining, 'I don't know if it does anything, but it gives me a bit of peace of mind and she likes them so' (Kay, vegan, UK). For other participants, raw foods as 'natural' worming solutions meant they could avoid chemicals. For example, Drew (vegan, UK) shared a video of himself preparing what he called a 'magical concoction', stating that the 'eggy shake' included 'fulvic minerals, probiotics and digestive enzymes'. Drew described these as being 'important for Kane's digestive system'. More intriguing were notions of purity around the oxygenated water added to the egg mix, where he stated,

> So, he gets a teaspoonful of (eggy shake) mixed with super oxygenated water, which is very pure water with extra oxygen in it. Now that doesn't mean it's fizzy. It's not fizzy. No, no bubbles in it at all. Was just specially made and impregnated with extra oxygen, which is really good for his body. (Drew, vegan, UK)

The discourse around cleansing continued as he called the shake an 'anti-worming mixture' that helps to 'clear out the gut', adding 'I don't want to put chemical medicines in him unless they're needed' (Drew, vegan, UK). Thus, natural ingredients were described as pure and valued for their cleansing capacities as opposed to negative perceptions of 'chemical medicines'. These framings blur the boundaries between food and medicine, whereby supplements or raw animal ears, often fed as part of RMBDs, were seen as purifying. This is important because RMBDs were in fact seen as a way of removing parasitic microorganisms from their dogs' bodies.

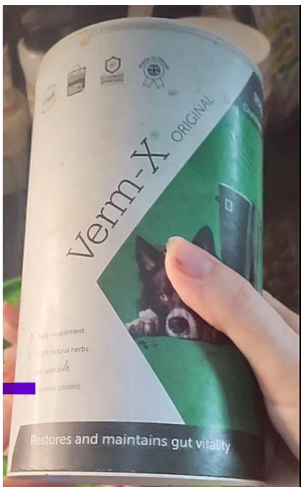

Figure 7: Food diary photo of a supplement fed as part of an RMBD (shared by Kay, UK)

While participants policed pathogenic microorganisms, other gut bacteria were perceived as 'good' for gut health restoration. Many participants reported feeding supplements, including vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, and live microbials that were often referred to as probiotics. Probiotics were described as 'natural' remedies, which were good for gut health. For example, Evie explained she added probiotics to her dog's diet 'to help her gut look after her' (Evie, vegetarian, Australia). Sara echoed this understanding, describing that feeding supplements containing enzymes, probiotics, and fulvic minerals 'really helps cleanse and heal really fast, doing some good work in the gut' (Sara, vegan, UK). The agential quality ascribed to the gut and liveliness of 'good' bacteria conveyed a chain reaction where a healthy gut was seen as supporting the dogs' health. For example, Sara explained that feeding a raw meat diet,

> Starts strengthening the immune system. Because the immune system is in the gut and if the gut is out of balance, which it will be after a period of time on a processed pet food diet. And let the gut get that balance and things like ear infections, eye infections, skin infections, outages and all that start happening. Because the immune system has been weakened. So yeah, it starts strengthening the immune system and you know, doing some good internal repair of the gut and the digestive organs. (Sara, vegan, UK)

The notion that dogs' immune systems had been compromised was referred to several times in the context of the modern industrial food system, which the 'natural dog' needed to be protected from. These constructions of vulnerability stand in stark contrast to the theme of canine robustness described in the previous section (Section 5.2.2). Whereas previously, dogs were portrayed as biologically equipped to deal with pathogenic bacteria, such as Salmonella and E. coli, they were not seen as being able to deal with parasitic worms. Here, dog owners could intervene by using RMBDs to cleanse and restore gut health.

Thus, purification is a mechanism of control, which describes expelling 'bad' pathogenic bacteria from canine bodies and replacing 'good' bacteria, such as probiotics.

5.2.4 Summary of section

The first section explored the theme of *gatekeeping microorganisms* through three sub-themes: *containing personal and social risks*; *dogs are robust*; and *cleansing and restoring gut health*. The relational understanding of humans as vulnerable and dogs as robust in the context of foodborne illnesses meant that microbial contamination was viewed by some participants as a risk to human health but not canine health. This analysis is relevant given that quantitative studies have consistently suggested that owners do not perceive RMBDs as a risk to human or animal health (Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020; Morelli et al., 2019; Bulochova and Evans, 2021; Morgan et al., 2022). Moreover, it adds nuance to previous research by showing that participants were also concerned about social exclusion and judgement about their feeding practices, which they thought might be regarded as somewhat 'taboo'. As has also been found by Morgan et al. (2022), a common theme was that these risks could be managed through the mechanism of containment, understood as keeping dog food and human food as separate as possible to avoid cross-contamination.

The robust dog was a boundary through which microbial contamination was symbolically managed. By drawing on discourses of canine physiology, maintenance of the 'natural dog' did not require human intervention to manage microbial contamination, which further underscores the propensity for dogs to consume meat, since it is simply part of their biology. In their research on natural parenting (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1), Bobel (2010, pp. 105-114) argues that static discourses around the 'natural' are attractive because they are 'separate from and unpolluted by human manipulation'. This interpretation seems fitting here in that notions of robustness cemented a sense of control around canine bodily purity.

While microbial contamination was indeed prevalent in the analysis, there were more complex and nuanced entanglements between dogs, humans, and various other microorganisms. RMBDs were seen as cleansing the gut, removing parasitic worms which posed a risk to the dog's health, and restoring a balance of 'good' bacteria. A survey of French dog owners found that owners who fed RMBDs were less likely to deworm their dogs than those who fed conventional diets (Hoummady et al., 2022). More research would be required to determine where this is because RMBDs themselves are perceived as a natural dewormer. Moreover, these perspectives around gut health are important given the growing interest in the effects of RMBDs on animal microbiomes in animal science research (Butowski et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2018). When viewed alongside the analysis around microbial contamination, it appears that the perceived benefits outweighed the potential risks that can arise from feeding raw. Moreover, the lively vitality of certain elements of

RMBDs as well as their cleansing capacity is of particular relevance when compared to the analysis in the following section, which explores participants' concerns around 'processed' pet foods.

5.3 Uncertainty around pet food manufacturing

In the previous section, I explored how participants were aware of the risks of microbial contamination and foodborne illnesses yet saw them as manageable in domestic spaces at the stage of consumption. The remainder of this chapter presents my analysis of concerns around chemical substances that were seen as entering the food chain at different stages. The theme of *uncertainty around pet food manufacturing* refers to concerns around pet food manufacturing and processing. The issues with processed kibble seemed to be that participants had little control over ingredients as they were not able to ascertain what went into the kibble or whether it was good quality. In light of this, I argue that participants established mechanisms to control the quality and safety of pet food, as explored in the sub-themes of *meat grades and regulation*, *freshness*, and *trustworthy advice*. In sum, the theme suggests that feeding RMBDs offer a way of bypassing commercial pet food manufacturing, thus alleviating some of their concerns about how pet food is made.

5.3.1 Meat grades and regulation

The sub-theme *meat grades and regulation* refers to concerns about the quality of meat ingredients and a lack of trust in pet food companies to provide ingredients of acceptable quality. Participants navigated this uncertainty through discourse around meat grades, such as 'human-grade' and 'pet-grade' meat.[13] Interestingly, while the term 'human grade' also appears on raw pet food packaging in the UK, the term was mostly used by Australian participants (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4 for methodological reflections).

Participants conveyed a high degree of scepticism and distrust in the quality of kibble pet food, which was often described as 'junk', 'cheap', or 'low quality'. While the term 'by-products' had positive connotations in the context of the sustainability of RMBDs (explored in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3.3), in the context of kibble, by-products were seen as low-quality ingredients. Drawing on the excerpts from participants below, I suspect that this is because of a lack of control over the ingredients included in kibble.

[13] It is important to note that there are no legal definitions of these terms and regulations for pet food differ in the UK and Australia. In the UK, there are relatively stringent regulations which mean that all animal materials in pet food must be passed as fit for human consumption prior to slaughter. However, once rendered and processed into meat meal, it can no longer be categorised as suitable for human consumption. In Australia, the pet food industry is self-regulated according to a voluntary Australian Standard and various state and territory legislation specific to pet meat. The Standard requires packaged pet food to be marked with the words 'PET FOOD ONLY' along with an illustration of the whole body or head of a dog or cat (AS5812:2017).

> You don’t really know what’s gone into the kibble. It could be any quality, any sort of, I mean Chappy’s the worst really, because I’m sure Chappy is sweepings off the factory floor. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> I think it’s more that you know, by-products and not that I don’t think they’re bad. A chicken neck is a fantastic, like good quality meat for a dog, right? But when it gets introduced into kibble, you cannot measure the quality of those by-products because they’re all put together. If you look at a lot of the dog food, it will say, you know, chicken, beef, turkey, right? So, you don’t know what those by-products are that are going in. (Kris, vegan, Australia)

> So, kibble to me would be like convenience junk food, just like everything just piled in the one bag together of the cheapest possible ingredients that they can get away with and say that it would be a complete diet for a dog. I actually don’t trust the dog food companies at all to not to, even when they say it’s premium dog food and everything. You look at the ingredients and it’s all wastes and by-products and it’s so yeah so kibble to me is really just junk that they put together to try and convince people that it’s complete and balanced. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia)

Viewing these excerpts together, they share a sense of distrust in pet food manufacturers operating in invisibilised spaces of food manufacturing. Not only were participants concerned about *who* was making pet food but also *where* this took place, which was made explicit through Lisa’s evocative statement of ‘sweepings off the factory floor’ above.

The lack of trust in pet food manufacturing was heightened among participants from Australia, who expressed additional concerns around regulatory laxity in the Australian context in comparison with other contexts, such as the UK and the US. Regulation was seen as important because it enabled participants to trust what was going into pet food.

> I just don’t trust Australia’s pet food industry, so there’s lots of, there's no regulations like, it’s not. Yeah, it’s not, not regulated, really. Yeah, they’re, just, you can put anything on the market and say it’s pet food and yeah. (Evie, vegetarian, Australia)

> I think a lot of the pet food is marketed as like super healthy, really good, high quality. For instance, Pedigree is marketed as if it’s like really good. But if you look at the ingredients, yeah, it’s just, it’s not a good food at all to be feeding your dog. (Kris, vegan, Australia)

> In Australia the pet food industry, it’s not regulated and people can claim, it’s really, I didn’t realise how bad it was until I got Milo and because the UK and the USA. The USA is really regulated, the

> UK, oh no the UK is the better one. But yeah, people can say anything, they can claim anything. (Lynda, vegan, Australia)

The repeated phrases ‘say anything’, ‘claim anything’, and ‘put anything’ raised by both Evie and Lynda in the excerpts above highlight a sense of distrust in pet food marketing, with particular uncertainty around labelling claims. Moreover, participants also expressed scepticism around the marketing term ‘premium’, which is interesting given that many commercial RMBDs are also marketed as premium pet foods. Having highlighted her scepticism around certain kibble brands, Kris explained, ‘there should be much better regulation in terms of what can be deemed a premium pet food quality as opposed to much lower quality food’. Participants communicated that they wanted to know what ingredients were included in commercial pet food and, despite being marketed as premium, many kibble brands were not deemed to be adequate quality.

In light of these concerns around the quality of kibble and lack of trust in the pet food industry more broadly, many participants described having more control around the ingredient quality in RMBDs. One of the ways in which they established control was through a heuristic grading system, distinguishing between ‘human grade’ and ‘pet grade’ meat. Human-grade meat was perceived as the ‘highest standard’ (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia) because it was deemed fit for human consumption and consisted of the ‘best selection of cuts and best quality products’ (Evie, vegetarian, Australia). In the Australian context, the importance of human-grade meat can be interpreted as a mechanism of control over the unknown, especially with the perceived absence of necessary regulation, as outlined above. Moreover, participants used the imaginary of whether they would eat their dog’s food themselves as an assertion of quality control. This was common for flexitarians, such as Dana who said:

> I have always also bought only human grade or mostly human grade food especially when it comes to minces, always human grade. So, I would never buy like a pet chicken mince or something like that. Just so that I, hand on heart, like know what is in it and know that if it’s good enough for me to eat, then it’s good enough for my pups to eat. (Dana, flexitarian, Australia)

More intriguing, however, were those who made the same assertion although they did not eat meat themselves. For example, Evie described herself as having ‘very high standards’, stating: ‘if it’s not good enough for me, not that I would ever eat meat, it’s not good enough for the dog’ (Evie, vegetarian, Australia). Because there was no material comparison between meat for human consumption and meat for canine consumption, vegans making these statements suggest that the term human-grade rendered meat symbolically edible and safe to feed.

Understanding the symbolic edibility of 'human-grade' meat for dogs becomes more apparent when analysed in contrast with participants' understandings of 'pet-grade' mince. Feeding human-grade meat appeared not just to be about particular cuts of meat but about knowing and therefore having more control over the process of manufacturing. Pet grade meat, by comparison, was seen as consisting of the unknown animal Other, as demonstrated in the excerpts below.

> So, in a lot of the pet mixes, they will like I don't know what ratio they put into it, so I don't know how much fat they've put into it 'cause normally it would be like off cuts of fats. I don't know what kind of bone they put in there. I don't know how much organ they've put in there. I don't know what parts of the animals in it. So, I would rather I know if I buy them human grade mince that that's what they're getting and then I can add whatever else to make it wholesome. (Dana, flexitarian, Australia)

> The meat that we source for the dogs is human-grade meat from abattoirs. Human abattoirs. So, it's not pet mince or pet meat, which is, you know, it can be lesser grade or from animals that perhaps aren't too healthy and things like that. So, it's a good quality product. (Romi, flexitarian, Australia)

Despite these uncertainties around the quality of ingredients in pet-grade meat, it must be noted that many participants still fed it to their dogs because it was reported to be more affordable than human-grade meat. This serves as a reminder that cost also plays a role in shaping pet feeding and navigating various values involves trade-offs (I return to this discussion in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2.2).

5.3.2 Freshness and processing

In addition to meat grades and regulation, another concern was the degree of processing involved in both pet food and human food manufacturing. The sub-theme of *freshness and processing* refers to understandings of control over food quality by retaining food in its 'natural' state. These views surfaced in relation to notions of processing, such as physical or chemical changes through cooking or freezing, as well as the addition of undesirable ingredients to the food during the manufacturing stage. In comparison to kibble, feeding fresh or whole foods as part of RMBDs seemed to be a way of detecting what the raw ingredients were, and therefore controlling what belongs or does not belong in their dogs' bodies.

Before exploring conceptions of freshness, it is first useful to outline contrasting perceptions of kibble. Couched in the language of nutritional wellness, kibble was often described as processed, with negative terms such as 'burned', 'destroyed', and 'dehydrated'. For example, Miles explained, 'if I eat good quality food then I don't want (my dog) to eat over-processed, burned food […] that can stay in the shelf for years' (Miles, vegetarian, UK). Moreover, Lucy contrasted kibble where the 'nutrients are cooked out of it and

destroyed' and fresh raw food 'where the nutrients are still alive' (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia). Concerns around the nutritional wellness of meat ingredients were often entangled with concerns around undesirable additional ingredients, such as additives and preservatives. This was emphatically described by Drew in the excerpt below:

> All they're doing is freeze drying all these components down to dust form then sticking them all together with a with a coagulant and then spraying them with flavour so the dog will eat them and spraying them with colour so the humans think they look nice. And then when you actually stop to think about it you realise that actually, there can't, I can't see how they can be good in kibble because it has to be the freeze dried or baked to some extreme heat to break it down into the dust form to make, to pass it through the extruders to make the bone shaped or the oval shaped or the whatever-shaped piece of kibble you want and then it is sprayed with flavouring and it is sprayed with colour. Which is why if you open a packet of something like Bakers you get orange and green and grey and blue and red. It's like smarties, you know it's chocolate with a coloured coating. (Drew, vegan, UK)

The negative portrayal of pet food manufacturing in the excerpt above was common among participants who were distrusting of the commercial pet food industry. What is also interesting is that knowing how kibble is manufactured did little to alleviate the concerns around how pet food is made; rather, these understandings of the manufacturing process seemed to underscore concerns around chemical contamination and processing.

In contrast to these constructions of kibble as processed, RMBDs were presented as fresh and therefore higher quality. The 'fresh is best' mantra was echoed by several participants, who also consumed a lot of fresh foods themselves and wanted to do the same for their dogs. For example, Paula explained, 'I want them to have a good quality food because I eat a lot of fresh food myself' (Paula, vegetarian, UK). By feeding fresh food, participants seemed to be trying to simplify food processing.

> I think I always try and be conscious about like the processing journey of food. So, if it's just been picked and then frozen and then it's sold, then for me that seems OK, whereas if food is like goes to a factory and then goes through loads of different changes and then comes out looking completely different for me […] I guess, it doesn't feel as right as just having things as they naturally occur. (Louise, vegetarian, UK)

The terms 'fresh' and 'raw' were often used interchangeably, and since many raw meat diets are in fact frozen or freeze dried, I believe the use of the term 'fresh' can be interpreted as a discursive mechanism of control. While participants were concerned about chemical changes during processing, they did not disagree

with processing altogether. For example, cooking food for dogs was often perceived negatively whereas freezing food was deemed as acceptable (especially for plant-based eaters who did not like to handle meat or blood). This suggested to me that processing itself was not the underlying concern. Rather, some forms of processing changed foods to such a degree that participants could not assess what the ingredients were, resulting in feeling out of control. In particular, feeding fresh, whole foods enabled participants to establish control through visual assessments of quality, even if they did not consume meat themselves. Despite not having control over the manufacturing of commercial pre-made raw meat, participants perceived the authenticity of these diets as important since it enabled them to determine what the ingredients were. For example, Lisa (vegetarian, UK) explained, 'I don't really know what's going into my raw food, but it does look like meat and you can see it's meat and you can see the fibres in it'. By resembling meat, including the fibres that make up the meat, there was a perception that it was knowable and therefore controllable.

Interestingly, despite valuing freshness and controlling processing for their dogs' food, there were differing degrees of consistency with descriptions of participants' own diets. Many stated they consumed commercial vegan and vegetarian products, often described as 'mock', or 'fake' meats and 'processed' food.

> I don't like eating, like, you know, some people, vegans or vegetarians, might live off of hot chips and the fake meats at the supermarket where I'm quite, I will occasionally eat fake meat, but I'm not big on anything that's got a lot of new and a lot of synthetic stuff, or a lot of additives. I prefer short ingredient lists, mostly natural stuff. I'd rather add mushrooms and lentils to a meal than a fake mince sort of thing. (Evie, vegetarian, Australia)

> I do have some of the processed stuff as well and, and that's for because I'm working and because of this, that and the other and it's easy and it fits in and then I know it's I've I'm not missing out on nutrients as well. (Paula, vegetarian, UK)

> I eat like a lot of, like, the fake meat. So, I'm a sucker for like quorn nuggets and whatnot. And like the fake hot dog […] my diet is atrocious compared to Poppy's. (Ava, vegan, UK)

> I think I'm very lucky where I am that we can do that with like just raw fruit and veg. With the other bits of vegan food that's where I struggle with the environmental pros and cons cause a lot of it is quite processed and industrialised. Yeah, it's the, I mean, I think, there are options, but I suppose you you're probably better off being one of those super healthy vegans that only eat like whole foods stuff, but I do like a treat, like a vegan chicken. (Freya, vegan, UK)

The excerpts above represent the range of views around the level of processing involved in manufacturing plant-based 'meat' for human consumption. Some participants viewed mock meats negatively, since they

were seen to be synthetic or processed, stating a preference for what were seen to be more natural ingredients, such as Evie's examples of mushrooms and lentils. In this way, fresh natural food was an important value across human diets and dog diets. Others, however, traded freshness for convenience and taste, whereby processed foods were seen as convenient and fitting into a busy lifestyle. Finally, Freya expressed tensions between different values, such as trying to avoid 'processed and industrialised' vegan food because of the environmental impacts but also valuing satisfaction and taste in the form of treating herself to vegan chicken. In summary, while some participants valued freshness as a way of maintaining control over ingredient quality for both their own diet and their dogs' diets, some appeared to be stricter about their dogs' diet than their own.

5.3.3 Sourcing from people I trust

The previous section showed how participants sought to control the quality and safety of dog food by seeking what they perceived as fresh ingredients in order to reduce chemical contamination stemming from manufacturing. The sub-theme *sourcing from people I trust* explores how participants also navigated the uncertainty of pet food manufacturing by relinquishing control to trusted suppliers, emphasising the importance of not just individual but also relational mechanisms of control. Relational mechanisms of control can be understood as navigating risks and concerns together with other actors in the food chain, such as raw pet food retailers, local butchers, farmers, and even abattoirs. While participants reportedly sought information from various sources (including vets, online articles, social media platforms, books, and academic journals), relationships with local raw food suppliers seemed to be important for participants as a source of *good* advice. In particular, it was notable that participants often knew these suppliers by name (names changed in the excerpts below for anonymity).

> Katie's great, I really trust her. And so, I often, if I have questions, she's the first person I'd go to […] the shop is her own thing so she's never trying to pressure you into buying stuff, she will always just chat through the options. (Kay, vegan, UK)

> If I wanted advice as well, I have to say that Bevan at the raw food shop, because he supports a lot of other holistic things as well, he's again full of good advice. So, you know excellent there to have that back up. (Paula, vegetarian, UK)

The excerpts above exemplify an understanding that local suppliers are more independent than larger pet food companies that were perceived as being driven by profit. Analysis of the interview data suggests that participants valued retaining control while also receiving advice in a non-pressurising, supportive environment from people whom they trusted.

Trusted suppliers were not only seen as sources of nutritional information but were also as important actors involved in navigating food scares and pet food recalls. Concerns mentioned about food scares were contextual, stemming largely from participants living in the state of Victoria, Australia, who referred to a recent case of contamination of raw pet-grade mince in the state that occurred in 2021.[14] The excerpt below from my interview discussion with Marnie from Victoria emphasised the role of the supplier in establishing trust and reassuring dog owners during this incident:

> **Marnie:** I remember hearing (name of town removed) the greyhound supplier talking and reassuring some customers at the time saying, 'no, that's not where we get our meat from. Yes, it's happened because of XYZ, but you don't have to worry'. I think it's a risk you take. It's a, you know, if you look at the history, there's problems with manufactured food, whether it be, you know, wet food, dry food in the dog industry. I think it's with the supply chain.
>
> **Interviewer**: Sure. And how, how do you navigate those risks?
>
> **Marnie**: Well, I guess somebody just said, you know, they never had a problem with (name of raw pet food shop). Um… I've never had a problem with these greyhound suppliers and, you know… I thought, I guess it's not something, I do think about it, but what worries me more is if, you know, my dogs aren't getting fed species-specific food. Like if I had an incident happen, I'd be devastated and then it would be like, oh my gosh. And obviously human grade. I mean, you're obviously, yeah, that's the highest standard, so.

I find it interesting that Marnie did not communicate the specific source of the contamination, but in her recollection, she emphasised the supplier's role in reassuring customers. Moreover, the statement 'it's a risk you take' can be interpreted as an engagement with rather than a total avoidance of risk, in which dog owners have to navigate risks between potential raw food contamination and the safety and quality of manufactured pet food.

In addition to receiving trustworthy advice from suppliers, participants also saw themselves as 'giving back' by supporting small, local business. Underscoring the reciprocal nature of these relationships, the preference for local suppliers seemed to stem from the desire for shorter supply chains over which they had

[14] In 2021, the State of Victoria's Agriculture department issued a state-wide alert over commercially prepared raw pet meat after 68 dogs contracted severe liver disease and suspected indospicine toxicity, of which 26 died. Indospicine is a naturally occurring toxin found in the Indigofera plant species, which are palatable to livestock. An investigation by Agriculture Victoria and PrimeSafe traced the source of the toxin to a local knackery, where interstate horses had been processed. The Maffra District Knackery issued a voluntary recall on raw pet food labelled 'Backmans Greyhound Supplies Chopped and 'Maffra Knackery Chopped' (Agriculture Victoria, 2024; Salmon et al., 2022).

greater control. By sourcing their dog food directly from farmers or abattoirs, my analysis suggests that participants were trying to remove the manufacturing step in the supply chain.

> Community is something that I really push for as well and you know, if I can get to the point where we're actually just straight up buying from our local farmer, then that's what I will push for and I will aim to do. (Isla, vegetarian, Australia)

> I do like going to the local butcher as well, because then you're supporting local and it is like a bit a proper kind of like local community one, which is nice. (Kay, vegan, UK)

Thus, in addition to the individual mechanisms of control around pet food manufacturing described in this section, such as sourcing fresh, human-grade ingredients, participants also valued advice from trustworthy suppliers and giving back to local communities and businesses. While I had expected that spaces of meat production and consumption might have produced value tensions for plant-based dog owners (see Cudworth, 2016), this suggests that establishing relationships and local food were also of importance (however, tensions associated with meat consumption will be addressed in Chapter 6).

5.3.4 Summary of section

This section has explored the theme of *uncertainty around pet food manufacturing*, which includes three mechanisms analysed in interviews with participants to navigate concerns around how pet food is manufactured. First, the sub-theme of *meat grades and regulation* outlined concerns around the quality of dog food, as well as perceptions of regulatory laxity in Australia, identifying that participants used heuristics of 'human-grade' and 'pet-grade' meat to help establish quality and safety. My analysis showed that while human-grade raw meat was perceived as the best quality for dogs, there was uncertainty around the constitution of pet-grade mixes. A second discursive mechanism of control was explored in the sub-theme of *freshness and processing*. By feeding raw, natural foods, there was a common understanding that harmful effects of pet food processing could be bypassed, thus idealising shorter and simpler supply chains. Finally, a relational mechanism of control was discussed in terms of seeking advice from trustworthy raw pet food suppliers in the sub-theme of *sourcing from people I trust*. The examples of specialist raw pet butchers show that raw feeding is connected to ideals around local food systems, in which participants established personal relationships with those they sourced food from. In comparison to the theme of *gatekeeping microorganisms* discussed in Section 5.2, where participants expressed a high degree of control over pet food consumption in the home, the analysis suggests they had less control over pet food manufacturing. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the stage of food production resulted in several concerns around toxicity and risk in the broader food system.

5.4 Food production is making us sick

> You go into a supermarket and all of those foods carry some health or toxicity side effect to the body. That's why we have a mass pandemic of a health crisis on. (Sara, vegan, UK)

The quote above exemplifies not just concerns around raw feeding, but connections drawn by participants between health, risk, and the broader food system – including both human food and dog food. The previous sections identified how dog owners managed potential microbial contamination from feeding raw meat to dogs and uncertainty around pet food manufacturing. The final section of this chapter investigates participants' concerns about the broader food system, with a focus on the links between food production and consumption. First, the sub-theme *toxicity feeding through the chain* details concerns around chemicals entering the food chain through agriculture; in particular, participants expressed difficulties in managing these concerns since they were largely deemed beyond the scope of their control. Despite this, participants envisaged *different ways of doing farming* in a second sub-theme, which includes discourses around organic and regenerative farming as a way of avoiding 'unnatural' contamination and restoring a sense of balance in nature. However, there was acknowledgement that purchasing organic products is expensive, which is relevant for discussions around access and exclusion in alternative food consumption (Guthman, 2003a; Slocum, 2007).

5.4.1 Toxicity feeding through the chain

In this sub-section, I explore participants' concerns around toxicity in the context of pet food production. In addition to the food additives and preservatives entering the pet food chain through food processing discussed in Section 5.3, feeding RMBDs was seen as a way of reducing pesticides from passing through to both humans and dogs through food. Kibble-fed dogs who are fed grains were seen as chemically compromised, with participants describing dogs and their excrement as 'full of chemicals' from 'toxic' or 'processed' pet food. Toxicity was understood in relational terms in the sense that toxic food results in a toxic dog, and therefore must be avoided. Despite this, participants were troubled by the ubiquity of chemicals in our food system, which make them almost impossible to avoid. I note here that the term 'pesticides' was the most specific language used, whereas most discussions referred to 'chemicals' more broadly.

Concerns around chemical toxicity largely stemmed from aspects of industrial crop production, involving pesticide use and in some cases genetic modification. For example, feeding dogs grains was constructed as unnatural for dogs, not just because of understandings of dogs' species-specific needs and physiology (as described in Chapter 4, Section 4.4) but also because chemicals in the food chain were seen as polluting

natural canine bodies. The entanglement of these two discourses can be seen in the excerpt below, which presents a holistic view of the interconnection between human, animal, and environmental health.

> Dogs and cats can survive on grain food diets for a certain amount of time, but they're not thriving by any means. And it's causing so many health problems for them, and for the soil and for the planet and for the humans. Because you know what, viruses are in the grains now, because there's so many pesticides used and then the crops themselves had the viruses on them and the pesticides, and they're genetically modified. (Sara, vegan, UK)

In the context of food manufacturing, processed pet food was portrayed as nutritionally insufficient, however in the context of food production, kibble was described as toxic, thus taking on a heightened sense of gravity. In particular, participants were concerned about the health risks posed by chemicals, such as cancer, as can be seen in the excerpts below. Interestingly, aside from Kay's statement below, there was very little focus on hormones and antibiotic usage in meat production in comparison to concerns around pesticides, which would potentially have been a greater risk for humans, especially those eating plant-based diets.

> But I really do feel that the modern dog is let down significantly now in that [...] they're over medicated, they're over vaccinated, over wormed, they're full of chemicals and dogs are getting granulomas and different other cancers at vaccination sites and different places, and that their immunity has got to be compromised. (Paula, vegetarian, UK)

> If that processed pet food goes in and 'cause they have to eat a lot, none of it really gets absorbed, so a lot comes out and it's sticky and smelly and toxic and full of chemicals and terrible for you, dangerous for you, dangerous for kids, dangerous for the environment. (Sara, vegan, UK)

> What does worry me in all of these things is I know that cows are just pumped with, like, antibiotics and hormones and then other animals have that so that I can't get away from it. (Kay, vegan, UK)

The notion of the toxic dog fed a conventional kibble diet is particularly interesting when compared to constructions of the robust dog in Section 5.2.2. While dogs were perceived as being evolutionarily equipped to deal with foodborne bacteria, they were constructed as vulnerable to the health side effects of chemicals. While not explicitly discussed in our interviews, I suspect this might be because of the construction of chemicals as 'unnatural'. Kibble and raw were often contrasted along the lines of toxicity and purity, with kibble producing the toxic dog and raw meat producing the natural dog. Raw feeding therefore became synonymous with a symbolic notion of purity, with one participant stating, 'it's not toxic when you're feeding a raw diet, so it's not toxic to the animal, to the human or to the plants, that is fantastic'

(Sara, vegan, UK). This binary framing conceptualises kibble-fed dogs as vectors of toxicity and a threat to public health and safety whereas raw-fed dogs are natural and safe. Other participants, however, saw both themselves and their dogs as embedded within the modern food system, in which chemical contamination was inevitable and inescapable.

5.4.2 Different ways of doing farming

In the analysis above, I showed how raw feeding was perceived as a way of reducing dogs' exposure to toxicity in the modern food system. For some participants, this extended to notions of alternative food production, such as organic and regenerative agriculture. Raw feeding alone was not always perceived as maintaining the purity of the natural dog, but rather *organic* raw feeding idealised greater control and transparency around how food was produced. I interpret this as a distinction between individual acts, such as choosing to feed raw, with demands for systemic food system change – there was a strong sense that the scale of change required for the latter was beyond the control of individuals in this study. One thought-provoking example was suggested by a participant who explained, 'no matter what you're doing or how you get there, there's no ethical consumption under capitalism' (Kay, vegan, UK).

Given the concerns around pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics described in Section 5.4.1, organic food production was presented as a way of avoiding chemicals entering the pet food chain. For example, organic meat avoided contamination from hormones and antibiotics, which 'pass through the food chain in some way or another' (Paula, vegetarian, UK). Participants also wanted greater transparency and control over where ingredients were sourced from, and organic food was seen as more aligned with these values. For example, Harvey (vegetarian, Australia) explained 'I have a lot of organic stuff nowadays and a lot of brands that produce organic food. They have QR codes and stuff on their packages that you can scan and see where their stuff is made, how it's produced and like the journey from being picked in a field to being sold in a packet at the store'. Given that transparency was something that he valued, Harvey expressed dissatisfaction with transparency around kibble diets, stating 'when it comes to kibble, I found that pretty much no brand is open about where they source their ingredients and exactly what they put in their food and how it's prepared'.

Organic agriculture was perceived as a more holistic approach to restore balance in the food system and several participants recognised the interconnectedness between human, animal, and soil health that echoes discourses around cleansing and restoring gut health in Section 5.2.3. There was a small group of UK-based dog owners who expressed that soil health and gut health were interconnected; therefore, restoring balance in the soil was seen as benefiting both canine and human health and wellbeing.

> If you think about it like you what your gut is like directly tied to the soil that you grow on like, because that's where everything comes from. And if there's like good, good things in the soil, then that is health going into the things that you're then eating or that the animals are then eating and you're then eating. So, there are like direct ties to that. And like people like there's some science that's kind of gut health is tied to kind of like mental health and other things as well. But it's a whole system and that yeah, we are, we're not just things walking on top of the plant. We are just all part of the one system. (Kay, vegan, UK)

Not only was soil and environmental health seen as benefiting canine and human health and wellbeing, but in turn, the language of regeneration envisioned 'natural' eating as part of restoring balance to nature. Thus, when entangled with organic food production, raw feeding was presented not just as a way of controlling toxicity, but also a way of fixing what was perceived to be a 'broken' food system. This was best exemplified by Sara (vegan, UK), whose understanding was couched in the language of spirituality: 'Every person who puts that kibble stuff in the bin and moves onto a raw diet I believe is putting the balance back into Mother Earth'.

Finally, while participants were supportive of organic food as a way of reducing toxicity to natural canine bodies from exposure to chemicals, hormones, and antibiotics as well as aligning with their own ethical values, many raised the issue of cost as a trade-off.

> The food that I used to feed, which I would love to be able to feed again is Honeys because it's all, all of it is, all is organically free-range meat. So, I feel happier about that, but it's really expensive at the moment, I can't afford to feed it. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> If I had more money for it, then yeah, I'd probably want to make sure that it was kind of like maybe from like an organic source and an ethical source. But I don't have the money to do that so I just go to LIDL, so basically where it's cheap and wait for like, at the big supermarkets, wait for when it goes on sale. (Kay, vegan, UK)

For several participants, organic raw meat was seen as too expensive, highlighting the importance of access in connection with safe and healthy pet feeding (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2.2 for further discussion).

5.4.3 Summary of section

This section explored the theme *food production is making us sick*, in which individual dog owners perceived themselves as having little control. This stands in contrast to how they saw risks around microbial contamination as containable in the context of the home, and to a lesser extent were able to remove the perceived negative effects of pet food processing by feeding fresh, raw foods. Toxicity from pesticides,

hormones, and antibiotics were perceived as a risk to human, animal, and planetary health, but above all there were concerns relating to the notion of the 'toxic dog'. Despite efforts to keep the 'natural dog' pure from chemical contaminants entering the food chain during food production, this was seen as difficult to control given the complexity of the modern food system and relative power of the individual consumer. Purchasing organic food was one mechanism to manage toxicity because it offered a way to reduce chemical substances, such as pesticides, and restore balance to a 'broken' food system. However, organic food consumption was limited by its high cost, which several participants stated they could not afford.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed plant-based dog owners' concerns around contamination and mechanisms of control discussed during research interviews in the UK and Australia. I argued that human-dog feeding was shaped by understandings of contamination and feeding dogs RMBDs was viewed as a way of controlling perceived dangers across the whole food chain, albeit to different degrees. Running through the chapter is the ideal of the 'natural dog' who needs to be protected from the toxicity in the commercial pet food system. The 'natural dog' can be interpreted as a symbolic critique of commercialisation and an attempt to gain control over the complexities of the modern food system. The spatial dynamics of control and natural food consumption were analysed across the food chain in relation to perceptions of control in the home, the manufacturing facility, and on the farm.

In animal science literature, there is a tendency to construct pet owners as unaware of the risks posed by RMBDs in the context of microbial contamination (Morgan et al., 2022; Viegas et al., 2020). The analysis in this chapter, however, shows that dog owners in this study were not only aware of risks but also took on the active role of 'microbial gatekeepers' through various mechanisms of control. One mechanism involved containing pathogenic microorganisms, such as Salmonella and E. coli, through hygiene and safety measures. The robust dog was perceived as physiologically equipped to deal with 'bad' bacteria without human intervention. This analysis stands in contrast to previous survey-based research, which suggests that responders indicated a higher perception of risk from foodborne illnesses for children and pets than for themselves (Bulochova & Evans, 2021a). It is interesting, however, that the notion of canine robustness was not emulated in discussions of concerns around intestinal parasites and broader gut health, whereby dogs were constructed as vulnerable rather than robust. In light of this, participants welcomed 'good' bacteria found in probiotic supplements and raw furry animal ears which were seen as a way to cleanse and restore canine gut health. Interestingly, the construction of dogs as robust and vulnerable in different contexts, even by the same participants, suggests that these characteristics can be mobilised to either accentuate or tone down concerns regarding the safety of the 'natural dog'. Despite this ambivalence, a key

takeaway is that dog owners took on a far more active role than previous research would suggest. Rather than microbial risk, this analysis points towards understandings of microbial diversity, where participants navigated which microorganisms were a cause for concern, for whom, and how they could be managed.

In addition to the complexities of gatekeeping microorganisms, participants' concerns extended beyond the boundaries of the domestic space. Due to uncertainties around how pet food is manufactured, they sought to establish control by feeding their dogs raw meat diets which were thought to undergo simpler and more 'natural' manufacturing processes. Similar to previous empirical research on raw feeding (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), there was a high degree of scepticism around the quality of ingredients that went into kibble or 'processed' pet foods. The desire for quality, not as a thing but as a process, can be interpreted as a desire for more control and transparency in systems of pet food production, which was evidenced through the examples of meat grading and establishing relationships with trusted suppliers. First, the contextual analysis provided in Section 5.3.1 shows that perceptions of regulatory laxity in Australian pet food production occurred alongside the use of quality-oriented heuristics, such as 'human-grade' and 'pet-grade' meat. These food labels carried understandings of how the animals that became pet food were processed and how these processes were regulated. Second, sourcing from trusted suppliers with whom participants had established personal relationships helped to alleviate some of their concerns around contamination, as evidenced by the example of indospicine contamination in the State of Victoria in Section 5.3.3. What both of these examples point towards is the ways in which dog owners attempted to control quality and avoid chemical contamination, thus preserving the purity of the 'natural dog'.

Finally, I outlined the sub-theme *food production is making us sick* which explores the idea of toxicity feeding through the food chain. Specific concerns included pesticides used in crop production as well as hormone and antibiotic usage in meat production, which can be interpreted as a threat to the ideal of the 'natural dog'. From a relational perspective, I showed how the idea of toxic food becomes a toxic dog. Similar to the construction of vulnerability to intestinal parasites, dogs were also constructed as vulnerable to chemicals, such as pesticides and hormones. One mechanism to alleviate these concerns was described as purchasing organic dog food, which was seen as offering a more holistic and 'natural' food production system to restore health and balance to an otherwise broken industrial food system.

These connections to the food system more broadly, and food production specifically, through the examples of organic food, clearly demonstrate the importance of contextual understandings of human-dog feeding. While animals consumed as food and planetary health were raised in the context of toxicity and protecting the 'natural dog', there were also hints towards broader priorities that decentre the natural dog and draw connections to more holistic notions of the interconnectedness of humans, non-human animals, and the environment. Therefore, I argue that mechanisms of control have proven to be a useful lens through which

to highlight how dog owners navigate the relational complexities of contamination through food consumption. However, in drawing attention to the potential dangers of modern food production, the focus remains largely on human-dog relations and ignores the non-human animals consumed as food and the environment in which food production takes place. It is to these issues I now turn to in the final empirical chapter, which explores food identities tied to animal welfare and environmental sustainability around raw meat consumption.

Chapter 6 – Navigating plant-based identities with feeding raw meat

6.1 Introduction: from dilemma to compromise

The previous two empirical chapters have presented in-depth analyses of plant-based dog owners' understandings of feeding RMBDs through the themes of care (Chapter 4) and control (Chapter 5). These chapters contribute to the thesis by expanding understandings of responsibilities around appropriate dog feeding and experiences of managing concerns of both microbial and chemical contamination across different stages of the pet food value chain. This third and final empirical chapter examines plant-based raw feeding through the lens of identity. While it has been suggested that identity may be a factor influencing the choice to feed a broad range of 'unconventional' diets (Michel, 2006), there is currently no literature that I am aware of that investigates food identities in relation to RMBDs for dogs.

The topic of identity has however been addressed in empirical research with vegetarian dog owners who feed conventional kibble diets and therefore forms a useful starting point for this analysis. As outlined in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.3.3), social psychological research on vegetarian attitudes to pet diets has highlighted what is called 'the vegetarian's dilemma' for pet owners (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014). This dilemma stems from conflicts between the desire to promote their pets' wellbeing with ethical concerns around animal welfare and the environment. Indeed, as a vegan myself, I expected that feeding meat to dogs would raise complex tensions. However, in the context of *raw* meat and RMBDs, the analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrated the prioritisation of canine wellbeing over dog owners' own dietary values, in which dogs' diets were aligned with the expectations around 'intensive pet care'. Moreover, in Chapter 5 I showed how plant-based dog owners are in fact driven by a broader range of concerns than animal welfare and the environment – these concerns also include quality, safety, purity, and naturalness. So far, the thesis has uncovered little evidence of 'the vegetarian's dilemma', but various tensions that are tied to how dog owners navigate their roles as 'good pet parents' seeking to do what they think is best for their dogs and protect them from perceived dangers in the modern industrial food system. Despite this, participants' values around animal welfare and the environment that one would expect to find tied to their own plant-based identities did not simply vanish. They resurfaced when exploring the ways in which food identities were navigated, which resulted in finding compromises between plant-based dietary values and canine wellbeing.

By exploring human-dog feeding through the lens of identity, this chapter interrogates the assumed contradictions between loving some animals and feeding animals as food put forward under the concept of 'the vegetarian's dilemma' (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014). To achieve this, I take a broader analytical approach

by interpreting how dog owners understand their complicity in animal agriculture and navigate complex value systems and compromises involved in living and eating alongside dogs. Rather than exacerbate value differences, the analysis shows that plant-based dog owners were able to alleviate tensions around animal welfare and environmental sustainability by feeding meat that was aligned with what I call 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses. These discourses distanced some raw feeding practices from industrial agriculture and instead foregrounded humane, free-range, high welfare, or sustainable alternatives. While often used as marketing terms, these concepts were understood by participants in complex and nuanced ways across British and Australian cultural contexts. This chapter provides empirical support for the relevance of identity in human-animal feeding (Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023; Michel, 2006) and develops academic discussions in social science disciplines around the rise of alternative pet food movements that so far have not addressed RMBDs (Baker, 2024; Nestle, 2008). It also analyses how dog owners understand sustainability with regard to RMBDs, which is of particular relevance given increasing concerns around the environmental paw print of pet food (Alexander et al., 2020; Martens et al., 2019; Okin, 2017).

The chapter is structured into two sections which explore how dog owners understand their complicity in animal agriculture and how they navigate compromise through 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses. As with the previous two analysis chapters, I draw on excerpts from interviews with participants and photo/video diaries in order to demonstrate key points, also highlighting cultural nuances between the UK and Australian contexts that are particularly relevant for this chapter. The first section shows that the tensions experienced are not just value-based but emerge through visceral and identity-based tensions around what it means to be vegan or vegetarian. In the second section, I analyse a set of 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses, showing how dog owners used these discourses to alleviate tensions around animal welfare and environmental sustainability. When faced with the irreconcilable belief that meat is best for their dogs' wellbeing (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4), plant-based dog owners in this study compromised, adapting their meat consumption and feeding practices in ways that to some extent aligned raw feeding with their own dietary values around animal welfare and the environment.

6.2 Feeling guilty or acknowledging complicity?

In order to understand connections to animal agriculture through feeding dogs RMBDs, this section draws on the concept of complicity, which assumes that everyone is implicated in some way in situations that we at least in theory have rejected (see Shotwell, 2016). As social and political theorist Alexis Shotwell (2016, p. 5) aptly argues, '(t)here is no food we can eat, clothing we can buy, or energy we can use without deepening our ties in complex webs of suffering. So what happens if we start from there?' The first part of this chapter explores how dog owners understand their complicity in animal agriculture, in order to provide

a broader understanding of the possible tensions plant-based dog owners might experience from feeding dogs RMBDs. Prior to conducting this project, I suspected that there might be discomfort around handling raw meat, especially if this meat resembled non-human animals, as is common for whole prey models of raw feeding. The analysis shows that the vegetarian's dilemma (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014) and indeed my own assumptions at the outset of this project, are too simplistic. Rather, participants experienced a variety of emotional, but also visceral and identity-based tensions in connection to animal agriculture. Expanding complicity beyond emotional reactions to also think about viscerality and identity is important if we are to better understand complexity in human-dog feeding.

The analysis is this section consists of two sub-themes. *Not a proper vegan* refers to the ways in which participants perceived conflicting identities around connections to animals consumed as food, resulting in some participants adopting negative intermediary identities of 'the vegan hypocrite' or 'the failed vegan'. *Getting my hands dirty* captures visceral and sensory experiences of handling raw meat and animal products that generated connections to animal agriculture. This shows that acknowledging complicity in animal agriculture is not necessarily accompanied by guilt as social psychological literature would suggest (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014) but rather tensions around visceral experiences of meat and dietary identities include but are broader than emotional dilemmas around raw meat consumption.

6.2.1 Not a proper vegan

The sub-theme *not a proper vegan* investigates participants' descriptions of identity conflicts resulting from personal and social expectations around food and animal-related identities. This largely stemmed from the difficulty of maintaining intersecting identities, such as vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian, animal lover, raw feeder, and dog owner. Struggling to hold all these identities simultaneously resulted in what can be interpreted as negative self-perceptions, such as 'the vegan hypocrite' and 'the failed vegan'. While both of these identities imply a kind of moral failure, interestingly, I show how reported feelings of guilt only emerged in 'the failed vegan' identity, which referred to human dietary relations. When explored across species, however, tensions that emerged between the 'animal lover' and 'raw feeder' produced an intermediate identity of 'the vegan hypocrite', in which participants did not always express guilt but still acknowledged tensions resulting from their complicity in animal agriculture.

6.2.2.1 The vegan hypocrite

As outlined above, the tension between loving animals and feeding dogs animals as food is said to result in feelings of guilt for vegetarian and vegan dog owners (Milburn, 2017; Rothgerber, 2013, 2014). In this analysis, there were indeed tensions that emerged between the vegan animal lover identity on the one hand and the raw feeder identity on the other. Many participants led discussions with their vegan identities,

describing themselves as animal lovers. Some even pre-empted my interest in tensions around vegans feeding their dogs raw meat, such as Kay who made this explicit in their food diary video with sub-titled text 'I'm vegan: what do I feed my dog?' (Fig. 8). Feeding dogs meat seemed to be perceived as a threat to individual 'animal lover' identities that motivated participants' plant-based diets. Several participants referred to themselves as 'hypocrites' or described their behaviour as 'hypocritical' because they were buying meat or contributing to animal death, which is suggestive of a failed animal lover identity.

> It's not ideal and you know, it's hypocritical in a way to have meat at all in the house. (Paula, vegetarian, UK).
>
> I don't like the fact that I am buying meat, but if I'm going to buy meat, I'd rather it come from like a free-range farm. I know that's quite hypocritical thing for me to say. (Ava, vegan, UK).
>
> I don't like to be a part of factory farming but I do rely on it to feed my dogs […] I don't feel super guilty about it because I think I am doing the best for my dogs while they are here. (Kris, vegan, Australia)

However, interestingly, rather than strictly having a guilty conscience, these excerpts express a sense of ambivalence – feeding meat was presented as non-ideal, underscoring participants' complicity in animal-based food systems.

Interestingly, these were not just internal or emotional tensions but were produced through social interactions and understandings of other people's perceptions of their dog feeding practices. One of the most striking examples was from Kay, who explained that someone had commented on a social media post where they had discussed their diets with the statement 'you're not a proper vegan'. While I did not interpret from our discussion that Kay perceived themselves as a hypocrite, this example shows that participants not only had to navigate their own personal identity constructs but also social expectations and possibly even exclusion for being a vegan, dog lover and raw feeder.

Figure 8: Still from video diary showing expression of vegan identities (shared by Kay, UK)

The excerpts above show that not being able to reconcile expectations around being an animal lover and raw feeder resulted in negative identity constructs of 'the vegan hypocrite'. The notion of the hypocrite is suggestive of identity conflicts, in which plant-based dog owners acknowledge that they are complicit in animal agriculture. However, rather than assuming guilt, this analysis also highlighted concerns around social judgement from others.

6.2.2.1 The failed vegan

As anticipated, some participants did report feelings of guilt in the context of meat consumption. Interestingly, however, this was largely not in relation to feeding their dogs RMBDs. Instead, some vegetarian and meat reducing participants referred to themselves as failed vegans. This tension emerged from the understanding that veganism was the goal, to which all should aspire. For instance, several non-vegan participants expressed that they aimed to become vegan with statements like 'my ultimate goal is to be vegan' (Marnie, vegetarian, Australia) and 'eventually the goal is to become full vegan' (Steph, meat-reducer, Australia). Despite these aims, non-vegan participants claimed they had struggled with making the transition to a vegan diet, such as Marnie who explained, 'I've tried so many times [...] but I always go back'. In addition, there was a sense that failed vegans were lazy, with Lisa (vegetarian, UK) stating 'it's just me being lazy' and James (meat-reducer, UK) saying 'the reasons I eat meat are probably mostly laziness'.

Participants who identified as vegetarian or flexitarian expressed guilt around contributing to animal agriculture and highlighted the entangled tensions around animal welfare and environmental impact of meat consumption.

> Like I said before, the guilt that another animal has suffered to give me that meal. Then there's a whole thing about the climate as well. Like, you know, we're like farming way too much and that's like a huge, that's having a huge impact on the climate. And yeah, so at every stage of the process, it's like I feel guilty, I feel guilty, I feel guilty. (James, flexitarian, UK)

When asked about his dog's diet, James appeared to acknowledge complicity in animal agriculture by stating, 'I'm already part of the problem' and somewhat jokingly declared the tensions around his identity, stating 'I call myself a failed vegan'. This was echoed by Steph who said, 'I know when I have some milk or I do have a piece of fish, I'm still aware that I'm participating in animal cruelty in some aspect' (Steph, flexitarian, Australia). While some participants had already acknowledged these tensions prior to taking part in this study, others developed more of an awareness during the interview discussions, which at times led to discomfort (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2 for ethical considerations around harm). For example, at the end of one interview, a participant shared, 'you just made me feel completely rubbish about the fact that I still eat some animal products ((laughs))' (Lisa, vegetarian, UK). These comments were interesting because discussions about feeding dogs meat also led to participants' reflections about their own diets, with some recognising their complicity in animal agriculture as vegetarians and flexitarians.

6.2.2 Getting my hands dirty

In addition to identity-based tensions, another major theme describes visceral and sensory experiences of handling raw meat, such as blood, bones, and other animal parts that reminded participants of animal death or the living animals consumed as food. While handling raw meat has been explored in the context of risk and contamination in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2), the theme *getting my hands dirty* outlines connections to animals through handling raw meat that resulted in both positive and negative perceptions of animal agriculture. The majority of participants reported that they struggled with handling raw animal parts because of this connection to animals, as indicated by the use of terms such as 'gross', 'squeamish', 'disgusting', and 'uncomfortable'. Interestingly, however, some participants found it largely unproblematic and were even curious about using new ingredients, demonstrating the different ways in which participants acknowledged their complicity in animal agriculture.

One set of narratives that particularly stood out were those around blood. Blood served as a visceral reminder that – compared to kibble biscuits – dog food is made up of animal bodies. For example, Isa (vegetarian, Australia) explained, 'with the kibble it was much easier because you don't see blood, you

didn't see anything, you know, any animal bodies or anything'. Handling blood was a new or infrequent experience for many plant-based owners who transitioned their dogs to raw meat diets, such as Sara (vegan, UK) who recounted feeding raw meat for the first time. She exclaiming quite emphatically: 'there was suddenly blood now!' Moreover, while DIY raw feeding was constructed as the epitome of intensive pet care (Chapter 4, Section 4.2), it was interesting that blood, as opposed to time, cost, or knowledge, was described as a major barrier to DIY raw feeding. Lisa (vegetarian, UK) referred to a raw feeding family member, saying 'I can't bring myself to do what they do, getting covered in blood and guts quite regularly'. I sensed here not a sense of guilt, but rather a sense of disappointment that they could not engage *more* with meat and animal parts for their dogs' diets.

While many participants described the blood in RMBDs as disgusting, I interpret this disgust as largely owing to connections drawn to imaginaries of living animals that had become dog food, described as 'flesh', 'animal parts', and 'animal bodies'. The discursive recognition of animal bodies is particularly interesting because it suggests an attempt to reconnect meat with the animal as a way of acknowledging complicity in animal consumption (see Bruckner, 2018).

> I've seen the horror videos of slaughterhouses and whatnot and the fact that it was once a living animal and now it's in my kitchen being chopped up for food, I think that's what makes me squeamish. (Ava, vegan, UK)

> With the like handling of animal parts and like where they're coming from and to think they hadn't actually thought about where they're coming from and like, what's the word, how like humane they've come from. (Freya, vegan, UK).

While acknowledging the animals that were made into dog food, some participants nevertheless expressed discomfort around the resemblance of raw meat to the animal it came from, which was particularly salient for certain treats, DIY, and whole prey. Some participants described meat as 'too real', suggesting there was a threshold of discomfort. For instance, James (flexitarian, UK) explained he would not be able to feed DIY chicken wings, heart, and throat, because it was 'too real [...] too much like body parts'. He described the discomfort of buying dried pig snout as a treat for his dog, stating 'the pig snout looks too much like a pig snout'. Moreover, for participants who fed whole prey, the resemblance of animal flesh was particularly confronting. Ava described feeding whole rabbit heads, adding 'which as a vegan is disgusting'. In particular, the idea of the whole animal was particularly uncomfortable, such as Evie who shared examples of people feeding 'whole chickens or whole mice', which she said was 'probably just a bit more confronting seeing eyeballs and things' (Evie, vegetarian, Australia). Having visited numerous pet shops and raw pet

butchers while recruiting for this study, I found the visceral observations of whole animals or animal parts similarly confronting.

Despite many participants expressing discomfort, I was most intrigued by an almost excited engagement with handling raw meat. The most prominent example was Lucy (vegetarian, Australia), who explained that she wanted to use the food diary to demonstrate how comfortable she was with handling raw meat. She shared what I personally found to be a confronting photo of raw chicken frames being chopped up on a wood block with an axe (Fig. 9). Lucy said, 'I wanted to put this (photo) in because I wanted to show that despite being vegetarian, I'm happy to get my hands dirty'. Lucy's description of the preparation process amplified the visceral aspects of handling meat, saying 'I'm up to my elbows in chicken juices [...] I'm happy to get my hands dirty if I have to feed my dogs, I'm in there, guts and all'. She explained that by using the word 'dirty' she did not mean unclean, but rather that she was 'not squeamish' about touching meat. Metaphorically, this excerpt is interesting because the idiom to 'dirty one's hands' has a dual meaning: to do hard physical work (which is consistent with 'intensive pet care' in Chapter 4) and to be complicit in something which is difficult, unpleasant or dishonest, which I suspect is what was intended here. My understanding was that Lucy was alluding to views that may consider vegetarianism and meat-feeding as inconsistent. At the same time, she explicitly acknowledged what I would call a form of 'visceral complicity' in meat consumption.

Figure 9: Food diary photo of raw meat preparation (shared by Lucy, Australia)

While Lucy's expression of complicity was more candid than most participants, there were a small number who seemed more ambivalent about handling raw meat. Although they conveyed how they were viscerally affected, they also used phrases such as 'not bothered' and 'not a big deal'. Affective states were articulated by Steph who said she 'didn't really have any issue' with raw feeding but added 'you know, some of the organs are a bit grosser than others' (Steph, flexitarian, Australia). Moreover, while I expected vegans to

find preparing whole prey particularly confronting, Ava stated ‘it really doesn’t bother me’ but reported that the smell of pre-prepared raw foods did affect her: ‘I find the premade mixes where it smells funny and you don’t know what it is worse’ (Ava, vegan, UK). This seemed to suggest that not knowing what the ingredients were heightened her visceral discomfort. Conversely, both Ava and Steph described getting to know novel meat ingredients with a sense of curiosity, particularly around organs, which they would not have eaten themselves.

> Yeah, I guess kind of in a way it was good to understand like the actual because, you know, I was buying some of them in quite large portions and well organs, I would never have eaten myself. But yeah, it was kind of interesting to, I don't know, an interesting experience handling hearts and, you know, brains. (Steph, flexitarian, Australia)

> But it really doesn’t bother me like I find like I don’t know, I find premade mixes where it smells funny and you don’t know what it is like worse. This doesn’t bother me at all. Like I’ve been sat there with like a knife, cutting up like balls, testicles and lambs’ brains and everything for her. So like, it really doesn’t bother me at all. (Ava, vegan, UK)

Steph and Ava appeared to convey a mixed sense of complicity, denying tensions in the abstract but illustrating some visceral difficulties as well as positive connections to meat ingredients.

6.2.3 Summary of section

Drawing on the concept of complicity (Shotwell, 2016), this section explored how plant-based dog owners understood their connections to animal agriculture through feeding dogs RMBDs and, in some cases, their own diets. It offered a nuanced understanding of the social and ethical complexities these dog owners face, suggesting that their struggles go beyond mere guilt (see Rothgerber, 2013, 2014). The analysis highlights not only emotional tensions but also damage to the authenticity of their plant-based identities, along with visceral discomfort, disgust, and even joy associated with handling raw animal products.

The theme *not a proper vegan* examined the conflicting identities that arose from avoiding animal products in their own diets while feeding animal-based food to their dogs. Many dog owners recognised their complicity in supporting animal agriculture, leading to negative self-perceptions as ‘hypocrite vegans’ or ‘failed vegans’ – terms that suggest a sense of moral failure. However, a closer look reveals that ‘hypocrite vegan’ was used in the context of human-dog dietary conflicts, whereas ‘failed vegan’ was applied by vegetarian and flexitarian participants aspiring to veganism as a moral ideal. While similar identity conflicts might be found among plant-based dog owners who feed kibble, the second sub-theme *getting my hands dirty* particularly emphasised the rawness of RMBDs. This theme focuses on the visceral and sensory

experiences of handling and preparing raw meat and animal products through which participants formed connections to the animals consumed as food – a concept I term 'visceral complicity' in animal agriculture. Some participants were confronted with the reality of animal death when handling blood or raw animal parts, while others approached the process with curiosity. Having explored the visceral and identity-based tensions around feeding RMBDs to dogs, the chapter will now turn to how plant-based dog owners navigated these challenges, finding compromise through 'ethical (raw) meat' consumption.

6.3 'Ethical (raw) meat' discourses as a means of compromise

While identifying and acknowledging complicity may indeed be a starting point for action (Shotwell, 2016), the second part of this chapter provides an applied empirical analysis of the ways in which plant-based raw feeders navigated the tensions discussed in the previous section. Below, I analyse a set of what I call 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses that participants drew on in order to alleviate tensions around animal suffering and environmental sustainability. First, the sub-theme *industrial animal agriculture is the problem* explores participants' critiques of what was seen to be the conventional mode of farming in both Australia and the UK. This included the use of terms such as 'mass production', 'factory farming', and 'intensive agriculture'. The main issue with these practices was that they were thought to be unnatural for farm animals and negatively impacting the environment. *Living a good life* examines understandings of farmed and wild animal welfare and wellbeing under alternative food production systems, often employing examples such as 'humane', 'free-range', and 'organic'. *Dying well* refers to perceptions of the ways in which animals used as food were killed as well as the ways in which animals were consumed as food. Finally, *doing my part* explores how participants framed meat consumption as distributable across dogs and humans who are seen as complicit in the same food system. This conveyed the idea that the impacts of animal agriculture could be balanced if humans adopted plant-based diets, using an offsetting logic. Together, these discourses reflect the broad range of ways participants navigated compromise around feeding their dogs RMBDs in a way that better aligns with their own values around animal welfare and the environment.

6.3.1 Industrial animal agriculture is the problem

During interview discussions about food production, many participants drew distinctions between industrial animal agriculture, which was described as the main cause of farm animal suffering and environmental degradation, and more 'ethical' systems of animal agriculture, such as high-welfare, free-range, and organic. The entanglement of animals, the environment, and health is emphasised in an excerpt from a participant, who stated, 'I think factory farming is, you know, a really bad environmental concern and it's also a big health concern and it reduces a lot of our empathy to these animals' (Kris, vegan, Australia). Framing industrial animal agriculture as the problem is also common in ethical meat discourses for human

consumption (Joy, 2012). In this study, I also interpret this as a necessary first step that involved identifying the problem in order to then carve out conceptual space for more 'ethical' forms of animal agriculture.

Negative perceptions of industrial animal agriculture were apparent through the way participants focused on the specific modes of meat production that were seen as cruel, often using terms such as 'factory farming', 'mass production', or 'intensive agriculture'. In general, the proliferation of industrial farming was perceived as the leading cause of suffering for farm animals. Participants also critiqued the treatment of animals as commodifiable resources in a system of mass production (see also Bruckner, 2018), which was underscored through a comparison with historical notions of farming.

> I mean the term factory farming is horrible, but it's what most farming is at the end of the day, isn't it […] the whole way that animals are treated now is just dire. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> When I was young, the population was less and there was no, there was no need for as much production that there is now. (Lynda, vegan, Australia)

> I think just thinking back like pre-industrial time like it was quite normal to have like a smallholding and you know you raise and kill your own and that was still I think it's the industrial aspect of it that's obviously damaging. (Freya, vegan, UK)

By evoking historical perspectives, these excerpts challenge the normalisation of industrial farming and foreground production with terms such as 'factory farming' and 'mass production'.

Discourses of naturalness that have been explored in Chapters 4 and 5 continued in discussions of animal-based agriculture, which was described as both cruel and unnatural. Several participants raised the concept of naturalness around farm animal feeding, which can also be seen as a critique of the commodification of farmed animals. For example, Drew (vegan, UK) explained that he transitioned to a vegan diet because 'the cruelty to animals is so extreme'. He perceived this cruelty to stem from 'factory farming and the process of pumping (farm animals) through all the chemicals so that they grow twice as quick as they would do normally'. Discourses around naturalness were echoed by Dana who said that ethically raising animals would involve 'not pumping them with hormones and things like that to make them grow faster and fed on like more natural diets' (Dana, flexitarian, Australia). Similarly, Romi transferred the concept of 'species-appropriate diets' to farmed animals: 'I guess the organic thing is important because that means that they're hopefully not getting fed, you know, lots of hormones or preservatives or a diet that's not appropriate for that animal' (Romi, flexitarian, Australia). This is interesting because, similar to the analysis around vegetarian diets being unnatural for dogs and therefore cruel (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1), unnatural feeding practices for farmed animals were also seen as cruel.

The concerns around unnatural diets for farmed animals were exemplified in specific examples of broiler chickens and cows. Lisa (vegetarian, UK) was concerned about the growth cycles of broiler chickens stating, 'I mean chickens live for forty-eight, forty-two days, isn't it? By the time they're killed that they can hardly stand up because they're so fat [...] it's just horrible'. Moreover, these 'unnatural' feeding processes were conceived as morally wrong. The excerpt below with Lynda stood out to me because it highlighted this moral concern around a broiler chickens' adapted growth cycle.

> **Lynda**: It's just wrong. My son's girlfriend's family have a chicken farm from egg, egg to the shelf, like the number 16 chicken. How long do you think it takes?
>
> **Interviewer**: I wanna say like it's something like 30 to 40 days
>
> **Lynda**: From a chicken to full size.
>
> **Interviewer**: 40 days.
>
> **Lynda**: It's about less than a month.
>
> **Interviewer**: Wow.
>
> **Lynda**: Yeah. And it was just such a shock that in in that so little, it hatches and it grows to this big.[15]

In addition to chickens, unnatural feeding practices in the reproduction of dairy cows were also described as unethical. Lisa (vegetarian, UK), explained:

> Ethically I should be vegan [...] because the life that dairy cows have, I am aware is not the best life. Particularly dairy cows, the babies are taken away when they're, when they're tiny, they're not even allowed to drink their own mother's milk, which is wrong. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK).

In these excerpts, issues with industrial animal agriculture largely stemmed from an understanding that animals were denied the ability to eat, grow, or nourish their young in 'natural' ways. In a system which views these animals as commodifiable resources, it is interesting that plant-based dog owners expressed critiques of industrial animal agriculture by drawing on the same discourses of species-appropriate care and natural feeding that were seen as important for dogs (Section 4.4). Although they continue to participate in animal agriculture through feeding RMBDs to their dogs, this analysis is important because it suggests that plant-based dog owners do not subscribe to a binary between animals as loved and animals as food as some

[15] While chickens can live for up 10 years, in Australia, broiler chickens (those farmed for meat) tend to live for about 37-45 days (RSPCA Australia, 2020) whereas in the EU the standard slaughter age is 42 days (Compassion in World Farming, 2019).

literature suggests (see Joy, 2010). Despite, or perhaps even because animals become food, they have expectations for their care and welfare.

In addition to critiques of industrial animal agriculture on the basis of 'natural' feeding, there were some, albeit fewer concerns around the environmental impacts of industrial animal agriculture. While the analysis in this section so far can be interpreted as a blurring of distinctions between dogs and farmed animals in the context of appropriate welfare, species distinctions were also reinforced in the context of environmental degradation. For example, specific animals were seen as enmeshed within industrial animal agriculture and presented as destroying the environment. Cows were viewed particularly negatively by some participants for 'destroying the climate' (Mona, vegan, Australia). Kay stated that 'cows and sheep can be the most ecologically damaging, and fish' (Kay, vegan, UK). The problem with these framings, however, is that the animals in industrial agricultural systems become scapegoats for environmental harm. In this way, one ethical (raw) meat discourse was based on the assertion that *industrial animal agriculture is the problem*, rather than animal agriculture in general. The following sub-themes explore the ideals of 'ethical (raw) meat, including the sub-themes *living a good life*, *dying well*, and *doing my part*.

6.3.2 Living a good life

As highlighted in the section above, many farmed animals in the industrial farming system were not perceived to be treated adequately but as this sub-theme will show, animals in alternative agricultural systems were perceived to be *living a good life*. This theme describes participants' desires for systems of meat production where animals are raised in more natural environments with a greater degree of freedom than in industrial agriculture. The analysis below demonstrates cultural differences between the UK and Australia; there was discussion of free range and organic production among UK participants whereas Australian participants often focused on the edibility of wild animals, such as kangaroos. While these options were described as more aligned with dog owners' values than perceptions of industrial animal agriculture, some participants remained critical of terms such as 'free range'.

6.3.2.1 Farmed animals

The edibility of farmed animals was constructed through descriptions of 'free-range' and 'organic' meat, particularly among participants in the UK. However, many also conveyed the high cost of these products, such that they sometimes remained an ideal rather than an everyday practice (see also Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2). For example, Freya (vegan, UK) reported feeding a mix of both organic and industrially raised animals to her dogs. Her descriptions of industrial agriculture, with images of poor conditions and overcrowding, stood in stark contrast to those of organic systems, which were seen as giving animals more freedom so that they are 'raised as best as can be'.

> I think it would probably be that (the animals are) farmed in your classic, not particularly nice conditions and they're kind of, I mean if I'm getting things like a bag of calves hooves or chicken feet, knowing that the calf who's probably gone on to be veal and they're kept in those tiny little stalls that they can't move in so I feel really bad. But, well yeah, the chicken feet they're probably in an overcrowded shed for their whole life. So especially with the price of them, they're definitely not going to be like the best organically raised freedom of everything kind of vibes. (Freya, vegan, UK).

While she claimed that imagining the living conditions for the animals made her feel guilty, feeding organic meat reduced her level of guilt as she explained 'if you could do it in the best possible way you can, I don't feel as bad' (Freya, vegan, UK).

Despite positive views of organic and free-range meat among some participants, others were more sceptical of the dissonance between the marketing of products and the material living conditions for farmed animals. For example, Drew (vegan, UK) explained 'I'm forever horrified that the RSPCA, our animal welfare companies' definition of free-range chicken is, you know, an A4 sheet of paper per chicken'. Similar to Freya (above), he contrasted these undesirable conditions with the 'little chicken farm' he stated he purchased his dog's food from, where the chickens spent most of their time outside. His expectations of a good life were couched in romanticised notions of farming, stating 'they would spend their life during the day clucking around a little field and then brought into the sheds at night time'. Therefore, while many participants saw free-range and organic meat as preferable to industrial farming, there remained a degree of scepticism around the extent of freedom and naturalness that free-range systems provided for farmed animals. While feeding free-range or organic meat to their dogs offered a compromise, this suggests that they were not able to fully reconcile their tensions regarding animal welfare. Moreover, it was difficult for many participants to disconnect the notion of the good life for animals from that of their deaths. While still supporting the notion of free-range farming, Drew (vegan, UK) acknowledged 'it's not a great life because (the animals) still die […] it's just trying to find the best of a bad world'. I will return to this later in Section 6.3.3.

6.3.2.2 Wild animals

In addition to understandings of the good life for farmed animals, some participants also fed their dogs 'wild' animals that were perceived as even further removed from industrial animal agriculture. Not only were wild animals seen as more species-appropriate for constructions of the 'wild' carnivorous dog (see Chapter 4), but they were also more ethically appropriate for plant-based dog owners seeking ways in which to find a compromise between what they believed their dogs needed and their own values around animal

welfare and the environment. This is best illustrated through the analysis of kangaroos in Australia below, which also demonstrates how cultural norms shape conceptions of ethical meat used as dog food.

In the pet food industry, wild animals such as kangaroo, rabbit, venison, crocodile, and ostrich are often described as 'novel proteins' or 'boutique meats' and form a growing segment of the premium pet food market (Shalamoff, 2020). This reductive and functional discourse, where animals become not just meat but protein, was emulated by the only UK participant who fed kangaroo which had been sourced from Australia, stating 'it was just another protein to add on the list to be honest' (Ava, vegan, UK). However, she also appeared to acknowledge a tension between animal welfare and environmental impact, by adding, 'it's quite responsibly sourced over there, but I'm sure I pay the price in emissions getting it over here'.

Unsurprisingly, the cultural constructions of kangaroos were far more nuanced in the Australian context where there is a rich cultural history with kangaroos. Kangaroos in Australia are not farmed but are part of an expanding kangaroo industry and are consumed as meat.[16] In this study, almost all Australian participants stated that they fed raw kangaroo to their dogs. In addition to factors such as cost, availability, and health, kangaroos were seen as more 'natural' and 'ethical' foods due to perceptions that (while alive) they were 'free', 'wild', and living outside the constraints of factory farming. Referring to the consumption of animals, Kris (vegan, Australia) stated, 'I don't agree with any of it but I would assume that the kangaroo is just living its life and it's not at the behest of any person and it's not stuck in a paddock just living there because it's going to end up on your plate later'. This quote highlights how kangaroos were constructed as ethical dog food in the Australian context due to an understanding that they live a good life – which can also be interpreted as a natural life. Naturalness was further underscored through notions of a good death, explored in the next sub-theme.

6.3.3 Dying well

The theme of *dying well* explores how participants navigated the killing of animals used as food, presenting some options as better than others. These included understandings of humane slaughter, ideas around dogs hunting 'natural' prey, and the desire that death is not wasteful. While the notion of dying well was raised in discussions with both UK and Australian participants, there are certain cultural nuances in terms of the entanglements between dogs and food animals, and the ways that they were constructed in different contexts.

[16] While not explicitly addressed in this thesis, there is a long history of hunting and eating kangaroos in Australia, dating back thousands of years where Aboriginal peoples have hunted kangaroos for their meat, skins, and symbolic value. Since the 1940s, however, the main use of kangaroo has been in pet food (see Wijnandts, 2022). Anecdotally, I have also observed that raw kangaroo is available in most Australian supermarkets in the fresh pet food section.

6.3.3.1 Killing humanely

As mentioned, one of the tensions that emerged for plant-based dog owners was how to navigate the death of animals used as dog food. In addition to imagining the conditions in which animals lived (see Section 6.3.2), they seemed to be more confronted by imagining the conditions and spaces in which animals were killed, such as abattoirs or what Lucy referred to as the 'kill floor'. Interestingly, for Lucy, who had presented the photo of chicken frames on a wood block in Section 6.2.2 and stated, 'I'm happy to get my hands dirty', imagining the moment of animal death was still confronting.

> Where I do have a problem and this is what I try not to think about too much is the kangaroo and their beef comes from a pet food abattoir that kills, you know, old and you know whatever animals are taken care of. I don't even really like to think about it. (Lucy, vegetarian, Australia)

Several participants used the term 'humane' to navigate tensions that arose from killing animals for raw dog food, often focusing on the animals' experience of death. For Lucy, humane meant to 'do it quickly and in a way that the animal feels no stress and very little pain'. Moreover, Dana justified the importance of humane slaughter by stating, 'watching other animals die and hearing them is very stressful for (farmed animals)' (Dana, flexitarian, Australia). One way in which participants saw that animals could be killed humanely was by shooting them because this was seen as an instant death.

Wild animals were therefore perceived as more ethical dog food not only because they were living a good life, but also because they died an instant death, which was perceived as relatively free from suffering. For example, Lisa (vegetarian, UK) contrasted the sustained 'abuse' that animals experienced in industrial animal agriculture with the short-lived death wild animals experienced. She gave the example of a wild rabbit, explaining:

> It's possibly slightly more ethical as long as they kill it with the first shot. It's free and it's more back to nature, isn't it? Picking off the ones that maybe aren't quite as quick, so that, I mean, I think I think humanity went wrong when we started to farm, actually. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK).

In this way, wild animals that had been shot quickly were considered a suitable compromise for many plant-based dog owners. Moreover, this analysis also suggests not just a broader distinction between industrial and alternative agriculture, but also a narrower distinction between wild and farmed meat. Despite a preference for humane meat, there was also scepticism around the use of the term, such as Freya who said 'I personally don't agree with the word humane when it comes to killing animals' (Freya, vegan, UK). For, Kay (vegan, UK) this tension was broader than humane meat, incorporating ethics in general: 'in some ways', they said, 'there is no ethical way to kill something'.

6.3.3.2 Hunting prey

While shooting animals was seen as a more 'humane' way for humans to kill animals to be consumed as dog food, discourses around hunting prey legitimised the edibility of certain animals by presenting dogs as natural predators. Despite dogs being domesticated, there were idealisations of dogs hunting for their own food. This is similar to understandings of species-appropriate carnivore diets explored in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4), but here I explore how certain animals were constructed as appropriate for dogs *and* ethical for humans because of their framing as 'prey'. The predator-prey dynamic was evidenced by Steph (flexitarian, Australia), who stated, 'it would be, I guess, a circle of life kind of deal where you know, it's hunt or be hunted. And yeah, you know, my dog would do that if he was in the wild'. While some views can be seen as romanticising an understanding of 'wild eating', others underscore the limits of 'wildness' in the context of canine domestication and socialisation.

To illustrate the idea of 'wild' dogs hunting natural prey, I explore the example of rabbits as dog food. Compared to the example of kangaroos in Section 6.3.2.2, who were deemed as appropriate and ethical dog food because they were constructed as wild and free, rabbits were wild, free, *and* prey.

> I'd love to just let Kane off the leash on the common where I live and let him go and hunt down rabbits every day and eat them himself. Because the rabbit would be a completely free-range rabbit until Kane caught it and he would be eating a diet that he caught for himself. But he can't, he can't catch anything. (Drew, vegan, UK)

The excerpt above envisions an undomesticated life, where Kane is self-sufficient and hunts for his own food. This was connected to Kane's specific life history since he was a rescue from Thailand where he had presumably been a 'street dog': 'the first three years of his life, he was a street dog, so feral, probably not quite as wild as a wild dog 'cause he would have seen people and been familiar with people'. Other participants expressed these views from the perspective of justice, such as Sara (vegan, UK) who explained:

> We've taken the role of hunting off our domesticated dogs, which is a massive psychological part of their, it's part of their sole purpose is to do some hunting and we've taken that off them by domesticating them, like the least we can do is give them the kill. (Sara, vegan, UK)

In my view, the distancing of raw-fed dogs and wild animals from the process of domestication, framing them instead as predator and prey, naturalises the process of killing animals for dog food and distances these practices from human involvement and responsibility. Hunting can be interpreted as an ideal that enabled plant-based dog owners to naturalise animal death and therefore navigate some of the tensions they experience around the killing of animals for dog food. Despite romanticised notions of the wild dog, we

cannot forget that dogs in the UK and Australia are owned, and therefore, largely control domesticated dogs and how they eat. For some participants, even owning dogs in the first place was perceived as problematic because feeding them meat conflicted with their own values.

> Well ethically, I shouldn't have dogs because ethically I don't think you cannot feed a dog meat. But I don't like the meat production process at all. It's horrible. So I mean, in some respects, I should let them off the lead and they could take down their own rabbit really and that would be nature, but I'm not gonna let that happen either. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

The notion of not having dogs being the ethical choice presents a consistent version of values. Lisa seemed to contrast her perception of an 'ethical' choice with a 'natural' choice in saying that letting her dog hunt their own food 'would be nature'. In my view, the idealisation of the wild dog and notions of natural prey shift the responsibility for animal death away from the owner towards the dog. However, social expectations around dog ownership, as suggested by the metaphor of the lead used by both Lisa and Drew (above), serve as a reminder that humans ultimately remain accountable for their dogs' actions.

6.3.3.3 Reducing waste

In addition to conceptions of humane slaughter and natural prey for dogs, participants also expressed concerns about death being wasteful, either symbolically or materially, which can be interpreted as a threat to understandings of environmental sustainability. In this section, I demonstrate how participants challenged this understanding by drawing on the concepts of using animals in the right way, using all parts of the animal, and using animals that would have died anyway, such as symbolic constructions of some animals as 'pests' in different cultural contexts.

There was a holistic understanding that animal death should be honoured, respected, and animals should not die 'in vain'. This was exemplified by Marnie (vegetarian, Australia) who said, 'I know that I'm feeding my dogs their treats along that ethical line and the animal is getting, you know, used in the right way. You know, it hasn't died in vain, I guess'. This sentiment was echoed by Ava (vegan, UK) who differentiated hunting for sport from hunting for food. Although she is vegan, she explained, 'I have no hesitation sending my partner out because if it gets something for Poppy to eat, I find that somewhat responsibly sourced because it's shot and killed purely for food, like there's gonna be no waste'. Therefore, this can be seen as legitimising killing animals for specific uses, for example, to be consumed as dog food. The idea that animals can be used in the 'right' way demarcates the killability of animals for some purposes over others.

Tied to the idea of respecting animal death, participants navigated compromise through an understanding that using all parts of an animal that had already been killed would reduce waste. For example, Isla (vegetarian, Australia) explained, 'that's something that we're more considerate about as well, the fact that,

you know, an animal has died for your meal. So you try and use as much of it as you can, and you know, you're honouring their death as part of that'. The concept of reducing waste was prevalent in discussions around 'by-products', 'leftovers', and 'off-cuts', which provided context as to which cuts of meat were deemed ethical dog food. These understandings are broadly aligned with Australian research which found that dog owners perceive feeding table scraps as sustainable (Thompson et al., 2015). The difference here is that these were not necessarily 'scraps' leftover from household meals that humans would eat, but rather off-cuts leftover from commercial butchers, or by-products left over from human food production. By-products were understood to be 'products of human consumption' (Evie, vegetarian, Australia) or 'leftover things that most people won't eat' (Steph, flexitarian, Australia). These included parts of animals like liver, kidneys, brains, testicles and feet. Moreover, in contrast to perceptions that 'human-grade' raw meat is pitting pet food in direct competition with the human food chain (Okin, 2017), very few participants fed cuts of meat that humans would eat, as stated by Isa (vegetarian, Australia): 'it's not like I'm gonna be giving (my dog) steak'.

There was also a view among dog owners that the meat industry is inherently wasteful and by feeding dogs RMBDs, they are in fact addressing this waste by feeding by-products and off-cuts. Lucy (vegetarian, Australia) explained, 'a great deal of (my dogs') food is by-products from the human food industry anyway [...] so a lot of it is the waste products from human food'. Evie (vegetarian, Australia) claimed 'if humans aren't eating it, it's just gonna get chucked away. So I might as well get it for my dogs'. Raw feeding was therefore constructed as a sustainable practice, by 'saving the product from being wasted'. For Isa (vegetarian, Australia), it was important to 'maximise what's in the butchers' as 'it's already there'. She explained that she made a conscious effort to buy cuts that people would not buy themselves to 'try to use up as much of what's already there and try not to be as wasteful'. Moreover, engaging with by-products in terms of sustainability helped participants to navigate some of the guilt they had been feeling around meat consumption. For instance, James explained that he gave his dog dried treats made up of by-products, explaining 'I absolutely give that to him kind of guilt free […] like what else is gonna happen to that stuff? It's just gonna get chucked away' (James, flexitarian, UK). This is interesting especially from vegan and vegetarian participants because they are actively engaging with spaces of meat consumption and perceive their dog feeding practices as intervening in what is otherwise seen as a wasteful meat industry.

In addition to perceptions that feeding dogs RMBDs made of by-products and off-cuts, some participants expressed choices to feed 'pest' animals because this was seen as a sustainable solution to dealing with 'waste'. This was most noticeable with descriptions of kangaroos in the Australian context, who were not only a more ethical source of dog food because of their wildness but were also entangled in cultural constructions as 'pests'. Several participants re-produced the disposability of kangaroos through language

such as ‘get rid’ and ‘cull’: ‘I mean, we’re gonna get rid of some of (the kangaroos) anyway. May as well feed them to the dogs’ (Tina, flexitarian, Australia). This was echoed by Steph (flexitarian, Australia) who disliked feeding her dog lamb but explained that kangaroos, camels, or wild boar would be more ethical, adding ‘animals that they say are invasive species and they need to cull them anyway, it’s like, well, why don’t you use those for the dog food?’ It is important to note here that in Australia, the term ‘invasive species’ is controversial and has colonial and nationalist undertones (Franklin, 2007).

As conscientious rejecters and reducers of meat consumption for humans, the feedability of kangaroos took on ethical and environmental dimensions in their construction as both ‘wild’ and ‘waste’. Wildness discourses partially alleviated dog owners’ ethical concerns around welfare issues associated with factory farming, whereas waste discourses partially alleviated sustainability concerns regarding the wastefulness of the meat industry and Australian ‘pest’ management practices. In this way, discourses of sustainability became a veil for the disposability of some animals as waste that could be legitimately consumed as dog food.

6.3.4 Doing my part

The final sub-theme in this section, *doing my part*, refers to understandings of distributed responsibility across human-dog diets on a household level, whereby dog owners perceived their own plant-based diets as offsetting their dog’s meat consumption. Isa (vegetarian, Australia) stated, ‘I’m doing my part [...] I don't eat animals. I try to keep my diet as plant-based as I can’. For Ava, this meant navigating environmental values and her dog’s health:

> I think I’d rather compromise slightly on the environment, knowing that in my diet I’m doing better for it to make sure that she’s got a good diet because I try myself to be really like environmentally clean [...] so if there is like a bit of a grey area in Poppy’s food, I try to make up for it. (Ava, vegan, UK)

In this way, Ava navigated a tension around the environmental impact of meat consumption by spreading the impact across both Poppy’s and her own diet. Some participants were even motivated to fully switch to plant-based diets because of their desire to feed raw meat to their dogs. For example, Romi and Jason, a couple from Australia explained that since both of their greyhounds and their young (human) daughter ate meat, they had become more concerned about their household impact, with Jason commenting ‘it’s like well we’ve had our run [...] so we’re off the ride, you know?’

In addition to distributed responsibility across individual households, the offsetting logic was also applied at the food system level, where there was a perception that humans are responsible for reducing the impact of meat to balance out the consumption of meat by dogs, which was often deemed as necessary.

> I would rather be allowed to feed my dogs meat, but everybody else stops eating meat because we don't need to eat meat, whereas they do need to eat meat. (Lisa, vegetarian, UK)

> I don't necessarily think that we're encouraging more, because at the end of the day, if us humans ate a little bit less, then there'd be more for dogs anyway. (Dana, flexitarian, Australia)

Aligned with the perception that dogs cannot make 'ethical' food choices (Chapter 4), dogs were not seen as responsible for reducing emissions from food production.

6.4 Conclusion

Examining the overarching theme of identity, this chapter has provided a deeper understanding of ethical complexity around human-dog feeding by focusing on how plant-based dog owners 1) understand their complicity in animal agriculture and 2) navigate compromises involved in living and eating alongside dogs who they feed RMBDs. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, feeding RMBDs is entangled with constructions of 'intensive pet care' and mechanisms of control to protect the 'natural dog'. This chapter has demonstrated that RMBDs are also entangled in perceptions of alternative food production and the consumption of 'ethical (raw) meat', bringing plant-based dietary identities back into focus and exploring how they are understood across human and dog diets. There are two key takeaways from the analysis that focus on complicity and compromise, respectively. First, plant-based dog owners acknowledged their complicity in animal agriculture, but this did not necessarily result in emotional feelings of guilt. My analysis shows how food identities and experiences of handling raw meat also resulted in tensions. Second, rather than exacerbate value differences, I explore how dog owners were able to alleviate possible tensions around animal welfare and environmental sustainability by drawing on various 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses.

The first section of analysis in this chapter (Section 6.2) explored plant-based dog owners' identity conflicts, often labelling their dog feeding practices as 'hypocritical' given that they avoid or reduce animal products in their own diets. In addition to time, cost, and convenience, which have been identified as drawbacks for feeding RMBDs in animal science research (Morelli et al., 2019; Empert-Gallegos et al., 2020), this suggests that identity is a relevant factor for understanding some of the difficulties around raw feeding. Moreover, while animal science research has explored the risks and dangers of handling raw meat products in terms of microbial contamination (see Section 2.2.1), to my knowledge, this is the first study that investigates dog owners' experiences of handling raw meat in connection with their concerns around the

welfare of the animals consumed as dog food. This showed symbolic connections between blood and animal death, which were discomforting for many dog owners in this study.

The second section (Section 6.3) explored how dog owners navigated tensions around raw feeding and their commitments to animal welfare and the environment through the notion of 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses. These included the sub-theme of *industrial animal agriculture is the problem*, which was predominantly perceived as at odds with ideals around animal welfare and the environment. In addition to perceptions of industrial animal agriculture, the was a common understanding that animals in alternative systems of food production, including wild animals, were able to live a good life and die well, which rendered them more 'ethical' choices for dog food than meat from industrial food systems. However, understandings of 'ethical (raw) meat' were dependent on contextual and cultural factors, with distinctions between the welfare of farmed and wild animals, and whether animal death was part of a system of 'humane' slaughter by humans or part of the 'natural' circle of life with constructions of dogs-as-predator and animals-as-prey. This analysis of human responsibilities to ensure a good death are in keeping with other research that suggests both UK and Australian consumers are concerned about animal welfare at slaughter (Buddle et al., 2023; Sinclair et al., 2023) (Roe & Greenhough, 2023). Finally, participants also constructed RMBDs as sustainable due to understandings of waste, consuming all parts of the animal and managing 'pest' species populations. Moreover, feeding RMBDs was not only seen as avoiding individual wasteful behaviours but as an active intervention in the otherwise wasteful practices in the meat industry. There was an additional understanding that sustainable behaviour should not just be measured on the individual level but distributed across the household. These views are important especially given that scientific research on animal nutrition has critiqued the sustainability of RMBDs, based on the rising demand for meat that is seen to compete with the human food system (Deng & Swanson, 2015).

While the above sub-themes are largely aligned with conceptual understandings of 'ethical meat' discourses for meat consumption by humans (Joy, 2010, 2012), 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses differ in that they present relational understandings of human-dog diets that legitimise the edibility of some animals as dog food over others in different contexts. The examples highlighted included 'wild', 'prey', and 'pest' animals, all serving to reinforce their edibility as ethical dog food. One of the most interesting cultural differences between UK and Australian dog owners' constructions of 'ethical (raw) meat' was in conceptual distinctions between what it meant for animals, who would be consumed as dog food, to live a good life. Here, it is worth noting that there are structural differences in terms of agricultural industries and geographies as well as different cultural and symbolic constructions of animals that come to be consumed as food, which may have shaped these understandings.

Chapter 7 – Discussion and implications

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 to6 in this thesis have investigated constructions of intensive pet care, mechanisms of control in food systems, and ethical values and identities connected to meat consumption among dog owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs. The analysis presented in the thesis provides novel insights on human-animal relations associated with dog feeding, which this chapter will now discuss in connection with broader literature and the wider implications of this research.

To recap, this study adopted a qualitative methodology to carry out photo/video elicitation interviews with dog owners in the UK and Australia. The interview data was then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify and develop key themes (Braun and Clark, 2019). The three overarching themes that are presented in the empirical chapters of this thesis are care, control, and identity. Each theme serves as a lens through which to examine human-dog feeding relations, offering new perspectives that have been largely overlooked in existing quantitative studies on pet feeding and RMBDs. It is important to note that while these themes are presented separately, their distinction is an analytical choice, and there is considerable overlap between them. Additionally, these lenses are partial and do not provide an exhaustive account of all social and ethical aspects of human-dog feeding relations. With this context in mind, I provide a brief summary of each analysis chapter below.

Chapter 4 examined dog owners' constructions of appropriate dog feeding through the novel lens of 'intensive pet care'. Moving away from narrow ideologies of nutritionism in animal science literature, it drew attention to human-dog relations and the social contexts in which feeding takes place. I argued that feeding RMBDs to dogs is an expression of 'intensive pet care', which describes understandings of 'good' pet parenting that require dog owners to invest large amounts of time, money, and knowledge into their consumption practices in order to nourish their dogs, respond to their preferences, and meet their needs. The analysis outlined three themes associated with 'intensive pet care', which rest on distinct but intersecting conceptions of human-dog relations. These were *nourishing care*, which refers to constructions of owners as providers and dogs as dependents, *individualising care*, which conceptualises owners as responders and dogs as agents, and finally, *species-appropriate care*, which emphasises distinctions between humans and dogs as different species. The importance of animality and species distinctions is particularly relevant upon a backdrop of sociological literature on human-animal relations, which will be further discussed in this chapter in section 7.2.1.

Chapter 5 explored dog owners' discursive 'mechanisms of control' around risk and contamination in human-dog feeding. Extending narrow conceptions of microbial risk in animal science research on RMBDs, it identified broader understandings of contamination across the whole food chain. I argued that while dog owners were aware of risks associated with feeding RMBDs, raw feeding can also be interpreted as means of controlling risks in the industrial food system. These mechanisms of control include the theme *gatekeeping microorganisms* in the home, which rested on demarcations of 'good' and 'bad' organisms which needed to be policed; *uncertainty around how pet food is made*, which highlights understandings of pet food manufacturing and processing; and *the modern food system is making us sick*, which draws connections to participants understandings of food production and how contaminants enter and travel up the food chain to their dogs as consumers. In addition to demonstrating how understandings of contamination extend beyond microbial contamination to chemical contamination at different stages of the food chain, the analysis showed that raw feeding is not just a species-appropriate diet entangled in understandings of dogs as 'natural' but also represents a desire for 'natural' and simplified systems of food manufacturing and production, which will be further explored in Section 7.2.2.

What Chapters 4 and 5 tell us so far is that plant-based dog owners are not just concerned about farmed animal welfare and sustainability but are also navigating caring responsibilities for their dogs as well as contamination and food safety. Yet, in Chapter 6, I brought the values associated with plant-based diets back into focus by investigating how participants understood their complicity in animal agriculture despite avoiding or reducing animal-based foods in their own diets and how they navigated tensions between animal welfare and environmental sustainability. I argued that, rather than exacerbating values differences or conflicts, as one might expect, feeding RMBDs enabled dog owners to alleviate tensions through their entanglement in what I call 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses. These discourses distanced RMBDs from industrial animal agriculture and embedded them in understandings of high-welfare and sustainable alternatives. Interestingly, the edibility of certain animals in the form of 'ethical (raw) meat' was conceptualised in different ways across British and Australian cultural contexts according to nuanced relations between humans, dogs, and animals consumed as food. My analysis complicates intellectual understandings of assumed contradictions between loving animals and feeding them to dogs (Rothgerber, 2013, 2014; Milburn, 2017) by focusing on first, how dog owners understand their complicity in animal agriculture and second, how they navigate compromises involved in living and eating alongside dogs.

The aim of this current chapter is to take a step back and weave together the different threads of analysis, connecting them to the broader implications of this research. First, it outlines conceptual implications for those interested in expanding understandings of social and ethical aspects of human-dog feeding. Second,

the chapter explores the methodological implications of this research, which is of interest to scholars using qualitative and talk-based and visual methods to explore feeding and human-animal relations.

7.2 Conceptually expanding research on human-dog feeding relations

As argued in the first chapter of this thesis and demonstrated in the literature review in Chapter 2, much food studies research has overlooked the role of animals-as-eaters, often conceptualising animals-as-eaten and humans-as-eaters. While human-animal studies scholars have shed light on the complex and diverse relations between humans and animals, highlighting the active role of animals in shaping social life, very little research has explored pet food or feeding (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3). Therefore, one of the aims of this thesis is to bridge the fields of food studies and human-animal studies in order to better understand human-animal relations in the context of dog feeding. Drawing on the analysis presented in Chapters 4 to 6, in this chapter I explore a series of tensions that characterise living and eating alongside dogs in order to conceptually expand research on human-dog feeding relations.

In Western cultural contexts such as the UK and Australia, I argue that the concepts of humanisation, industrialisation, and carnism constitute the predominant narratives around food and relations with pets in both the pet food industry and animal science research on canine nutrition. Based on this analysis of plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBDs, this thesis expands these prevailing categories by presenting alternative views of human-dog feeding relations. These new categories – animalisation, natural, and veganism – offer different ways of relating to both food and non-human animals. I note, however, that these perspectives are not in binary opposition to the dominant narratives identified, but rather dog owners find themselves navigating the complex terrain of being situated between humanisation and animalisation, industrial and natural, carnism and veganism.

The conceptual considerations developed in this thesis are significant for both animal scientists and social scientists studying human-dog feeding, as they challenge assumptions in previous research and offer new insights into the social and ethical dimensions of dog feeding practices. I acknowledge that these tensions are not static and may also shift in different cultural contexts, requiring new conceptualisations. Nonetheless, I hope that these reflections can serve as a valuable foundation for future research on human-dog feeding relations. The following subsections outline the scope of these tensions and critically discuss some of the limitations the alternative narratives developed in this thesis, in order to explore their potential to foster interdisciplinary dialogue on human-dog feeding relations.

7.2.1 Between humanisation and animalisation

As highlighted in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1) the 'humanisation of pet food' is one of the dominant narratives in interdisciplinary literature on pet feeding and within the pet food industry. This supposes that as pets are integrated into human families, trends in human nutrition spill over into their pets' diets (Schleicher et al., 2019). This view of integration in the context of pet feeding rests on the notion of similarity, that is, dogs are fed food that is more similar to human food, such as organic, premium and vegetarian diets (Dodd et al., 2019; Banton et al., 2021; Kumcu and Woolverton, 2015). Drawing on analysis from this thesis, I conceptually expand understandings of human-dog feeding by arguing that we are in witnessing the 'animalisation of pet food', which is described in detail below. Following a social constructionist approach, I emphasise here I do not see the notion of 'animality' as inherently connected to animal bodies, but rather as a discursive production of the human and the animal (Haraway, 2003). After outlining the concept of the 'animalisation of pet food' in the context of feeding, I subsequently discuss the relevance of this concept by connecting it to broader literature on the topic of human-animal relations. This focuses on how pet food animalisation and wild feeding can add nuance to theoretical understandings of 'animality' and difference in feminist and critical pet studies literature.

7.2.1.1 The 'animalisation of pet food'

This thesis challenges prevailing narratives of humanisation in pet food literature in two key ways. In this section, I critically examine the concept of 'spillovers', which suggest that trends in human nutrition influence pet nutrition (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1). The analysis in this study suggests that human-dog food choices are far more complex and context-dependent than previously assumed. Second, the discourses of animalisation explored in this study challenge the notion of humanisation by emphasising the differences, not similarities, between humans and dogs. However, these discourses must be understood within the context of a premium pet food market that commodifies the idea of the 'wild dog' (Baker, 2024; Wrye, 2015).

In order to address the complexity of spillovers between human and dog diets in this study, I shall examine instances of shared values across human and dog diets that can be interpreted as similar models or ways of eating but not necessarily similar diets, as has been suggested in much pet feeding research. The interpretation of shared values is particularly interesting since, when explored individually, plant-based diets and RMBDs are thought to be built on very different value systems that may conflict in terms of animal welfare and the environment (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). One shared value was variety, which was demonstrated through discussions around the provision of varied ingredients, foods, tastes, and textures (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1). Feeding varied ingredients each day is a marked departure from feeding dogs

nutritionally-complete kibble that has been deemed a unique pattern of feeding for animals (Wyre, 2012). In keeping with empirical research which has drawn connections between humanisation and benefits to pet health (Schleicher et al., 2019), varied ingredients were valued by dog owners in this study both as a way of providing balanced nutrition as well as improving their dogs' behavioural wellbeing. Indeed, notions of providing the 'best' possible diet were often based on anthropomorphised constructions of dogs as child substitutes or dependents, as described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.1), which echoes previous research on consumption as a means for constructing pets as family members (Greenebaum, 2004).

Moreover, Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.2) demonstrated how the value of 'natural', fresh food was shared across human and dog diets. Despite this, dog owners were stricter about their dogs eating 'natural' food than they were for themselves, with many claiming that they consumed processed plant-based foods, such as mock meats. This suggests that, in the context of feeding, they were stricter about their dogs' health than their own (see Schleicher, 2019). What these two examples show, however, is that shared values, such as variety and naturalness, may draw human and canine models of eating together, but this does not mean what constitutes food is the same. Rather, there are some values, such as variety and naturalness, which shape both human and canine food choices, but can still result in very different diets in practice. Therefore, I remain critical of pet food industry discourse that simplifies complex feeding practices into claims like 'feeding pets like people' (Wall, 2021). Pet food scholars need to be mindful of what specifically is being shared or transferred, be it practices or values, models of eating or foods, and also distinguish between the processes of humanisation – the integration of pets into human families – or anthropomorphisation – the ascription of human-like characteristics to non-human animals.

Despite the above interpretation that shared values, such as variety and naturalness, could suggest increasingly similar models of eating between humans and dogs, I do not believe that this supports the humanisation of pet food narrative. Instead, I argue that these values are aligned with what I call the 'animalisation of pet food', which distinguishes dog diets and ways of eating from human diets. The animalisation of pet food can be characterised as a form of species-appropriate feeding which draws on descriptions of food chain taxonomies (e.g. carnivore, omnivore) and biological attributes, which result in the idea that dogs are evolutionarily 'designed' to eat raw meat. Moreover, descriptions of physiological and behavioural distinctions between dogs and humans served to legitimise raw feeding in biological terms. Both variety and naturalness, rather than attributes of human foods or ways of eating that are transferred to dogs, can be viewed as a closer interpretation of how dogs would have eaten in 'the wild' or at some historically distant point in their process of domestication. In this way, the idea that values are transferred from human diets to dog diets overlooks the ways in which dog diets are understood on their own terms.

By foregrounding dogs-as-eaters, my analysis also showed how understandings of canine wellbeing were situated in constructions of the wild. The examples of enrichment feeding that sought to mimic foraging and hunting behaviour necessitate a distinction between *RMBDs* as a source of food and *raw eating* as an experience. One reading of *raw* in RMBDs is that it represents what I call 'wild eating'. Anthropologist Molly Mullin (2007) uses the terms 'wild feeders' and 'wild feeding' to describe feeding based on the eating habits of wild or feral animals, which I believe more accurately captures the symbolic attractiveness of RMBDs for some dog owners. To put wild eating into context, we have come a long way from what sociologist Jennifer Wrye calls the 'nutritionally-complete food commodities' that are kibble diets. For pet owners, she argues, commercial pet foods marked a departure in the history of animal feeding since they provided a single food source designed to meet pets' dietary needs which, in turn, meant that owners did not have to take responsibility for pet health themselves (Wrye, 2012, p. 4). Commercial pet food corporations maintain this dominant model of pet feeding by emphasising their expertise through science-based nutritional discourses that are grounded in research. However, I would argue that the participants in this study have taken up concern for their dogs' health, nutrition *and* wellbeing in ways that recognise their distinctness from humans, or their dog-ness if you like. Therefore, the focus on dietary trends in much pet feeding research ignores the contexts in which eating takes place and the ways in which eaters are constructed.

In sum, I argue that we are witnessing what I call the 'animalisation of pet food'. This can be characterised as feeding that is seen as biologically appropriate, drawing on understandings of animal physiology and 'natural' eating behaviours that mimic notions of what domesticated animals might have consumed in the wild. The animalisation of pet food encompasses both nutritional and behavioural wellbeing for dogs in this study, and challenges humanisation of pet food narratives by emphasising distinctions between the 'animal' and the 'human'. In terms of diets, what is seen as appropriate for humans is not necessarily appropriate for dogs since they are seen as having species-specific needs. While conceptualised in the context of human-dog feeding, the animalisation of pet food, is also highly relevant for understanding broader scholarship on human-animal relations in contemporary pet keeping, which I now turn to.

7.2.1.2 Power, agency, and difference in human-animal relations

As shown in the previous section, the empirical analysis in this thesis contributes to literature on human-dog feeding by introducing the idea of the 'animalisation of pet food'. This is not only important for understanding the ways in which distinctions between humans and dog come to shape notions of species-appropriate care (see Section 4.4) but also complicates the connection between humanisation and anthropomorphisation in sociological literature on human-animal relations. It is thought that as pets are integrated into human families, pet owners ascribe human-like characteristics to pets, such that they are

regarded as family members, children, and child substitutes (Hirschman, 1994; Sanders, 1993; Arluke and Sanders, 1996). However, my analysis suggests that dogs in this study were very much integrated into human families, but this did not necessarily result in them being regarded as children or family members. For instance, dogs were referred to in various different ways, ranging from 'fur babies', which could be characterised as anthropomorphising, to 'my little wolves' and 'carnivores', which rest on discourses of animality. This variation exemplifies what critical pet studies scholar Rebekah Fox (2006, p. 526) calls the 'liminal position' that pets occupy 'on the boundaries between 'human' and 'animal''. As boundary beings, they are simultaneously characterised as children, family members, friends, animals, and objects. According to critical pet scholar Heidi Nast (2006b, p. 302), the 'anthropomorphic malleability' of pets means that they can to some extent be 'shaped into whatever you want them to be'. Indeed, the analysis in this thesis echoes empirical research, which has found that dog owners tend to employ both anthropomorphic understandings of pets with reductive notions of instinctual behaviour (Fox, 2006). I have demonstrated how these identities are also mobilised to support food choices that are seen as paths to appropriate care (see Chapter 4).

One of the benefits of a relational analytical lens is that exploring constructions of canine identities also casts a reflective light on those of the humans who feed them. As discussed in Chapter 2, intensive and natural parenting are highly gendered cultural ideologies, responsibilising mothers to engaging in highly demanding care for human children. Using this lens, my analysis has shown that many of the dog owners in this study are also engaged in intensive pet parenting practices that involve researching, shopping, preparing, and feeding high-quality, fresh, safe, and varied diets tailored to their dog's individual preferences and tastes. However, while feminist scholars have critiqued intensive mothering practices for disproportionately placing the burden of care on women (Fisher et al., 1990; Tronto, 2015), interestingly, in the case of raw feeding, intensive pet parenting was taken up by both female *and* male participants. While this might challenge gendered assumptions about who is responsible for caregiving, discursive constructions of gender were still at play, such as masculine narratives of carnivory and the use of technical or scientific language (such as macronutrient ratios), which rationalise meat feeding. Moreover, notions of 'good' pet parenting remain an individualised expectation (even for men) that still uphold neoliberal ideals of self-sacrificing caregiving rather than redistributing care work more equitable across society and institutions.

What this study has also shed light on is that dog owners do not hold strict subjectivity in the making of food choices, thus drawing attention to the importance of non-human animal subjectivity or human-dog intersubjectivity which is often discussed in posthumanist approaches to co-constituted human-animal relations (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.2). The theme of individualising care identified constructions of

dogs-as-agents and owners-as-responders, whereby dog owners were attentive to canine performances of preference for certain foods (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). RMBDs were very much constructed as 'the dog's choice', as evidenced through the numerous examples of dogs' favourite foods and their perceived excitement around mealtimes. This echoes research on more-than-human families which highlights the incorporations of dogs' perceived preferences into the routines of family life (Power, 2008). However, while dogs were seen as being able to express desires and food preferences (see also Charles, 2016), there was a human/animal boundary in the context of making ethical food choices. For instance, feeding dogs vegan or vegetarian diets was seen as an imposition of ethical values (and implicitly human values) onto dogs, which participants communicated was unfair and in-appropriate. This has implications for human-animal relations literature that explores understandings of canine subjectivity, often outlining the ways in which intersubjectivity is negotiated but with less focus on what kind of choices are included or excluded (Blouin, 2013; Cudworth, 2019; Fox, 2006; Charles, 2014, 2016). While sociologist David Blouin (2013) suggests that people with a 'protectionistic orientation' towards dogs construct them as 'subjects, but not as people' (Blouin, 2013: 298), my analysis complicates this understanding since the construction of dogs 'not as people' can also deny their recognition as *ethical* subjects. Canine subjectivity extended as far as food preferences, but ethical food choices were understood to be a distinctly human ability, which overlooks broader understandings of animals' moral behaviours and re-inscribes the human-animal binary (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009). Therefore, my analysis has highlighted the potential for and limitations of canine subjectivity around food choice and it furthers our understanding of how relational dynamics of power can be obscured through narratives of choice.

To come to the second discussion point regarding canine subjectivity, while narratives of choice established important, albeit limited, understandings of canine subjectivity, participants' presentation of RMBDs as 'the dog's choice' risks obscuring the structures of ownership and domestication which shape feeding relations. These structures form what sociologist Erika Cudworth calls the 'anthroparchy' – 'a system of social relations through which domesticated non-human animals are dominated through forms of social organization which privilege the human' (Cudworth, 2011, p. 141). While some participants acknowledged the dependency of dogs on their owners for food (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2), more often than not, power relations were only visible in the food diary photos and videos, which depicted dogs waiting for food (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2). Thus, the liminality of canine identities became apparent in how dependency and agency were mobilised by participants at different junctures to justify their choices to feed RMBDs. This is not to say that their dogs did not *also* enjoy their food and dog owners did not *also* attempt to accommodate their dogs' preferences, but oftentimes relational dynamics of power in which humans were responsible for feeding were obscured through narratives of choice.

Despite the veiling of power dynamics in discussions around canine choices, narratives of difference can be interpreted as indirectly drawing attention to power relations by seeking to acknowledge dogs as part of 'nature' and therefore to some extent outside of human control. This analysis is important for critical scholars drawing on feminist approaches to human-animal studies, who have argued that the recognition of difference is crucial for developing respect for the non-human world (Donovan, 2006; Fox, 2006; Plumwood, 1993). While notions of difference and naturalness expand and broaden current understandings of pet care and wellbeing, which I argue should be taken seriously, I also caution the notion of 'species-appropriate care' on the grounds of biological essentialism which gives little weight to social or cultural explanations of difference (Peggs, 2012). As aptly argued by Motamedi-Fraser (2024, p. 236), '(h)umans create dependencies in dogs, and then use dogs' species story to claim those dependencies as an intrinsic, evolutionary characteristic of dogs'. Indeed, there was little critical reflection among participants about how dog feeding reproduces this dependency by assuming that dogs are supposed to be fed rather than seeking their own food (Wrye, 2012). In this way, prevalent narratives around dogs as carnivorous, wild, or even wolves in this study – like narratives of choice – can obscure social relations of power and domestication.

Taking forward this notion of difference, one appeal of rawness for those who feed raw meat, I argue, is its symbolic appeal to the wild while doing little to fundamentally transform the structures of domestication. Take enrichment feeding, for example, which was portrayed by participants as an expression of species-appropriate care to enhance canine wellbeing based on 'natural' behaviours (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2). The feeding diaries captured several examples of slow feeders that represented 'natural' environments and canine behaviours, such as foraging, that were discussed with participants. While this supports research which suggests that enrichment feeding is thought to have positive welfare outcomes (Heys et al., 2024), there has been little critical scholarly reflection on enrichment feeding in the context of power relations. What was less explicit in discussions with participants is that slow feeders simultaneously provide another avenue of consumption to further integrate dogs into commercialised dog feeding. Moreover, while blurring the domesticated/wild boundary, their artificiality symbolically appeals to the wild while reinforcing companion animal domestication. Dogs in this study were not eating in the wild, but in domestic spaces. Another example is romanticised notions of dogs hunting for their own food as a way of expressing 'natural' behaviours. Again, the limits of species-appropriate care became apparent through subtle reminders of the social expectations of pet ownership, such as discipline and control (Power, 2012; Redmalm, 2020). This suggests there is a tension between wild eating, which was seen as an important aspect of appropriate care in this study, and wild behaviour, which is increasingly being curtailed in public spaces as responsible pet owners are expected to always be in control of their dogs (Fox and Gee, 2019). Therefore, while the recognition of difference is indeed crucial for developing respect for non-human animals, it is important to remember that narratives of difference in what Motamedi-Fraser (2024, p. 231) calls 'species stories' are

not purely conceptual but 'materially shape the lives of individual animals'. I now turn to the section tension: between industrial and natural.

7.2.2 Between industrial and natural

In recent years, the humanisation of pets has fuelled the increasing commercialisation of the companion animal industry (Fox and Gee, 2016; Kumcu and Wolverton, 2015; Boya et al., 2012, 2015). Pet food is intricately intertwined in human food production systems as many kibble pet foods are made up of by-products from human food production meaning they are integral to the human food chain. Moreover, many pet food brands are owned by the world largest food corporations, such as Mars (Pedigree, Royal Canin), Nestle (Purina), and Colgate Palmolive (Hill's Pet Nutrition). Therefore, understanding how dog owners engage with the pet food industry is also of relevance for understanding broader food system dynamics. Indeed, many studies in animal science have compared owner perspectives between kibble diets and RMBDs (Empert-Gallegos, 2020). However, I argue that comparisons between kibble and RMBDs, which focus on foods, oversimplify the tension at hand. Instead, I argue that we are witnessing a broader tension between conceptions of industrial and natural food systems. Raw feeding has emerged as an alternative narrative from within the industrial food system which is presented as a 'natural' and 'premium' alternative to conventional meat-based kibble diets. I argue that by feeding 'natural', unprocessed raw foods, participants sought to protect their dogs from the perceived dangers of the commercial pet food industry. The idealisation of the 'natural dog' presents a critique of commercialisation and constitutes an attempt to re-establish control over food in the industrial food system while simultaneously re-inscribing the structures of commercialisation that are under critique. This section first outlines how the notion of feeding the 'natural dog' can expand current understandings of human-dog feeding and then discusses these in the context of broader literature on alternative food consumption and the sociology of food that reflect on aspects of alterity and access.

7.2.2.1 Feeding the 'natural dog'

The tension between industrial and natural pet food systems was recognised over a decade and a half ago by anthropologist Molly Mullin (2007), who offered the following observation about the raw feeding movement: 'despite their diversity, the wild feeders tend to share a sense that their feeding choices are made in opposition to the power wielded by corporations' (Mullin, 2007, p. 293). This sentiment remained relevant among the participants interviewed in this research in that kibble could similarly be interpreted as a representation of 'corporate manipulation' (Ibid.). For example, the analysis of mechanisms of control in Chapter 5 supports previous quantitative research which has indicated that raw feeders do not trust the conventional pet food industry and RMBDs afford owners greater control over ingredients (Morelli et al.,

2019; Morgan et al., 2017). However, by foregrounding dogs-as-eaters, the relational analysis in this study provides more nuance, in that participants were not just ideologically opposed to corporate power, but the power wielded by the industrial pet food system was perceived as harmful to their dogs' health and wellbeing. Therefore, participants sought to protect their dogs from the perceived dangers of the commercial pet food system by feeding 'natural', unprocessed raw foods.

While participants were critical of the commercialisation of pet food, it is hard to dispute that RMBDs have become increasingly commercialised in recent years, which adds further complexity to the tension between industrial and natural dog food. The sheer number of specialist raw pet food brands and pet butchers which have opened in both the UK and Australia (many of which I visited as part of this research) is testament to this. Moreover, practices of raw feeding described in this study did not demonstrate a strict anti-commercial stance; there was a diverse spectrum of feeding arrangements with varying degrees of commercial integration, ranging from mixed kibble-raw feeding, pre-prepared commercial raw foods, DIY diets sourced from supermarkets or local (pet) butchers, whole prey from wholesalers and abattoirs, and one participant even reported that their family sourced their dog's food through hunting. While I was initially interested in the extent to which raw feeding was conceived as reflecting a commitment to alternative food networks, what became more apparent throughout this project is the commercialised side of raw feeding and perceived lack of control over feeding that ensued. Similarities can be drawn to other alternative food movements, such as organic and local food, many of which aimed to de-commodify the food system but have since become increasingly commodified (Guthman, 1998, 2002, 2003a; Johnston et al., 2009).

Despite the increasing commercialisation of RMBDs, it is interesting that participants were still highly critical of commercial pet food. In Chapter 5, I argued that these perceptions were entangled in the notion of the 'natural dog' which represents a challenge to the perceived dangers of the industrial food system in which RMBDs are also embedded. Similar to relations of dependence that have been discussed in Cairns et al.'s study on mother-child feeding (2013, p. 98), feeding the 'natural' dog became an attempt to manage dogs' exposure to contamination through consumption practices. Rather than an end in itself or binary opposition to industrial food, the concept of 'naturalness' was entangled in discursive mechanisms of control through which participants sought to distance themselves from the industrial food system. Therefore, rather than categorising the ways in which RMBDs were seen as natural in opposition to industrial food, the analysis in Chapter 5 focused instead on the theme of control in order to foreground relational dynamics between dog owners, dogs, and their food in the modern food system.

The analysis in Chapter 5 adds nuance to animal science research on the safety of raw feeding, which suggests that pet owners ignore or are unaware of the risks of microbial contamination (Viegas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022). Rather, dog owners in this study were *aware* of contamination, but their perceptions

were shaped by the extent to which they believed that these risks could be *controlled*. This is reflective of broader sociological research on human-microbial relations which foregrounds the intersection between social and microbial worlds (Greenhough et al., 2020). Moreover, the notion that RMBDs could cleanse and restore gut health echoes what Whittaker and Do describe as an 'emerging *probiotic* worldview in Western society, which considers disease as the outcome of microbial imbalance or dysbiosis when there are excessive or absent microbes' (Greenhough et al., 2020; Whittaker & Do, 2023, p. 1179 - original emphasis). Therefore, my analysis broadens narrow conceptions of microbial risk in animal science research on RMBDs and highlights the interconnection between control and dog owners' perceptions of risk.

Situating raw feeding and scientific concerns around microbial contamination within the broader food system reveals that the 'moral panic' around microbial risk is quite literally not hitting home. In Chapter 5, I argued that dog owners in this study felt like they could control and contain these risks in the context of their homes. What they seemed less able to control was contamination entering dog food outside of the domestic space, in other words, in the factory or on the farm. These narratives are in line with MacKendrick and Stevens' (2016, p. 326) notion of the 'contingent boundary of bodily protection' which describes the contradictory ways that individuals describe their ability to protect themselves against exposure to chemicals in the food system depending on context. They argue that 'nontoxic shopping provides a contingent boundary – sometimes it is robust and sometimes it is porous and ineffective' (MacKendrick & Stevens, 2016, p. 324). Canine bodies were constructed as robust in certain contexts, such as microbial contamination in the home, and polluted in others where the boundary had dissolved, such as in discussions around hormones, pesticides, additives, and preservatives. The naturalness of the 'natural dog' rests on discourses of robustness and vulnerability that were mobilised at different junctures.

7.2.2.2 Access to high-quality and safe food

As outlined above, the notion of the 'natural dog' presents a critique of the conventional pet food industry by highlighting the need to protect dogs from the perceived dangers of contamination in the industrial food system. While I argued that RMBDs are becoming increasingly commodified, there remains the question of whether they, like pets themselves, are yet another site of 'intensely commodified investment tied to global inequalities' (Nast, 2006a, p. 897). Put simply, not everyone can afford high-quality and safe pet food.

In this study, the food labelling heuristics of human-grade and pet-grade meat among Australian participants and organic raw meat among predominantly UK participants, helped to establish a sense of control in what were perceived under-regulated or toxic pet food systems respectively. While aspects of my analysis pointed towards questions of access, cost, and inequality, this research is methodologically limited in that

it did not explore other dog diets or those who no longer feed RMBDs in order to better understand the premiumisation of dog diets. While several participants did raise issues around the cost and time required to feed RMBDs, access to specialist pet butchers and farmers markets, to provide some examples from this study, are a far cry from the realities of those facing pet food insecurity in low-income communities (Arluke, 2021; Irvine et al., 2012; Scanlon et al., 2021). In both the UK and Australia, there have been recent concerns over the affordability of pet food in the context of the 'cost of living crisis', with a number of media outlets commenting on the increasing use of pet food banks (Fiore, 2024; Murray, 2022). The RSPCA's animal kindness index showed that four out of five pet owners in the UK were concerned about the increasing costs of pet care in 2024, with one in five worried about the affordability of pet food (RSPCA, 2024). Similarly, a recent survey in Australia found that 40 percent of customers were worried about the affordability of pet food, commenting that they had moved to cheaper dog food brands or were buying fewer treats (Sadler, 2024). Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that tensions between industrially produced and natural pet food may only be exacerbated by cost barriers, which may preclude some dog owners from being able to navigate or control pet food quality and safety, ultimately affective canine wellbeing.

7.2.3 Between carnism and veganism

Having discussed tensions between humanisation and animalisation as well as industrial and natural pet food, the third tension I explore in this chapter is between carnism and veganism. Carnism, as an ideology, and meat eating, as a cultural practice, are dominant food norms in Western cultural contexts, such as the UK and Australia. Veganism represents a challenge to carnism by supporting a 'way of living which seeks to excluded – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing and any other purpose' (The Vegan Society, 2024). Adopting the approach that meat eating is a cultural phenomenon (Joy, 2010), I argue that dogs are entangled in cultural norms around meat eating, which are based on different relations between humans and non-human animals, including both the eaten and eaters of meat. This section discusses how dog owners in this study navigated tensions between carnism and veganism by finding compromise in 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses that better aligned with their values around animal welfare and environmental sustainability. This study is novel in that it is the first to explore dog owners' ethical perspectives around RMBDs. In this section, I first discuss 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses in the context of literature on alternative pet food movements, and then I address how these discourses contribute to constructions of the edibility and killability of animals in different cultural contexts, which connects dog feeding to research in critical animal studies.

7.2.3.1 ‘Ethical (raw) meat’ and alternative pet food movements

The analysis in Chapter 6 explores the ways in which identity constructs are connected to and navigated in decisions around human-dog feeding. This is important since, to my knowledge, no animal science literature on RMBDs has explored raw feeding practices in the context of dog owner or canine identities. Moreover, the examination of plant-based dog owners who feed RMBDs complicates prior understandings of the ‘vegetarian’s dilemma’ in social psychological literature. To remind the reader, the conflict between the desire to promote their pets’ health and wellbeing with ethical concerns around animal welfare and the environment is said to result in feelings of guilt (See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.3). This thesis takes this a step further by exploring the ways in which dog owners navigate tensions between carnism and veganism, showing the negative associations of being complicit in animal agriculture were alleviated to some extent through employing ‘ethical (raw) meat’ discourses. By examining dogs owners’ constructions of ‘ethical (raw) meat’ in the context of dog diets, the analysis shows that academic discussions around ethical meat are not just relevant for human food but also dog food.

In Chapter 6 (Section 6.3), I demonstrated how dog owners in this study, who had all decided to either reduce or eschew animal products in their own diets, employed ‘ethical (raw) meat’ discourses as a way of navigating the tensions that emerged from feeding their dogs meat. In contrast to feeding kibble meat-based diets, RMBDs were constructed as not just better for dogs’ health and wellbeing, but their entanglement in ‘ethical (raw) meat’ discourses also suggested they could simultaneously address issues around the welfare of food animals and environmental sustainability through feeding RMBDs. As such, many participants reported feeding humane, ethically sourced, high welfare, and sustainable meat. This suggests that RMBDs are a relevant example to consider in research on a small but growing body of literature on ‘alternative pet food movements’ (Baker, 2024; Nestle, 2008). According to Baker (2024, p. 2), alternative pet food movements are characterised by pet food industry brands who ‘advertise qualities of alternative food movements (AFM) such as superior nutrition, sustainability and humane handling of animals’. While Baker (2024) focuses on the marketing of ‘humane’ dog food by industry actors, my analysis of ‘ethical (raw) meat’ discourses shows that dogs owners also construct their own understandings of ‘ethical’ dog food, which differs across cultural contexts.

One of the most interesting aspects of exploring the relationship between human and dog diets in the context of meat consumption is that ‘ethical (raw) meat’ discourses did not seek to invalidate veganism, as Joy (2012) argues, but differentiated the legitimacy of meat consumption across species lines. The danger of neo-carnist ideologies, argues Joy, is that despite engaging with ethical reflections around meat consumption, they provide rational justifications for meat eating – ‘the solution is not to *stop* eating animals, but to change the way we eat them’ (Joy, 2012, original emphasis). However, when examined in the context

of human-dog feeding in this study, constructions of edibility are more nuanced and differentiated for dogs and humans. While the arguments of normal, natural, and necessary (explored in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1.1) seemed to support feeding dogs raw meat, I showed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3) that feeding raw meat to dogs did *not* invalidate veganism for humans. In fact, at times it invigorated their own commitments to plant-based diets. This suggests that while 'ethical meat' is criticised for limiting the possibility of a fully plant-based food system in human diets (Arcari, 2018; Joy, 2010; Joy, 2012), we should also be considering pet diets and human-dog feeding relations. Below, I examine the entanglement of human-dog diets across three different neo-carnist ideologies (Joy, 2012) reviewed in Section 2.3.1.1.

The analysis in this study adds further complexity to 'ethical meat' literature by demonstrating that dog owners continue to follow plant-based diets while also purchasing 'humane' meat for their dogs. These narratives reflect what Joy (2012) calls 'compassionate carnism', whereby conscious consumers can address animal welfare concerns they might have through purchasing 'humane' meat. Participants' understandings of natural behaviours (including feeding behaviours), space and outdoor access, no artificial growth stimulants and humane slaughter largely support previous research on consumers' cultural understandings of farmed animal welfare in the UK and Australia (Bray & Ankeny, 2017; Buddle et al., 2018; Miele et al., 2011). For example, the importance of natural diets for farmed animals was also interpreted in research on consumer motivations for buying free-range eggs in Australia, in which the authors claim the hen's diet 'was used to explain how caged egg production was "not natural", in comparison to other production systems' (Bray & Ankeny, 2017, p. 218). This thesis introduces an added layer of complexity by arguing that unnatural feeding not only represents the industrial food system but also threatens the purity of the 'natural dog' as the eater at the end of the food chain. The concept of the natural dog is further complicated by their entanglement with both farmed and wild animals. For instance, Australian participants drew connections between dogs and kangaroos that served to naturalise the edibility of kangaroos since they were seen to live outside of the constraints of industrial factory farming. Additionally, due to the contested nature of animal death and dying, plant-based dog owners invoked the notion of a 'good death' to ethically navigate the killing of animals for dog food. Particularly interesting were the ways in which the violence of slaughter was obscured through the discourses of 'culling' and 'harvesting'. As Chao (2022) argues, kangaroos may be wild, but they are also culled and commodified, at which point they enter the system of animal agriculture as products. Moreover, the ideal of dogs hunting prey in order to connect with a naturalised version of eating romanticises violence, when many dogs labelled as aggressive or violent in human-controlled societies face surrender or euthanasia (see Lambert et al., 2015).

In addition to humane meat, narratives around sustainable meat and waste suggested that some raw meat-based products are aligned with 'ecocarnist' ideologies that legitimise the consumption of sustainably raised animals (Joy, 2012). Participants saw raw feeding partially as a way of addressing concerns about waste in the meat industry while continuing to follow plant-based diets themselves. My analysis provides an in-depth understanding of dog owners' perspectives around the sustainability of RMBDs, which is of particular relevance given concerns among animal and veterinary scientists that raw feeding presents a challenge to environmental sustainability (Alexander et al., 2020; Conway & Saker, 2018; Lumbis & Chan, 2015). The common understanding in pet food literature is that the 'human-grade ingredients in RMBDs are in direct competition with the human food system and discourage the use of grains and by-products that are seen as more sustainable ingredients (Conway & Saker, 2018). Drawing on the analysis in Section 6.3.3.3, I argue that this view does not consider the diversity of raw feeding practices or the continued use of by-products by raw feeders. While there were varied perceptions of by-products in terms of quality, many participants emphasised the inclusion of by-products from the meat industry for human consumption, off-cuts from butchers, and leftovers from human meals in their dogs' diets because these were seen as sustainable. As has also been highlighted by Baker in their analysis of 'humane' dog food, '(b)y-products of the meat-for-human-consumption industry still form the base for the premium pet food industry, except now, by-products are re-labelled as "whole prey"' (Baker, 2024, p. 9). This emphasises that by-products are not unique to the commercial pet food industry, but are also integral in the production of alternative pet food.

Narratives around the animalisation of pet food discussed in Section 7.3.1.1 also served to reinforce the dominant narrative of 'biocarnism' which underscores the necessity of meat in terms of health (Joy, 2012), but this was also differentiated across human diets and dog diets. While veganism was presented as a choice for humans, the view that dogs cannot choose to be vegan was prevalent among almost all participants. This analysis echoes Cudworth's (2016, p. 223) interpretation of meat feeding practices among UK dog owners, in which she argued that '(n)arratives of human choice infuse practices of dietary resistance to carnism, whereas biologism effectively reproduces the "love/eat" distinction when it comes to feeding animal companions'. This is evidenced most aptly by the quote 'just because I'm vegan, doesn't mean my dog is' (Kay, vegan, UK). However, in this study, I argue that the human/animal binary around eating and feeding was more porous than Cudworth claims. The notion of 'animalisation' was not just prescribed for dogs but also emerged in participants' justifications for veganism. Vegan diets were presented not just as a dietary choice but in fact as 'species-appropriate' for humans, thereby naturalising them as the one 'correct' choice. This is important in showing how carnist discourses in human-animal feeding can become entangled with vegan ideologies in ways that do not necessarily seek to invalidate veganism.

7.2.3.2 Cultural constructions of edibility and killability

Critical animal scholars have long argued that the way humans construct animal identities impacts the way that they are treated. For instance, Joy asserts, '(h)ow we feel about an animal and how we treat them, it turns out, has much less to do with what kind of animal they are than about what our perception of them is' (Joy, 2010, p. 6). In this exploration of human-dog feeding relations in the UK and Australia, I have demonstrated that constructions of edibility and inedibility not only vary across species but also across different cultural contexts.

Understandings of 'ethical (raw) meat' sources differed based on cultural entanglements between dogs as eaters of meat and other non-human animals as food. In particular, the popularity of wild animals as dog food did not just stem from their novelty or improvements to canine health[17], but rather through entanglements with notions of 'wild eating' upon which raw feeding is built. For example, kangaroos were constructed as 'pests' by Australian participants, which can be interpreted relationally as lowering their value for humans and legitimising their killability as dog food. Rabbits were seen be UK participants as 'prey' for dogs, which raised their relational value for dogs and naturalised them as dog food. In this way, different animal entanglements imbued with cultural meanings legitimised some animals as dog food over others in different contexts. Moreover, while participants shared views about humane killing, there was little reflection about issues with kangaroo welfare in the commercial kangaroo industry which has been brought to light by animal rights organisations in Australia (Chao, 2022).

As discussed in Chapter 6, the entanglement of the wild dog with wild animals, such as kangaroos and rabbits, helped participants to navigate ethical tensions between nourishing and killing, presenting certain animals as the 'least bad' option in order to best align species-specific needs with their own values around animal welfare and environmental sustainability. From a more critical perspective, however, these entanglements rely on the relative invisibility of animals consumed as food. To focus once again on the examples of kangaroos, anthropologist Sophie Chao (2022) has argued that kangaroos in Australia are a symbol of resistance to domestication and commodification – a symbol which I believe was implicitly harnessed by Australian participants in this study. However, Chao (2022) reminds us that while kangaroos may have resisted captivity, they remain vulnerable to culling. Since pet food scholars have argued that the marketing of the 'wild dog' in premium pet food maintains the killability of animals (Baker, 2024; Wrye, 2015), I caution the romanticisation of the home as a site where 'the eating of non-human animals is rejected; where relations of care and conviviality might enable the relative flourishing of human and animal

[17] In the pet food industry, wild animals such as kangaroo, rabbit, venison, crocodile, and ostrich are often reductively described as 'novel proteins' or 'boutique meats' and form a growing segment of the premium pet food market.

companions' (Cudworth, 2021, p. 427). My analysis suggests that dog owners' understandings of 'relative flourishing' *further legitimise*, rather than reject, the consumption and killability of non-human animals as dog food. Situating canine-human relations within broader human-animal dynamics has shown that social constructions of different species matter. Specifically, discourses of wildness also served to legitimise the edibility of some non-human animals, re-inscribing speciesist boundaries between dogs as eaters and other non-human animals as food.

7.2.4 Summary of section

In this chapter so far, I have discussed the analysis of human-dog feeding relations in the UK and Australia in the empirical chapters of this thesis. I show how dog owners in this study navigated tensions between humanisation and animalisation through constructions of appropriate care; between industrial and natural through discursive mechanisms of control; and between carnism and veganism through ethical (raw) meat discourses (Fig. 10). By connecting this analysis with various bodies of literature, I have demonstrated how this research builds on previous research in animal science on RMBDs, consumer science on human-animal feeding and social science literature on meat consumption, food sociology and human-animal relations. Having outlined the conceptual implications of this research, I now turn to the methodological implications of using qualitative visual methods in addition to talk-based interviews for researching human-animal relations.

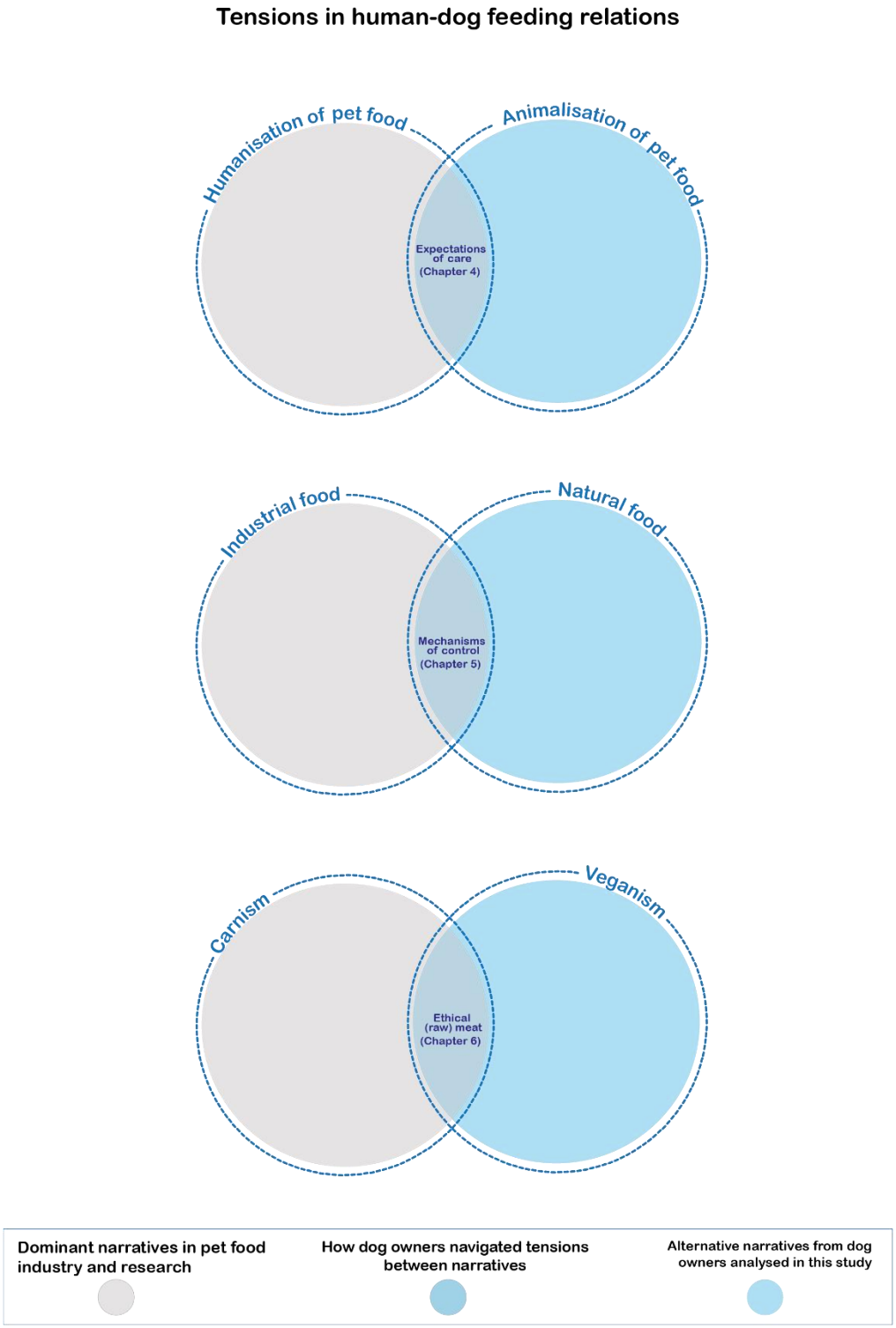

Figure 10: Conceptually expanding understandings of human-dog feeding by foregrounding diversity and complexity, resulting in a series of tensions for plant-based dog owners who feed their dogs RMBDs

7.3 Reflecting on visual and talk-based methods for researching human-animal relations

As outlined in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3), in addition to the conceptual aims of this thesis, I also sought to reflect on the combination of visual and talk-based methods for researching human-animal relations. Drawing on a body of methodological literature addressed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.1), I distinguished between functional and reflexive aims of my methodological choices. Below I evaluate the benefits and limitations of visual and talk-based methods for 1) capturing relational values around human-dog feeding and 2) visibilising non-human animals in qualitative research. This discussion is relevant for academics across the fields of veterinary sciences, food studies, and human-animal studies interested in using 'more-than-talk' methods to explore human-dog feeding relations and investigate relational values around food and feeding.

7.3.1 Capturing relational values around human-dog feeding

This thesis combined participant generated photo and video diaries with online elicitation interviews in order to explore in-depth understandings of relational values across human and dog diets. Upon reflection, the combination of talk-based with more-than-talk methods in the form of in-depth interviews and food diaries did facilitate a deep exploration of relational values. However, there remained both functional and ethical challenges in terms of reflections across the human-animal divide.

First, the sequencing of data collection, starting with the participant-generated feeding diaries followed by elicitation interviews, built in time for participant reflection across human-dog diets prior to the interview (Bartlett, 2015). For example, when asked about her experience of completing the food diary, Louise (UK) stated, 'it's been quite interesting actually. I'd never really thought that about there being any parallels between like what I eat and what my dog eats, but it does actually make quite a lot of sense'. During the interviews, too, the food diaries were a useful tool to encourage reflection, enabling participants to draw attention to specific aspects of interest in the photographs and videos and enabling me as the researcher to take on a facilitative role highlighting any aspects that they might not have raised themselves. In this way, the visual diaries helped us to reach collaborative and common understandings (Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002). For example, one participant responded to a question about how they felt watching a video they shared of dog food preparation by reflecting on the connection between feelings of disgust and how they handled their dogs' food. They stated, 'it's really interesting to watch that back actually […] and kind of see how my feelings actually do translate to, like, the way I handle the food' (James, flexitarian, UK). Another example in the excerpt below demonstrates how I used the photos to draw attention to values which the participants did not explicitly raise themselves.

> **Interviewer**: So, I noticed also in the in the photo that you sent, you have quite a few organic products and I wondered if you could walk me through that. Is organic important to you? Do you buy a lot of organic food?
>
> **Mona**: No, I wouldn't say that it's that important. But at the same time, I also think about all the pesticides and poisons and you know, right, I like I have a vegetable garden, although it's doing terribly this year and it's doing terrible because everything's eating it, you know, the rats, the possums, the rabbits this, yeah, you know the snails can eat a whole vegetable plant down overnight.

While Mona stated that 'organic', as an abstract value, was not important for her, I interpreted from the subsequent discussion that this did in fact matter when situated in specific food contexts. In this way, the food diaries enabled a deeper interrogation and contextualisation of certain values of interest to this research study, both prior to and during the interviews.

Given that the aim was to explore relational *values*, one challenge I encountered was a tendency for participants to talk about feeding *practices* during the photo and video elicitation. I suspect this is because practices were materially more visible than values, which can often be abstract or elusive (Pera et al., 2022). Rather than asking participants to describe what they were *doing* in the photo, I transitioned to asking how participants *felt* about the photos, which often directed the discussions towards values. This is evidenced in an excerpt between me and Lucy (vegetarian, Australia) below:

> **Interviewer**: And when we, when we look at this picture here, what, what does it make you feel sort of looking at it now?
>
> **Lucy**: Um… so I feel proud when I look at that ((laughs)), that I feed my dog such good quality food. Looking at that, you know, lovely condition. It's weird saying that because there's no way I'd eat it, but you can see that it is in really good condition, fresh, healthy meat and bones and like, yep, my dogs get the best of everything. So, I'm proud that I would make the effort to make sure that they got stuff like that.

In light of this, I remained mindful of the interplay between values and practices, which at times required carefully steering questions during the interviews.

Understanding the connections between human-animal relations and the co-production of identities through visual methods in this research undoubtedly requires consideration of the role of performativity. Focusing not just on what is depicted in participants' photos and videos, but the way it is depicted also carries meaning. Therefore, the visual material produced by participants are not neutral representations of daily

life – rather, visual methods can be seen as 'performative technologies' (Bramming et al., 2012) that foreground and background various aspects of feeding. Rather than visual representations of daily life, the photos and videos shared by participants either intentionally or unintentionally conveyed performative representations of self (Barad, 2007; Butler, 2002). In particular, the photos shared of aesthetic and vibrant meals suggest performances of good pet parenting and assert a superior moral identity over kibble feeders.

Although the mixed qualitative methods did encourage participant reflection, there remained both functional and ethical challenges for reflecting *across* diets. First, I noticed that participants often spoke in depth about either their dog's diet or their diet but encouraging reflection across the two required frequent reminders and steering questions. For instance, I often used signposting, such as 'if we now think about this in the context of your dogs' diet' or 'is this similar with your own diet?' I suspect this challenge might have been enhanced by the order of interview questions, which began with dog feeding before moving on to human diets. On the whole, participants seemed to have reflected more on their own diets than their dogs' diets. In future, relational feeding studies might consider ways in which to situate human values first before moving to explore values around dog diets, in order to start with the phenomenon which may have already received more prior attention and reflection. Moreover, in order to encourage reflective deliberation, focus groups could be a useful avenue for future research, as they are well suited to encouraging deliberation between participants that might uncover tensions between different perspectives (Hennink, 2011).

In addition to challenges during the interviews, another functional limitation was that the methods did not capture reflections arising after the interviews. During interview discussions, some participants conveyed that they would have to reflect more on the topics raised, such as Mona who said in the context of vegan dog diets, 'obviously, you're bringing it to light for me now and now I'll be thinking about it more. And then I'll have to do something about this' (Mona, vegan, Australia). Two participants asked whether they could organise a follow-up interview; one wanted to discuss more after transitioning their dog back to a raw diet after a period of illness, and another wanted to reflect on the ethical discussions we had had around animal welfare and sustainability. These prompts from participants highlighted that I could have embedded follow-up interviews in the research design when dealing with topics around food values in order to capture post-interview reflections.

Reflecting across human and dog diets also presented unforeseen ethical challenges, such as emotional discomfort for some participants. In addition to raising awareness of positive things, it has been suggested that diary methods can also raise awareness of negative aspects of peoples' lived experiences (Bartlett, 2015). While most participants communicated that they had found the interview interesting, there were a handful of participants who described feeling upset or uncomfortable about the reflections that had occurred. A mild example was one participant who stated jokingly, 'you just made me feel completely

rubbish about the fact that I still eat some animal products ((laughs))' (Lisa, vegetarian, UK). However, please see Section 3.5.2 for a detailed discussion on ethical considerations.

In sum, while the visual methods aided the functional aims of this research by encouraging deeper reflection both prior to and during the interview, there remained challenges in discussing relational values, particularly across the human-animal divide. It is unclear to me to what extent this is a methodological limitation or a finding in itself, although I suspect both may be at play. However, I have demonstrated the usefulness of combining interview and visual diary methods for exploring values around human-dog feeding. Next, I consider the reflexive aim of visibilising non-human animals in qualitative social research.

7.3.2 Visibilising non-human animals in qualitative social research

In addition to encouraging participant reflection, another aim of using visual methods was to challenge anthropocentrism in sociological research and increase the visibility of non-human animals (Cudworth, 2018; Bear et al., 2017; Buller, 2015; Carter and Charles, 2018, Hobson-West, 2007). I argue that the visual diary methods were an improvement on talk-based methods but largely remained anthropocentric – as I will explore in this sub-section, visibility does not equate to meaningful inclusivity.

The photo/video food diaries did to some extent achieve the goal of visibilising non-human animals, and especially canine experiences of eating, but this remained structured according to speciesist understandings of dogs as family and other animals as food (Carter & Charles, 2011; Joy, 2010; Stewart & Cole, 2009). In keeping with previous ethnographic and more-than-human research (Alger & Alger, 1999; Fox et al., 2022; Smith, 2003), there were instances where participants explicitly used the photo/video food diaries to present their dogs as eaters, thereby emphasising their subjectivity. For example, Louise (UK) reflected, 'I tried to get a better photo of the dog as opposed to just the food'. Moreover, the video diaries, in particular, provided space for the emergence of canine agency, through which canine performances of preference became materially visible both to me as a researcher and to participants during our interviews (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). This was particularly notable in instances where dogs' behaviours contradicted participants' statements, such as the example below where Flora sniffed her food and then walked away without eating it, despite the participant reporting that she loved her food (Fig. 11).

While the feeding diaries visibilised dogs as eaters (or in the example above, a disinterested eater), greater analytical attention could have been paid to embodiment in the photo and video diaries as a way of unmasking relations that constructed some animals as family and others as food. I had anticipated that visibilising animals fed to dogs alongside dogs-as-eaters would encourage participants to reflect on the relative power and privilege of different species in feeding contexts, especially given that they had chosen to reduce or remove animals-based foods from their own diets. However, the diaries alone often visually

re-produced the objectification of non-human animals consumed as food. To draw on Carol Adams (2000, p. 14), the reducibility of 'dead-meat' animals for canine consumption still rendered other animals as invisibilised 'absent referents' in visual displays of human-dog feeding (Fig. 12). It was only in subsequent interview discussions that I could better understand the materialities of meat through conversations around dog food preparation, which reflected more nuanced and embodied connections to non-human animals, such as participants describing dog food using terms like 'flesh', 'animal parts', and 'animal bodies' (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2). Moreover, listening to the videos with participants, my attention was drawn to various sounds, such as the whining of dogs waiting for food and the crunching of bones that served as a visceral reminder of the animals consumed as food. As highlighted in geographical approaches to visceral food consumption (Bruckner, 2018; Evans & Miele, 2012; Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Sexton et al., 2017), the body can provide a window into the feelings, moods, and sensation that form connections with discursive values and political aspects of food and feeding. Here, participants' discomfort raised broader discussions around values with regard to non-human animals and expectations of what food systems should look like. Therefore, insights from visceral geographies of food consumption could be combined with ongoing developments in visual research, particularly around multisensory visual methods that highlight the 'multiple and intertwined sensory channels' through which visual images are experienced (Pink, 2020, p.4). Given the prevalence of verbal descriptions of emotion and embodiment around raw feeding, future research could seek to explore relationships between verbal, visual and evocations of other senses, such as smells, textures, and sounds of both human and non-human eaters as well as the eaten.

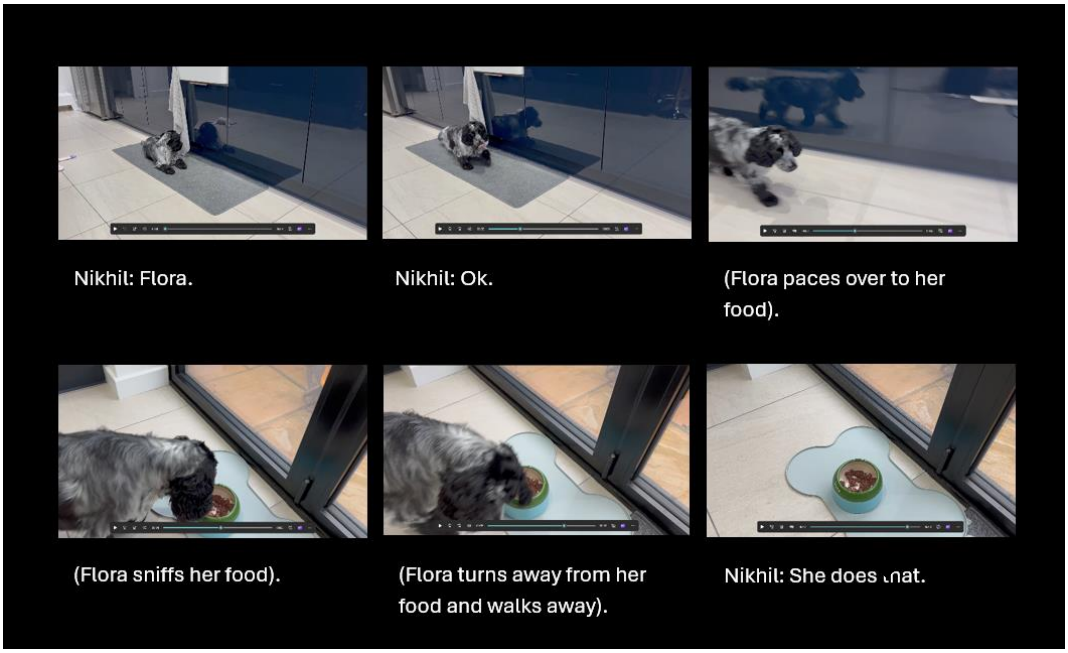

Figure 11: Stills from video diary showing canine performances of preference (shared by Nikhil, UK). Final frame has been edited to de-identify the dog's name.

Figure 12: Photo of food diary showing visible and invisible animals (shared by Harvey, Australia)

Finally, despite my intentions to challenge anthropocentrism in sociological methods, the visual methods remained largely anthropocentric, privileging talk over more-than-talk, and human points over view over those of non-human animals. In an influential article about conducting research with non-human animals, critical animal studies scholar Lynda Birke (2009, p. 1) asks whether research takes seriously the 'animals' point of view' or rather 'the viewpoint of the humans thinking about animals?' Reflecting on my analysis, there is a strong weighting towards the latter (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2 for future considerations).

7.3.3 Summary of section

This section has reflected on the combination of participant-generated photo and video diaries with online elicitation interviews to explore relational values across human and dog diets and visibilise animals in qualitative sociological research. The use of visual methods in conjunction with interviews enabled deeper participant reflection on feeding practices and values, though there were both functional and ethical challenges, particularly in bridging the human-animal divide. While food diaries facilitated participant reflection and discussions about values, particularly regarding human and dog food choices, there was a tendency for participants to focus more on practices than abstract values. The sequencing of interviews and food diaries also required careful steering to encourage participants to reflect across both human and dog diets. Although the visual methods highlighted the role of dogs as eaters, these representations also reinforced speciesist divisions, rendering some non-human animals, particularly those consumed as food, as invisible. It was only by combining visual and talk-based methods that discussions opened up around the ethical treatment of animals, with more nuanced accounts of fleshy connections with the animals consumed as food. Yet, I argue that the visual methods remained anthropocentric, privileging human perspectives over

those of non-human animals. The section concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the methods used, particularly in achieving meaningful inclusivity of non-human animals in the research.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the empirical analysis in this thesis in connection with previous empirical research reviewed in Chapter 2 across animal science and the social sciences. As mentioned, one of the aims of this thesis is to conceptually expand dominant narratives in current pet food research. To this end, I outlined three tensions in human-dog feeding between dominant narratives and alternative narratives generated in this research: these are humanisation and animalisation; industrial and natural; carnism and veganism. The discussion examined how dog owners navigated these tensions through expectations of care (Chapter 4), mechanisms of control (Chapter 5), and ethical (raw) meat discourses (Chapter 6).

While narratives of humanisation remain prevalent in pet food literature and even among dog owners in this study, my analysis complicates this understanding of canine integration based on their similarity to humans and feeding dogs food which is more similar to human food. Instead, I argued that we are witnessing the 'animalisation of pet food' (Section 7.3.1.1), which describes constructions of feeding that are biologically appropriate, drawing on understandings of animal physiology and natural eating behaviours that mimic what domesticated dogs might have consumed in the wild. The animalisation of pet food was prevalent in the value of wild eating among participants in this study. Rather than similarity, discourses of animality reinforce distinctions between the human and the animal. The irony, however, is that feeding dogs raw meat symbolically appeals to the wild while doing little to transform or even obscuring the structures of domestication that necessitate humans feeding dogs in the first place. After all, dog feeding, whether kibble or raw meat, ultimately reproduces dogs' dependencies on humans by assuming that they are supposed to be fed rather than seeking their own food (Wrye, 2012).

The industrial commercial pet food industry, as previously demonstrated in animal science research on raw feeding (Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2017), was identified as a dominant narrative from which participants sought to distance themselves. Raw feeding offers dog owners a way of protecting dogs from the perceived dangers of the commercial pet food industry by feeding what is perceived as natural, unprocessed raw foods. While the raw feeding movement emerged as a critique of commercial kibble, RMBDs are becoming increasingly commercialised, which only exacerbated the tension between industrial and natural foods. This speaks to various other 'alternative' food movements, which aimed to de-commodify the food system but have since become increasingly commodified (Guthman, 1998, 2002, 2003b). Despite this, there remain questions about diversity and inclusion around alternative diets and systems of food production (Guthman, 2003a; Slocum, 2007). The cost of RMBDs, for one, is of particular

concern, not just for participants in this study, but also raises questions about barriers to pet health and wellbeing.

This study also complicated dominant carnist norms around meat eating in the UK and Australia, first and foremost by choosing to explore plant-based dog owners' understandings of dog feeding. The 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses identified in Chapter 6 sit between carnism and veganism in the context of human-dog feeding. Literature on 'ethical meat' for human consumption has cautioned discourses which foreground high welfare and sustainable meat production practices since they limit the potential of a fully (human) plant-based food system (Arcari, 2018; Joy, 2012). However, dog diets are an important part of our shared food system. This analysis has shown that 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses do not limit humans transitioning to plant-based diets, but were used to alleviate tensions around the values of animal welfare and environmental sustainability. This is important given the growing interest in alternative pet food movements, which have so far focused on politics and marketing (Baker, 2024; Nestle, 2008). Moreover, the analysis of 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses in the UK and Australia demonstrated that constructions of edibility and killability vary across cultures, which is of relevance for expanding critical research on meat consumption (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1).

Having outlined the conceptual implications of this study for future research on human-dog feeding relations, the chapter explored the potential for visual methods in research exploring human-animal relations. As mentioned, the aims of employing visual methods were to investigate relational values around human-dog feeding and visibilise non-human animals in the research process. While there were functional benefits in terms of exploring values in depth and encouraging participant reflection around concepts which can be abstract or difficult to communicate, I discussed challenges in terms of reflecting across the human-animal divide and capturing post-interview reflections, which could have been improved by conducting follow-up interviews or focus groups. Moreover, there were unforeseen ethical challenges that included negative reflections on eating practices. Despite these challenges, I argued that visual methods were largely successful in exploring relational values and I believe they increased the depth of this research. The second aim of visibilising non-human animals in qualitative social research was achieved but did not necessarily equate to meaningful inclusivity. While there is certainly potential for using visual methods in research on human-animal relations, the participant-generated photos and videos limited capturing the animals' points of view (Birke, 2009). Taking these discussion points forward in the final chapter of this thesis, I outline considerations for future research and interested parties.

Chapter 8 – Reflections and future considerations

8.1 Towards a better understanding of human-dog feeding

In order to explore diverse dietary practices and complexity in human-dog feeding relations, this thesis developed qualitative case studies of dog owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs in the UK and Australia. This is an example of extreme case sampling which involves choosing unusual or extreme cases in order to provide new or previously unexplored aspects of social phenomena (Gray, 2018; Neuman, 2011). I argued that the adoption of both plant-based diets and RMBDs are more than just a set of dietary preferences to avoid or include (raw) meat and animal products, but reveal various beliefs, identities, and relations with non-human animals. Based on what is currently known about these value systems, I assumed that feeding RMBDs might produce (or possibly alleviate) tensions around responsibilities towards feeding dogs, animal welfare, the environment, and handling meat, in particular. I was interested in understanding how dog owners navigated relational values (see Chapter 1, Section 1.5) across their own diets and their dogs' diets and what this could tell us about their relations with dogs as eaters and other non-human animals consumed as food.

Having identified the need for more qualitative research in the field of human-animal feeding, the study aimed to capture in-depth understandings, contextual accounts and complex relations between humans and nonhuman animals. To my knowledge, this thesis provides the first qualitative study to explore dog owners' understandings of RMBDs (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2). I employed mixed qualitative methods, including both talk-based online interviews and more-than-talk photo/video food diaries in order to capture the complexity of human-dog feeding while drawing attention to non-human animals in the everyday and routinised context of the home. Three empirical analysis chapters (Chapters 4-6) explored divergent diets, diversity, and complexity in human-dog feeding through the themes of care, control, and identity. Having provided a summary of the analysis in each of these chapters in Chapter 7 (Section 7.1), here I return to the research questions (see Table 4) that guided this research and summarise key interpretations from the analysis.

Table 4: Research questions

Main research questions:

1) How do owners who follow plant-based diets and feed their dogs RMBDs understand the relationships between their own diets and their dogs' diets?
2) What can analysis of these understandings tell us about their identities and human-animal relations?

Sub research questions:

1) How do plant-based owners *view* their responsibilities for their dogs' nutritional health and wellbeing?
2) How do owners who follow plant-based diets *experience* feeding raw meat diets to their dogs?
3) How do owners *navigate* their beliefs and values associated with their own plant-based diets with feeding raw meat diets to their dogs?

As explored in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), previous quantitative animal science research has outlined various motivations for feeding RMBDs, including canine health, naturalness, a lack of trust in the pet food industry, and animal nature. Not only has the qualitative analysis in this thesis provided deeper contextual understandings of what dog owners mean by these concepts, but the relational analytical lens adopted provides new understandings of this phenomenon in terms of food values, identities, and human-animal relations. My analysis showed that dog owners in this study feed RMBDs in order to express ideals of 'intensive pet care' and to control contamination in the modern industrial food system, while also aligning their dogs' diets with their own dietary values around animal welfare and environmental sustainability.

With regard to plant-based owners' understandings of their responsibilities for their dogs' nutritional health and wellbeing (Sub-question 1), I demonstrated in Chapter 4 that decisions around raw feeding are guided by understandings of what I have called 'intensive pet care', which describes individualised responsibilities that rest on situated and contextual understandings of canine-human relations. Intensive pet care describes normative standards that 'good' pet parents are expected to meet by investing time, money, emotion, and knowledge into their consumption practices in order to nourish their pets, respond to their preferences, and meet their species-specific needs. By drawing on the concept of 'intensive mothering' from sociological research on mother-child feeding (Hays, 1996), my analysis demonstrated some similarities to understandings of appropriate care for human children. Plant-based dog owners in this study upheld ideals of *nourishing care* by feeding what was considered to be the 'best' possible diet (Section 4.2) and *individualising care* that foregrounds owners' responsiveness to their dogs' individual preferences and tastes (Section 4.3). The main difference to the literature on feeding human children was that dog owners

also took on the responsibility of attending to understandings of the dogs' species-specific needs and behaviours through what I called *species-appropriate care* (Section 4.4). This is important because it suggests an atypical model of pet integration into family structures, based not just on their similarities but also differences to humans. While this research has been conducted with dogs, given the rapidly changing domain of pet commercialisation, visions of what pets are have expanded to include numerous different non-human animals, such that these considerations around natural behaviours could apply to wing clipping birds, de-clawing cats, and keeping backyard chickens, for example (see Buddle et al., 2024).

Understanding how dog owners interpret their responsibilities towards feeding their dogs is relevant for veterinary and animal science research on pet feeding. While very little research has addressed the role of care in feeding RMBDs, veterinary scientists have acknowledged that, for some owners, the act of feeding is a way of enhancing the human-animal bond and directly influencing the wellbeing of their animals (Freeman et al., 2013). The analysis in this thesis, however, has emphasised that the human-animal bond is not static, but human-dog feeding relations are dynamic and varied, resting on constructions of provider-dependent, responder-agent, and human-animal identities. Moreover, intensive pet care is not just relevant for understanding human-canine relations; what is viewed as 'good' and 'bad' care also reproduced social distinctions. For example, DIY raw feeders in this study presented an idealised version of 'good' care, which was demarcated from commercialised raw feeding as 'acceptable' and kibble feeding as 'bad' care.

In addition to owners' responsibilities, the study also developed understandings of how plant-based owners experienced handing raw meat and navigated concerns through mechanisms of control around contamination in the food system (Sub-question 2). I had expected that handling raw meat would produce discomfort owing to tensions with their own values, particularly around avoiding harm to animals. While this was indeed the case for some participants, my analysis in Chapter 5 showed that plant-based dog owners also experienced visceral discomfort that was bound up with concerns not just about the ethics of animal death, but also about contamination. While a vast amount of animal and veterinary science research on RMBDs highlights the risks of microbial contamination from handling raw meat (reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1), the analysis in Chapter 5 shows that dog owners in this study employed discursive mechanisms of control in order to navigate perceived risks in the modern industrial food system. These included understandings of human-grade, fresh, whole, non-processed, and organic food that were valued for being higher quality and posing less risk to both canine and human health. I argued that the 'natural dog' was largely the centre of concern, whose own bodily protection was understood to be either porous or robust at different junctures. Thus, feeding RMBDs to dogs is not just about controlling food ingredients, but by extension also a means of controlling canine bodies – who ingest these ingredients – through discourses of purity and toxicity.

My analysis of control over ingredients provided in Chapter 5 is therefore more nuanced than previous animal science research (Morelli et al., 2019) in terms of what owners are trying to control as well as how control is navigated. By drawing on the notion of the 'contingent boundary of bodily protection' from sociological research on nontoxic consumption (MacKendrick & Stevens, 2016, p. 326), I showed that context is important in the ways in which dog owners perceived their ability to control risks. Participants viewed microbial risks in the home as controllable but were more concerned about chemical contaminants entering the food chain in the factory and on the farm during food production. This is relevant given the focus on microbial contamination both in academic research and health and safety communication around raw feeding, which will be discussed further in Section 8.3.1. More broadly, these understandings of purity and protection may also be relevant for thinking about other kinds of decisions involving tensions between what people think is best for those they care for that might be in conflict with values about yourself, such as pet neutering (Morgan et al., 2017) and vaccination (Hobson-West, 2022), although further research is required to understand these connections (see Section 8.2).

Despite the aforementioned aspects of care and control which motivated dog food choices, plant-based owners still faced ethical tensions around their dogs RMBDs (Sub-question 3). In Chapter 6 (Section 6.3), I demonstrated how owners partially alleviated identity-based and visceral tensions by employing what I have called 'ethical (raw) meat' discourses. While plant-based dog owners held various beliefs around animal rights, animal welfare, and the environment, they were able to align these values with RMBDs by finding compromises that did not compromise values. 'Ethical (raw) meat' discourses problematised industrial animal agriculture while promoting notions of the good life and a good death for animals consumed as food, as well as reducing waste as part of sustainable food practices. While there are overarching similarities to 'ethical meat' discourses for human consumption (Joy, 2012), I showed how the edibility of ethical (raw) meat for dogs rests on various entangled identities between dogs and non-human animals consumed as food, such as 'wild', 'predator', 'prey', or 'pest'. The analysis exemplified this by exploring malleable cultural constructions of kangaroos and rabbits in the UK and Australia that reinforced their killability. To echo Bruckner et al. (2018, p. 42), 'the symbolic animal matters, even when physical encounters are rare'. In this study, however, the symbolic entanglement of different animals legitimised the edibility of some animals as 'ethical' dog food. Therefore, while values around animal welfare and the environmental impact of food shaped human participants' choices to avoid meat and animal products in their own diets, the construction of RMBDs as 'ethical (raw) meat' diets meant that these values could to some extent be aligned through dog feeding practices.

The notion that the aforementioned tensions around animal welfare and sustainability might be reconciled by feeding dogs plant-based diets was strongly contested by the understanding that vegan diets were

inappropriate for dogs. What was particularly interesting was how the appropriateness of plant-based diets and RMBDs were constructed in relation to human and canine species. While plant-based diets were seen as the most ethical diet for humans to follow, they were largely viewed as inappropriate for dogs owing to two different but intersecting discourses of naturalness and choice. First, discourses of naturalness were prevalent in what I called the 'animalisation of pet food' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2.1), which emphasises species distinctions and notions of wild eating. It can be characterised as feeding what is seen as biologically appropriate food by drawing on understandings of animal physiology and 'natural' eating behaviours that mimic notions of what domesticated animals would have consumed in the wild. By emphasising species distinctions, the animalisation of pet food emphasises distinctions between the 'dog' and the 'human', resulting in understandings that what is seen as appropriate food for humans is not necessarily appropriate for animals since they are seen as having species-specific needs. In this way, vegan diets for dogs were seen as inappropriate in part because they were 'unnatural' and did not meet dogs' nutritional needs as 'carnivores' or their behavioural needs as 'predators'. Second, discourses of choice were prevalent in the theme of individualising care (Chapter 4, Section 4.3), where there was a common view that vegan diets were inappropriate for dogs since they were seen as an imposition of (human) ethical values. Here we can see how constructions of species-specific needs and ethical values intersect, in which the naturalisation of canine meat consumption takes away the perception of choice (Joy, 2010). Plant-based diets were constructed as a choice that rests on ethical values, and one that only humans have the capacity to make, whereas RMBDs were constructed as natural for dogs based on species-specific needs.

8.2 Considerations for future research

The analysis in this thesis has provided a novel contribution to literature on pet feeding by highlighting a series of tensions and alternative narratives that expand understandings of human-dog feeding relations in new directions (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2). There is much scope for future research that could start by asking different kinds of questions than those currently posed in research from the fields of animal or consumer sciences, such as: How do constructions of 'animality' shape feeding practices, and how can those who care for animals attend to species differences in non-essentialist ways? How do ideas around 'naturalness' and purity shape the ways in which food and/or animal bodies are controlled? What kinds of tensions might emerge from human-animal feeding? How are complexities around human-animal feeding navigated (by both humans and other animals)? How do how humans and animals navigate inter-subjective food choices? Given the largely explorative nature of this thesis, there are a number of different directions for future research. Below, I focus on a handful of considerations that have both emerged from this thesis and speak to broader developments in the fields of food studies and human-animal studies. These include methodological considerations for foregrounding the perspectives of non-human animals; exploring

different alternative pet diets; understanding the roles of different actors involved in RMBDs across the pet food value chain; and researching human-dog feeding in different cultural contexts.

First, future research could more explicitly centre canine perspectives on feeding. By conceptualising dogs-as-eaters, this thesis has made an important challenge to the conceptual dichotomy in much food studies and animal studies literature between human-as-eater and animal-as-eaten. Despite the aim of visibilising non-human animals in this research, I argue that the visual methods employed largely achieved the functional aim of capturing relational values but were limited in terms of non-human animal inclusivity (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4 for discussion). Future research should therefore consider methods of data collection and data analysis that centre not just canine *visibility* but canine *perspectives* around feeding, which I shall outline in more detail below.

During the design of qualitative research involving non-human animals, scholars should consider which methods might be best suited for providing space for unexpected displays of non-human animal agency and/or capturing relations of power. With growing technological capacities for researching interspecies communication, visual and ethnographic methods of data collection should aim not just to capture the animal but the 'animal's point of view' (Fox et al., 2022). For example, rather than (human) participant-generated photo/video diaries, researchers could take videos at a dog's level (Fox et al., 2022) or conduct go-along interviews (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003) that take place in the spaces in which dogs are present. This builds on a growing body of more-than-human research approaches, in which pets are present with their owners in the home (Fox, 2006; Redmalm, 2020; Sutton, 2021) or while dog walking (Cudworth, 2017, 2018). These approaches might open up new understandings of dogs-as-eaters, especially regarding informal food events, such as scavenging. Moreover, given the increasing interest in embodied methods in animal studies, future research could foreground an attentiveness to touch, taste, smell, and sound, as well as the researchers' own bodily engagement in the research (Fox et al., 2022). Scholars could also look to creative projects adjacent to academic research for inspiration. One example is the 'multispecies dinner', a collaboration between Mediamatic and philosopher Eva Meijer in the Netherlands, which explores egalitarian spatial dynamics for eating, such as lower tables shared by both dogs and humans (Thissen, 2023). In addition to data collection, much work is required to develop approaches to analysing visual data that includes animals. Reflecting on this thesis, choosing to view the visual diaries as a methodological tool rather than data in itself was beneficial for exploring values as relations, but the latter could have helped to better understand animal perspectives. Therefore, future analysis could highlight the materiality of animals in visual photo and video data to explore animal movements, actions and interactions with spaces, and the researcher (see Bear et al., 2017).

Looking beyond visual methods, this thesis has also raised important questions around non-human animal subjectivity, which could be explored in future research that seeks to understand the limitations and possibilities of non-human animal decision-making around food in various contexts, such as domestic spaces, zoos, laboratories, farms, and animals in the wild. Interestingly, one of my participants, who was a biologist by training, suggested setting up a choice experiment with their dogs, to see whether they would choose to eat kibble or raw meat (or perhaps both!) in real time. This raises considerations around the need for inter- and multidisciplinary research on animal feeding (see Thomas & Cassidy, 2022). Qualitative researchers could expand familiar methodological toolkits by combining insights from ethological studies of animal behaviour (Birke, 2014; Charles et al., 2024; Fox et al., 2022; Hamilton & Taylor, 2017). Specifically, I believe there could be great benefit in designing research with interdisciplinary research teams, including animal behaviourists, ethologists, and social scientists to see how the collaborative study of animal subjectivity shapes research outcomes.

A second area for future research is to expand this research to consider other 'alternative pet food movements' (Baker, 2023; Nestle, 2008). For example, given the increasing popularity of vegan dog diets (Dodd et al., 2020; Knight & Satchell, 2021), future research could investigate in-depth understandings of care, control, and identity around vegan dog feeding. It would also be important to examine consumers' understandings of pet foods labelled 'sustainable', 'humane', and 'natural', with a particular focus on how consumers navigate transparency and trust in pet food production (see Chapter 5, Sections 5.3.3 and 5.4.2 and Chapter 6, Section 6.3). The analysis in this thesis has demonstrated that these are not static terms but are understood and taken up by dog owners in different ways in different cultural contexts. For instance, in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.4), I demonstrated that sustainability was framed relationally, based on the idea that human plant-based diets could in some way cancel out their dog's meat-based diet. This points towards the need for better understandings of relational food sustainability across human and dog diets and understandings of how impacts might be seen as distributed across members of multi-species households. Moreover, given the questions around access and cost that were peripherally raised in this study (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2.2), additional research is needed to better understand the ways in which alternative pet food movements produce human-animal inequalities, which could be explored by focusing on those who cannot afford 'premium' dog food, for example.

A third research area is to focus on the role of various actors along the (raw) pet food value chain. This study has focused on raw feeding in the home and identified the importance of human-animal relations in shaping food choices for both human and canine consumers. However, participants described experiences and opinions about various different actors indirectly involved in pet feeding, such as pet food producers, manufacturers, slaughterhouse workers, veterinarians, pet butchers, and online forum members. Future

research could investigate the interactions between dog owners and these actors in more depth, and also analyse how these actors understand values, identities, and human-animal relations. For example, how do pet food producers understand their identities or relations with animals that become dog food? What are pet food manufacturer's perceptions of sustainability regarding RMBDs? What is the role of pet butchers in communicating information around dog feeding? What are the animals being fed who become dog food? Carrying forward the previous arguments about centring animal perspectives, further research could shed light on the lived experiences and material realities of the animals who become pet food, both in farmed and wild spaces.

Finally, while I have argued there is a need for more in-depth research on human-dog feeding, I also suggest a broadening of research sites to explore different cultural contexts. The majority of research on pet feeding has been carried out in English-speaking or Anglophone contexts – the cases of the UK and Australia in this study being a case in point. However, pet ownership is increasing in countries around the world that have different cultural relationships with dogs and meat consumption practices. In China, for example, there are tensions between the dog meat industry and a growing number of dog owners – with a fast-growing pet population, there is increasing demand in the domestic pet food market (Xiao et al., 2021), thus blurring the boundaries between the eater and the eaten. Another interesting context is India, where there are cultural sensitivities and complex religious norms around meat consumption, but also diverse relationships with dogs, particularly with high numbers of free-ranging dogs that are not strictly owned in the Western cultural sense but are nevertheless enmeshed in relations of dependence with the humans who provide them food (Bhalla et al., 2021; Corfmat et al., 2023). Given the different constructions of animal edibility as dog food in the UK and Australia based on varied canine-animal entanglements explored in this study (see Chapter 6, Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3), it could be particularly interesting to explore whether understandings of 'wildness' also shape dog feeding practices across different cultures, and if so, how they interact with different cultural or religious values. In addition to specificities in different national contexts, it is also important to recognise that raw feeding is increasingly becoming a global phenomenon that is shaped by transnational influences, such as the media, communication, and flow of goods through trade. Many raw feeding social media groups are made up of dog owners from around the world, suggesting that the sharing of information is transnational. Thus, further research could explore these flows of information in more detail by exploring dog owner communication in and through online platforms (see Bulochova and Evans, 2021b, for example).

8.3 Considerations for interested parties

In addition to the conceptual and methodological implications for academic research outlined in Chapter 7, this research is of relevance for various groups or parties interested in human-dog feeding, health, and wellbeing. These parties include, first and foremost, dogs themselves (although they will likely not read this thesis) and their owners, as well as veterinarians and animal healthcare professionals, policy makers, animal welfare organisations, pet food manufacturers and industry associations, and international organisations concerned with food and sustainability transitions. The cross-cutting considerations addressed include consumer perceptions of regulatory laxity and understandings of human-animal relations in veterinary healthcare settings.

8.3.1 Perceptions of regulatory laxity

The regulation of pet food has increasingly come under public scrutiny upon a backdrop of pet food recalls and concerns around food safety (Bischoff & Rumbeiha, 2018; Nestle, 2008, 2010; Remillard, 2008). The analysis of in-depth understandings how dog owners navigate food safety risks through discourses of control in Chapter 5 is therefore highly relevant for those involved in policy making, veterinary healthcare, and pet food production. In the following paragraphs, I outline two considerations regarding dog owner perceptions of regulatory laxity and calls for greater transparency in pet food production.

In contrast to previous animal science research and policy guidelines on raw feeding, which focus heavily on microbial contamination, my analysis shows that dog owners were in fact more concerned about chemical contamination. To reiterate the arguments made in Chapter 5, dog owners viewed biological hazards as manageable through food safety and hygiene practices employed in the home. Outside of the home, however, they were more concerned about 'chemical' contaminants, such as pesticides, additives, and preservatives, entering the pet food chain. These understandings are important because they reflect a different hierarchy of concern than, for example, the UK Pet Food Manufacturers Association's (PFMA) *Guidelines for the Manufacture of Raw Pet Food in the UK* (2017), which explicitly prioritises 'biological hazards' as the greatest risk to public and animal health. I argue that the conceptual distinction in these Guidelines drawn between 'biological hazards' and 'undesirable substances' (examples given include pesticides and heavy metals) does not reflect consumer understandings of their ability to control or manage risks. The dissonance revealed here necessitates further research into how dog owners' navigate pet food safety, taking into consideration broader notions of contamination as well as subjective mechanisms of control. As political food scholar Marion Nestle correctly points out, individual decisions about acceptable levels of risk 'involve perceptions, opinions, and values, as well as science' (Nestle, 2010, p. 31).

The analysis in this thesis also has implications for understandings of consumer trust and calls for greater transparency around pet food production (see Baker, 2024). While both UK and Australian dog owners were concerned about the processing of kibble foods and expressed distrust in commercial pet food corporations, the analysis offers a deeper understanding of perceptions of regulatory laxity around pet food production and labelling, particularly in Australia. There was high interest in transparency for concepts often included on pet food packaging, such as 'human grade', 'pet grade', 'humane', 'free range', and 'sustainably sourced'. This investigation comes at a time of increasing public conversation around regulatory reform and the introduction of mandatory pet food standards at the Australian federal level (RSPCA Kesteven, 2024; RSPCA Australia 2021). A key takeaway from this research is that dog owners are not only concerned about pet food safety, but they also want to know whether the conditions of pet food production align with their own values.

8.3.2 Human-animal relations in client communication

The welfare of dogs and other pets is shaped by the decisions that owners make around food and feeding on a daily basis. This study shows how these decisions are influenced by their values about (pet) food and various understandings of the relations between themselves, their dogs, and non-human animals consumed as food. Greater attention needs to be paid to the social and relational aspects of pet feeding, in order to both broaden and deepen understandings of the values, relations, and identities which drive food choices across human and animal diets (Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023; Michel, 2006). Such understandings are not only important for the development of veterinary science as a discipline, but they aim to improve canine health and wellbeing – an end which I believe is ultimately shared by veterinary professionals and raw feeders. In order to improve communication between animal healthcare professionals, including veterinarians, veterinary nurses, canine nutritionists, behaviourists, and dog owners, understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial.

On the basis of the analysis in this thesis, veterinary and nutrition professionals should be open to discussing possible concerns about commercial dog food as well as the ways in which raw feeding is seen as a path to care. This speaks to previous research, which has advised open and constructive discussion around dietary choices (Lumbis & Kinnison, 2023; Morgan et al., 2022). In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that dog owners feeding RMBDs were guided by ideologies of 'intensive pet care', in which raw feeding aligned with valorised standards of time, financial, and knowledge investments into pet care and social expectations around 'good' pet parenting. This care, however, rested on distinguishable logics of nourishing dogs, responding to their dogs' preferences, and meeting their species-appropriate needs. Contra to dominant humanisation narratives in pet feeding research, the analysis in this thesis shows how raw feeding is entangled with discourses of pet food animalisation (Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1), which demonstrate

participants' strong interests in better understanding canine physiology and the behavioural needs of specific species. This is similar to previous quantitative research, which found that French raw feeders were more likely to take care of ethological and behavioural needs, such as providing more access to the outside and off-lead walking (Houmady, 2022). What this suggests is that enrichment motivations for raw feeding could be a useful avenue for veterinarian-client discussions around canine nutrition and a path to better understanding.

While previous research in animal science has indicated that raw feeders do not trust veterinary advice around nutrition (Michel et al., 2008; Morgan et al., 2017), the analysis in this study adds further nuance to these understandings by highlighting the importance of client communication as well as perceptions of the veterinary industry more broadly. Some dog owners were wary of disapproval from veterinarians around their raw feeding practices, which was suspected to be a reason for distrust by Morgan et al. (2017), but was not empirically investigated with dog owners themselves. Dog owners in this study were concerned about social judgement and expressed a desire to be listened to and taken seriously by healthcare professionals, which is important given the controversy surrounding raw feeding in public and scientific discourse (Hilal, 2019; Stogdale, 2019). An important takeaway is that participants were not opposed to science or professional expertise *per se*, and they often employed scientific discourses around canine nutrition and behaviour (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). However, leading conversations about the risks of raw feeding before gaining a deeper understanding of motivations could shut down important conversations that ultimately effect pet welfare.

While improving communication around raw feeding and alternative diets is one path to improving pet welfare, this analysis suggests that distrust in veterinarians stemmed from participants' understandings of commercial and educational structures in the veterinary profession. The perception of conflicts of interest stemmed from the involvement of commercial pet food corporations in veterinary training and concerns around biased advice, which was only heightened by the sense of protective care dog owners sought to establish to improve their dogs' health and wellbeing (see Chapter 4). These claims are highly relevant given the tensions between commercialisation and care that have also been highlighted by veterinary professionals (Belshaw et al., 2018; Coe et al., 2007) and pet owners' perceptions of corporate veterinary care (Anderson, 2021). Thus, structural issues would also need to be addressed to improve trust in the veterinary profession around nutritional advice and alternative diets. Despite this, it is important to note the examples provided by participants who are working with vets to formulate diets as well as trust in pro-raw veterinarians, many of whom have published popular books on raw feeding (Billinghurst, 1993; Brady, 2020; Habib & Becker, 2021; Lonsdale, 2001). This suggests that veterinary expertise is of high value among raw feeders. I note, once again, that this level of detail was captured through qualitative research,

but since this thesis did not explicitly focus on sources of knowledge, I suggest that future research is required to explore dog owner understandings and experiences of interactions with veterinary professionals, as well as other avenues of knowledge, such as online communities in more depth (see Section 8.2).

Considering issues around trust in veterinarians, previous research has highlighted the importance of online information for raw feeders (Michel et al., 2008; Morgan et al., 2017; Laflamme et al., 2008). Rather than quantifying sources of information around raw feeding (Morgan et al., 2022; Morelli et al., 2019), I asked participants where they received *useful* information which enabled me to better understand their values around trusted and meaningful advice. The analysis showed that dog owners were often sceptical of online information and sought meaningful, ongoing connections with specialist raw pet butchers, whom they trust for nutritional advice. This is particularly relevant, since previous surveys of owners' perceptions of raw feeding have paid little attention to the role of pet butchers as sources of information (Morelli et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2022). Further research is also required to understand the quality, rather than quantity, of information received and explore how knowledge around raw feeding changes over time, from new to long-term raw feeders. Moreover, given the increasing commercialisation of RMBDs, veterinary healthcare professionals would also benefit from better understanding the relationships between dog owners and pet butchers, and in particular the substantive information being discussed and shared. Further research would need to be conducted with a larger dataset to determine the significance of these relationships and what kind of information and advice is being delivered through pet butcher channels.

8.4 What our pets eat matters

Over the years it has taken to conduct this research, many people have asked me what my PhD topic is about. While I have often found this difficult to distil, one of the simpler answers is that my research is about dog food. As I highlighted in the prologue of this thesis, dog food is also food. Despite the growing attention to what humans eat and how food is made, we need greater recognition that pets, and other non-human animals for that matter, are eaters in the food system. After all, to echo food scholars Marion Nestle and Malden Nesheim, '(w)e all share one interconnected food supply' (2010, p. 7). Yet, that interconnectedness continues to be overlooked by many of the most influential research groups working at the intersection of food, health, and sustainability. To spotlight just one, the EAT-Lancet Commission, a group of global experts who have proposed an increase in plant-based diets for a healthy and sustainable food system, pose the following question: 'Can we feed a future population of 10 billion *people* a healthy diet within planetary boundaries?' (EAT-Lancet, 2024, emphasis added). To me, the glaring omission in this question is that there are likely around 1 billion pets worldwide, not to mention numerous other domesticated animal species, who also need to eat (Health for Health for Animals, 2022).

While there is a lot more work to do, I have argued that greater scholarly attention needs to be paid to animals-as-eaters, especially in the fields of food studies and human-animal studies. My analysis has visibilised a hidden consumer – the domestic dog – who has often been largely omitted from consideration in food studies research. Without intentionally conflating dogs with human children, for a long time, children too were overlooked in food studies research because of the ambivalence around their subject/object positionality – as Cook (2009, p. 33) highlights, 'as a person or being with likes and dislikes yet as a thing to be nourished'. The added complexity in the case of dog feeding is the recognition of canine subjectivity, as animals but not as people. Despite this, dog feeding unfolds within everyday relations of power and dependence, such that food choices are made relationally, based on what humans who care for dogs think is important and how they interpret their needs, behaviours, and preferences.

Reflecting once again on my first encounter with raw feeding several years ago, I noted the tensions that I understood to be present for a vegetarian dog owner who fed their dog an RMBD. I emphasise that my primary interest in studying plant-based raw feeders was not simply to learn how to market dog food to them. This niche group of people and their dogs mattered to me because they raised questions about how dog owners navigate complexity and diversity in human-dog feeding relations. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that these practices are not fundamentally inconsistent but result in a series of tensions. Despite following plant-based diets, for participants in this study, feeding their dogs RMBDs was the right thing to do, even in the face of social pressures. Ultimately this underscores that living alongside non-human animals may involve non-ideal compromises (Shotwell, 2016), reiterating that we need to think about the complexities of food choices, how people prioritise those in their care, and how they navigate conflicting values amidst the rapidly changing complexities of daily life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment material

Item 1: Social media flyer (Phase 1_UK_University of Nottingham)

Item 2: Social medial flyer (Phase 2_AUS_University of Adelaide)

Item 3: Paper flyer (Phase 1_UK_University of Nottingham)

Share your experiences of raw feeding!

Do you feed your dog raw meat?
Do you follow a plant-based diet?

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

for study to better understand dog and human diets in the same household

We're recruiting dog owners:

- ☑ aged 18 and over
- ☑ based in the UK
- ☑ who feed their dog a raw meat diet
- ☑ and follow a vegan/vegetarian/plant-based diet

What would taking part involve?

Share your views on raw feeding as well as your own diet by:

- attending a 1-hour online interview discussion
- sharing up to 3 photos/short videos of dog feeding to discuss together during the interview

To take part or find out more:
please scan QR code for website
or contact Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes at
natalia.ciecierska-holmes@nottingham.ac.uk

University of Nottingham
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THE UNIVERSITY of ADELAIDE

Item 4: Paper flyer (Phase 2_AUS_University of Adelaide)

Item 5: Participant information sheet (Phase 1_UK_University of Nottingham)

Participant Information Sheet & GDPR Privacy Notice

Section 1 - Participant Information Sheet

Date:

Title of Study: Raw Feeding for Dogs in the UK and Australia

Name of Researcher(s):
Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes, PhD Candidate, University of Adelaide and University of Nottingham

Professor Pru Hobson-West, Primary Supervisor, University of Nottingham
Professor Kate Millar, Secondary Supervisor, University of Nottingham
Professor Rachel Ankeny, Primary Supervisor, University of Adelaide
Dr Michelle Phillipov, Primary Supervisor, University of Adelaide

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. One of our team will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the purpose of the study?

What to feed their dogs is important for many owners. In recent years, increasing numbers of owners are feeding their dogs 'alternative diets', including variations of raw meat-based diets. This project is exploring dietary shifts in human and non-human animal companions. The primary aim is to better understand the values, practices and ethics of dog owners who feed raw meat-based diets, while themselves eating a plant-based diet. To conduct this research, we are asking participants to complete photo/video diaries and attend an online interview.

Why have I been invited?

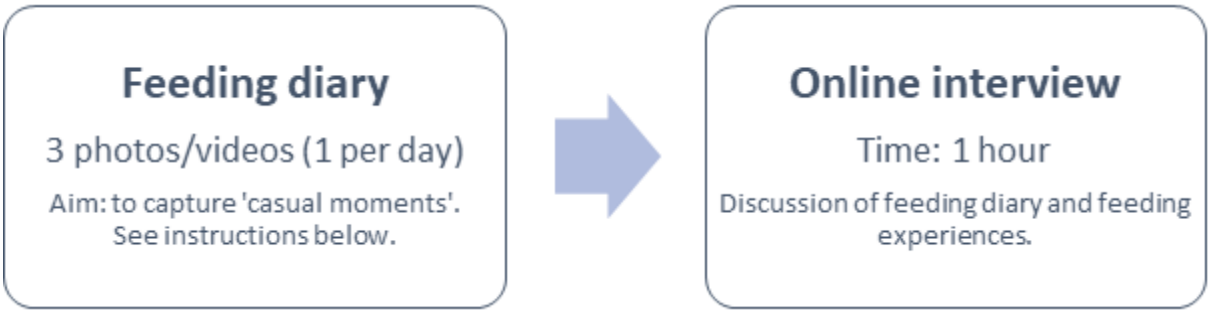
You have been invited to take part because you are a self-identifying vegetarian or vegan who feeds your dog a raw meat-based diet and are over 18 years of age. We are inviting 20-30 participants like you to take part.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This would not affect your legal rights.

What will taking part involve?

We would like you to complete a 'food diary' for 3 consecutive days followed by an online interview lasting 1 hour.



Raw feeding diary instructions:
We would like you to share up to 3 photos/short videos (up to 1 minute) and suggest you take 1 per day. If you are not able to do this on a particular day, please do not give up, just start over again the next day you are able to. Here are some points we would like you to keep in mind:

- We are interested in both your own and your dog's experiences of raw feeding preparation and mealtimes. You could, for example, include entries of your dog, yourself, their food, as well as your food if you'd like.
- We are particularly interested in finding out how you make decisions about raw feeding and how you relate this to your own food choices.
- Before the online interview, please upload the food diary photos/videos to your computer as we will discuss them in the interview. If possible, please email these to Natalia.

Interview instructions:
We will then arrange an online interview at a mutually convenient time that will last around 1 hour. The interview will be conducted with Natalia, who will send you a link beforehand. Please check that you have your pictures/videos uploaded to your computer. If you haven't already emailed them, Natalia can advise you how to share them during the online Teams discussion (using the chat function). After discussing the feeding diary, you will be asked some questions about raw feeding and your own food choices. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions as the aim is to better understand the food choices you make for yourself and your dog(s). After the interview, the discussion will be written out – your name and any personal details will remain private.

Expenses and payments
Participants will not be paid an allowance to participate in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
The biggest inconvenience to you is in terms of time, for the feeding diary and online interview. This is why we suggest a simple photo/video per day is enough for the feeding diary task.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from this study may help towards understanding consumer decision-making around raw feeding for dogs, a trend which has become ever more popular in recent years. With so many new products available as well as diet options, this is relevant for understanding the role owners play in the health and well-being of their dogs.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the School Research Ethics Officer. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet. Should you have any concerns about your diet or health, please see NHS guidance (https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/) or contact your local GP.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
We will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.

If you join the study, the data collected for the study will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of Nottingham who are organising the research. They may also be looked at by authorised people to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and we will do our best to meet this duty.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**, secured within the University of Nottingham. The University of Nottingham's Automated Transcription Service will be used to process audio from the interview. Any information about you which leaves the University will have your name and address removed and a pseudonym (another name) will be used for both you and your dog(s) so that you cannot be recognised from it. Pseudonimised data may also be stored in data archives for future researchers interested in this area.

Your personal data (address, telephone number) will be kept for 7 years after publication so that we are able to contact you about the findings of the study *and possible follow-up studies* (unless you advise us that you do not wish to be contacted). All identifiable research data will be kept securely for 7 years. After this time your data will be disposed of securely. During this time all precautions will be taken by all those involved to maintain your confidentiality, only members of the research team will have access to your personal data.

Although what you say in the interview is confidential, should you disclose anything to us which we feel puts you or anyone else at any risk, we may feel it necessary to report this to the appropriate persons.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you withdraw then the information collected so far may not be possible to extract and erase for 4 weeks after completion of the interview and this information may still be used in the project analysis.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the study will be published in Ms. Ciecierska-Holmes PhD thesis, journal articles, conference papers and media posts. We will ask for your consent to publish the photos/videos you share as part of the food diary. As with other data, you can withdraw these from the research within 4 weeks after completion of the interview. In the reporting of any research findings, you and your dog(s) will be referred to using different names in order to protect your privacy and it will not be possible to identify you in any of the published photos or videos. If this is likely, these photos or videos will not be published to ensure your privacy.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by the University of Nottingham and the University of Adelaide and is being funded by the University of Adelaide.

Who has reviewed the study?
All research in the University of Nottingham is looked at by a group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee (REC), to protect your interests. This study has received a Favourable Ethical Opinion by the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details
Researcher: Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes, PhD Candidate, University of Adelaide and University of Nottingham, email: Natalia.ciecierska-homes@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor/PI: Professor Pru Hobson-West, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, email: Pru.Hobson-west@nottingham.ac.uk

Dr Melanie Jordan, Research Ethics & Integrity Officer, REC Chair & Associate Professor in Criminology. email: melanie.jordan@nottingham.ac.uk, +44 (0)115 74 87284/ 95 15410

Section 2

Privacy information for Research Participants
For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data
We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are for Ms Ciecierska-Holmes PhD study on raw feeding for dogs.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR
The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

How long we keep your data
The University may store your identifiable research data for a minimum period of 7 years after publication. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include a pseudonymisation procedure for both yours and your dog's names.

Who we share your data with
Extracts of your data may be disclosed in published works that are posted online for use by the scientific community. Your data may also be stored indefinitely on external data repositories (e.g., the UK Data Archive) and be further processed for archiving purposes in the public interest, or for historical, scientific or statistical purposes. It may also move with the researcher who collected your data to another institution in the future.

Item 6: Participant information sheet (Phase 2_AUS_University of Adelaide)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Raw feeding for dogs
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2022-048
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Rachel Ankeny
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes
STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD candidate in Sociology

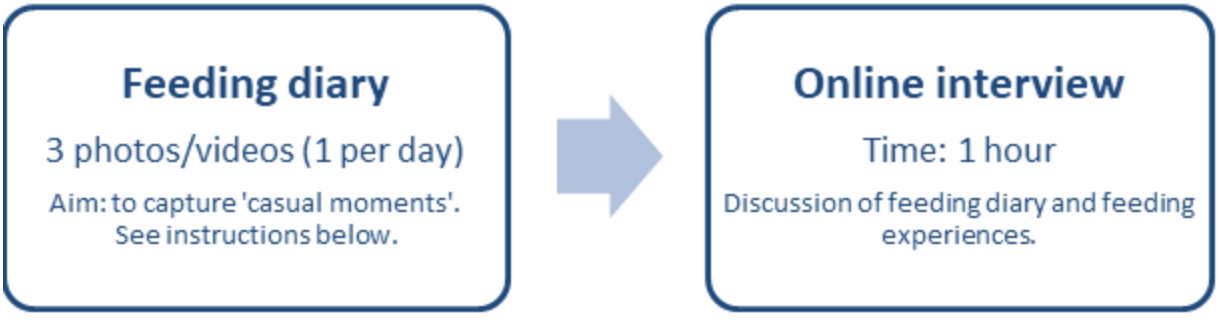
Dear Participant,
You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
What we feed our dogs is important for many owners and guardians. In recent years, increasing numbers of owners are feeding their dogs 'alternative diets', including variations of raw meat-based diets. This project is exploring dietary shifts in human and non-human animal companions. The primary aim is to better understand the values, practices and ethics of dog owners who feed raw meat-based diets, while themselves eating a plant-based diet. To conduct this research, we are carrying out individual interviews and feeding diaries with raw feeders.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes. This research will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy jointly awarded by the University of Adelaide and University of Nottingham, UK, under the supervision of Professor Rachel Ankeny, Dr Michelle Phillipov, Dr Pru Hobson-West and Professor Kate Millar.

Why am I being invited to participate?
You are being invited as you are a self-identifying vegetarian or vegan, who predominantly feeds your dog(s) a raw meat-based diet, and are over the age of 18.

What am I being invited to do?
You are being invited to carry out a feeding diary followed by an online interview.



Feeding diary instructions:
We would like you to take 1 photo/short video per day (up to 1 minute). If you aren't able to do this on a particular day, you can continue on the next day you are able to. Here are some points we would like you to keep in mind:

- **What to include**: We're interested in both your own and your dog's experiences of raw feeding, preparation and mealtimes. Entries could include dog food or food preparation, your dog, mealtimes, your own food etc.
- **Don't worry about aesthetics**: The photos/videos don't need to 'look good'. We want to capture casual moments that we can discuss together.
- **Once you have your entries**: Please upload these to your computer if you'd like to share them during the discussion. Alternatively, you can email them to Natalia before the interview.

Online interview instructions:
Natalia will arrange an online interview with you at a mutually convenient time lasting around 1 hour. This will begin by discussing your feeding diary to better understand your feeding practices followed by some questions about your views on raw feeding and your own food choices. With your consent, the discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed, removing your names and any personal information so you cannot be identified.

OPTIONAL: follow-up interview for participants in Adelaide and Melbourne
In addition to the food diary and interview, participants living in the Adelaide will be invited to take part in a follow-up interview taking place at your home around your dog's mealtime. This is completely optional – if you take part in the online interview, you do not have to take part in the follow-up interview. The interview would take place with Natalia, who would be present with you while you go about your usual feeding activities. This is to give you freedom to demonstrate various aspects of raw feeding. It isn't to judge how you are feeding your dog(s), but rather to help understand the process and encourage discussion. If you are eligible and interested in taking part, Natalia will discuss this with you during the online interview.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?
Feeding diary and interview: 1:15 hours
Optional follow-up interview with Adelaide participants: 30-60 minutes

Participants will not be paid for taking part in the study. We are offering a $20 pet shop gift voucher for all participants who take part in the online interview.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
For the feeding diary and online interview, the biggest inconvenience to you is in terms of time. This is why we suggest a simple photo/video per day is enough for the feeding diary task. Please not, the feeding diary activity may encourage reflections about your own diet. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage, please stop the activity.

For in-person follow-up interviews with **Adelaide participants**, there is a risk of direct or airborne transmission of Covid-19. Health recommendations from the South Australian government will be followed at all times and communicated to you prior to the interview. If you have any questions about this, please do not hesitate to contact the research team. You may also experience inconvenience in terms of time. This is why the interview has been kept to one meeting and won't take more than 30-60 minutes

of your time. If you feel that the presence of the researcher in your home is intrusive, we could also conduct the interview in the garden. In the case of any adverse events, the HREC Secretariat will be contacted immediately.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?
There are no immediate benefits to you or your dog from taking part in this study. However, the information from this study will help towards understanding consumer decision-making around raw feeding for dogs, a trend which has become ever more popular in recent years. With so many new products available as well as diet options, this is relevant for understanding the role owners play in the health and well-being of their dogs.

Can I withdraw from the project?
Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time before the completion of the project.

What will happen to my information?
Confidentiality and privacy: Instead of your name, a pseudonym will be used throughout the research. While all efforts will be made to remove any information that might identify you, as the sample size is small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed.

Storage: Only the researchers at the University of Adelaide and University of Nottingham will have access to the audio files and transcripts. The records will be kept in a secure facility for at least 7 years.

Publishing: The study will form part of Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes' PhD thesis. In addition, the information will be used in publications, journal articles, media articles and conference presentations. You and your dog(s) will not be identified in the publications. We will ask for your consent to publish the photos/videos you share as part of the food diary. In order to protect your privacy, it will not be possible to identify you in any of the published photos or videos. If this is likely, these will not be published.

Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
In case you have any questions about the project, please contact:

Professor Rachel Ankeny, Principal Investigator, rachel.ankeny@adelaide.edu.au
Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes, Student Researcher, natalia.ciecierska-holmes@adelaide.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2022-048). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research

involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:
Phone: +61 8 8313 6028
Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au
Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?
If you would like to participate, please contact Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes to arrange an appointment. You can reach her via email natalia.ciecierska-holmes@adelaide.edu.au or telephone (add later). You will also need to read through and return a signed consent form. If you do not already have this form, please contact Natalia.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Rachel Ankeny, Principal Investigator
Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes, PhD Candidate

Item 7: Consent form (Phase 1_UK_University of Nottingham)

School of Sociology and Social Policy
Participant Consent Form

Name of Study:
Raw Feeding for Dogs in the UK and Australia

Name of Researcher(s):
Natalia Ciecierska-Holmes, PhD Candidate, University of Adelaide and University of Nottingham

Professor Pru Hobson-West, Primary Supervisor, University of Nottingham
Professor Kate Millar, Secondary Supervisor, University of Nottingham
Professor Rachel Ankeny, Primary Supervisor, University of Adelaide
Dr Michelle Phillipov, Secondary Supervisor, University of Adelaide

Name of Participant:

By signing this form I confirm that (please initial the appropriate boxes)**:**	**Initials**
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	
Taking part in this study involves a 3-day food diary and an interview completed by the participant that will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be transcribed as text and stored securely for 7 years after publication.	
That data from interview audio recordings may be transcribed by the University of Nottingham's internal transcription service.	
Personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.	
My words can be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. However, these will be anonymised and your real name will not be used.	
Photos or videos taken as part of the food diary and shared with the study team can be published in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	
I give permission for the anonymised data that I provide to be used for future research and learning.	

I agree to take part in the study

_____ _____ _____
Name of Participant Signature Date

_____ _____ _____
Researcher's name Signature Date

Item 8: Consent form (Phase 2_AUS_University of Adelaide)

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	**Raw feeding for dogs**
Ethics Approval Number:	**Researcher to insert this number (allocated once the project has been approved.**

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.

3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.

4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

5. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.

6. I agree to:

   Be audio recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

   The publication of my feeding diary photos/videos ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project within 7 days of participating in the project.

8. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in a book/journal article/PhD thesis/news article/conference presentations/website.

9. I would like to receive a summary of the project findings upon submission of the thesis

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.

11. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

12. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: Signature: Date:

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

Interview topics and questions
Food diary and semi-structured interview (online)

Introduction: (ca. 10 mins)
Interviewer introduces themselves, the aims of the study and ground rules:

- You are free to state you feel uncomfortable and stop the interview at any time
- The interview will be audio-recorded and pseudonymised after the interview
- We're talking about the relationships between your own diets and your dogs' diet. The aim of the study is to expand understandings of raw feeding by exploring dog owner's perspectives. No right or wrong answers.

Participant is invited to introduce themselves and their dog(s).

- Could you introduce yourself and tell me about your dog(s).
- How long have you had him/her/them?
- How would you describe them? Prompt: what breed are they?
- How would you describe your relationship? What are you responsible for?

Section 1: food diary photo/video elicitation (ca. 15 mins)

- I'd like you to show me any photos or videos you took for the feeding diary activity. Can you tell me more about what you were doing at this point? Why did you decide to take this photo?
- Can you tell me about the food you prepared? How did you do this?
    - If homemade: What ingredients did you use? Where did you get these from?
    - If commercial: What ingredients were in the food? Where did you get this from?
- How did your dog behave around mealtimes? What were your impressions?
- Can you tell me more about how you felt at this point? What was your experience of preparing food for your dog? How did you feel about handling and preparing raw meat and/or animal products?

Section 2: semi-structured interview (ca. 1 hour)
Topic 1: raw feeding background and context

- How long have you been raw feeding?
    - Prompt: What made you start feeding this diet? Other diets?
- Why do you feed raw? What do you think the benefits of feeding raw are?
- Where do you get useful information about raw feeding? Prompts: e.g. online, vet, packaging, friends and family
- Do your friends and family express their opinions about what you feed your dogs?
- Some people argue that there are risks with raw feeding, such as incomplete nutrition or health and safety issues with handling raw meat. What do you think about this?
- Some people talk are concerned about the environmental impact of raw pet food. What do you think about this?

Topic 2: Owner's plant-based dietary choices and food values

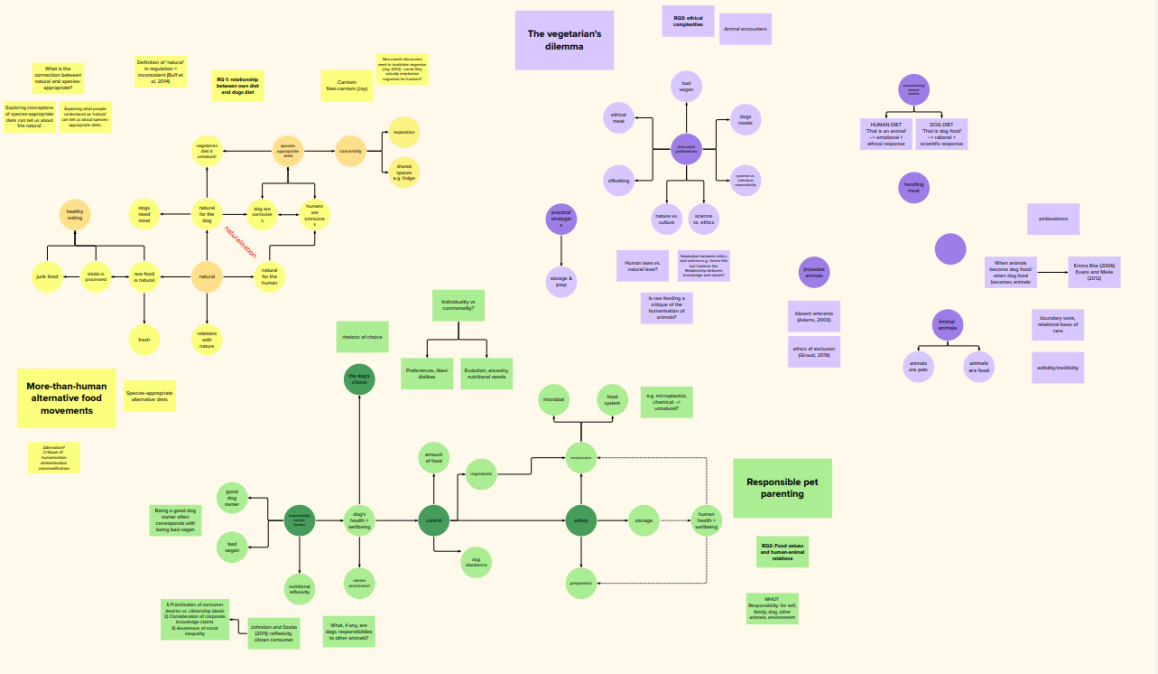
- I'd like you to tell me a bit more about your own diet. How would you describe your diet?
    - Why do you follow a plant-based/vegetarian/vegan diet?
    - What factors influence what food you purchase? E.g. organic, sustainable
- Have you ever found feeding your dog raw difficult for some reason?
- I'd like to know what healthy eating means to you. Is this the same for you and your dog(s)?
    - How would you compare your own diet and your dog's diet?
- What do you think your dog would feed themselves if they were given the opportunity? Would they eat raw or processed?
- We've talked a lot about your dog(s). How would you describe your relationship with/responsibility for other animals?

Wrap up:

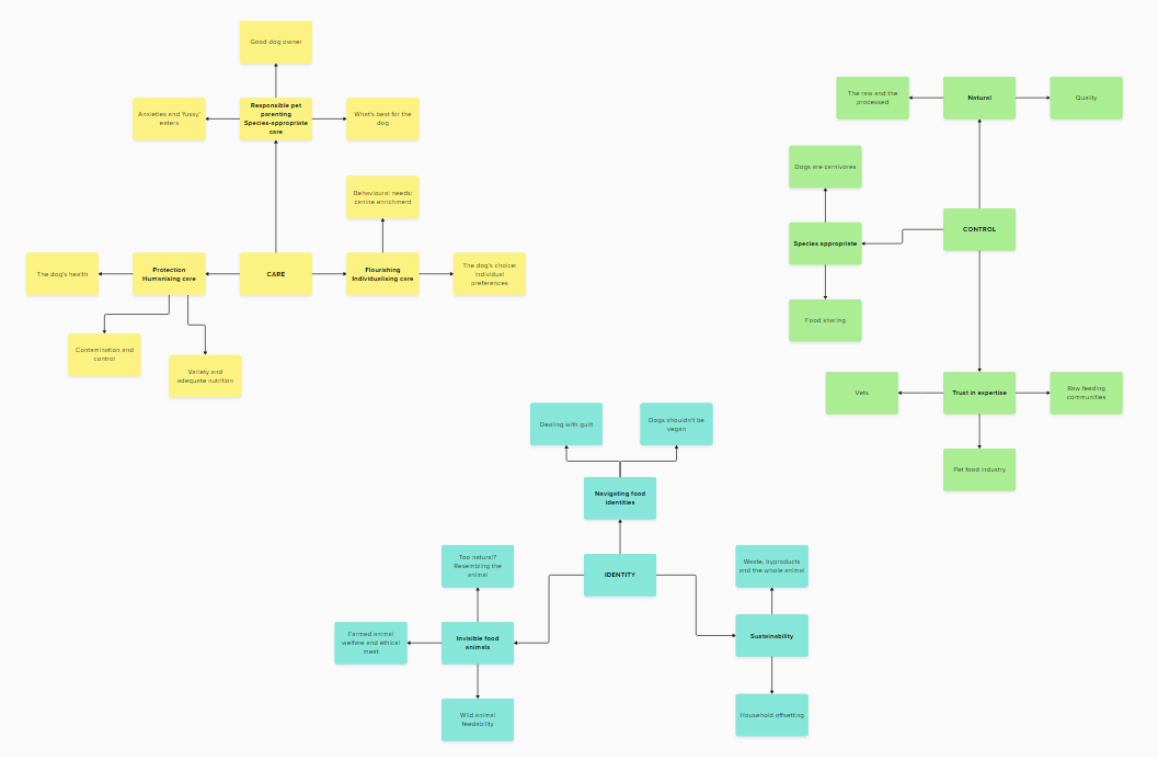
- Is there anything else that you'd like to mention that we haven't covered? Do you have any questions?
- How did you find the food diary experience?
- Check demographic info: age, gender, level of education, occupation
- Check: where did you hear about the study?
- One final thing: pseudonyms for you and your dog(s)
- Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix 3: Visual map of themes made in Mural

Item 1: Visual map of initial themes



Item 2: Visual map of reviewed themes



Item 3: Visual map of names of themes