

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Edge Hill University		
Unit of Assessment: D34 - Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Rethinking relationships with animals as food, companions and entertainment		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Prof. Claire Parkinson (previously Molloy)	Professor Culture, Communication and Screen Studies. Co-director, Centre for Human Animal Studies	1.9.1999 – 28.10.2007 1.8.2012 – continuing
Dr Richard Twine	Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences. Co-director, Centre for Human Animal Studies	2015- continuing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The social and cultural importance of human-animal relationships is often overlooked despite the reliance on animals as food, companions, workers, symbols, experimental subjects and their use in entertainment and media. Professor Claire Parkinson's research on media, culture, communications and multispecies relationships has led to impact in three key areas: i) informing business, charity, and advocacy groups' digital content, public communication and campaign strategies ii) informing government policy iii) raising public awareness of issues related to food and companion animals and animals used in entertainment. The research has led to major promotional and advertising campaigns related to veganism, environmental and animal advocacy, influenced the long-term strategy of The Vegan Society and informed the public and policy debate on dangerous dogs.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Claire Parkinson (previously Molloy) was employed at EHU as a Senior Lecturer from 1999 until 2007 and since 2012 when she was appointed as Professor of Film, Television and Digital Media. Since 2001, her work has been significant in bringing together approaches from media, communications and cultural studies and critical animal studies (CAS). Parkinson's work on anthropomorphism and animals, first published in 2001, has sought to reorient academic debate on the topic. She returned to the topic in 2016 to develop a new critical framework that understands anthropomorphism as contextual, differentiated, and situational. Through this later work Parkinson has called for a more nuanced and pragmatic understanding of anthropomorphism at a time of environmental crisis [1]. The work was presented internationally at keynote addresses in Australia (ISAZ 2018), Spain (EACAS, 2019), Germany (ISSISR, 2019) and various invited talks in the UK. Parkinson contends that the mediation of another animal's experience is always anthropomorphic and can lead to problematic misunderstandings but proposes that anthropomorphism can also be usefully deployed to develop empathetic connections that bridge the distance between Western consumers and other species [1, 4]. This argument is fully expanded in her latest monograph, <i>Anthropomorphism, Animals and Mediated Encounters</i>, that draws on political economy analysis and ecofeminist approaches to propose a reconceptualization of anthropomorphism which, she argues, intervenes in the practices that govern the material lives of other species [1]. Her work in this and other publications has analysed the public reception of messages about animals and the environment to provide key insights into the mobilisation of affective, ethical, and activist engagements [1, 2, 4, 5].</p> <p>Parkinson's work since 2012 has revealed how media shape public understanding of animal agriculture, animal welfare, ethics and food practices [1, 4]. Her work on anthropomorphism and the public reception of media messages about food animals informed the development and methodology of an 18-month mixed methods research project commissioned and funded by The Vegan Society [2]. The 'Pathways to Veganism' project was undertaken by a team from the</p>		

Centre for Human Animal Studies and led by Parkinson (PI). The research examined the public reception of health, environmental and animal ethics messages associated with veganism and the cultural meanings attached to meat, dairy and other animal products. From 35 key findings, the research made eight recommendations to aid the communication of vegan messages to non-vegan audiences and a further follow-on report detailed the findings of the research where it examined responses to vegan messages about animal ethics in mainstream and social media. Amongst these, the research found that non-vegans were more receptive to vegan messages about health and environmentalism than animal ethics, and that family dynamics play a major role in sustaining a vegan lifestyle. The research also produced important insights about reception in relation to age and gender and the credible communication of pro-vegan messages. The follow-on report on the reception of animal ethics messages made thirteen recommendations, identified a hierarchy of animal imagery, found that participants commonly anthropomorphised parent-child animal images and identified with narratives that featured parent/child dynamics, and that they actively disengage from distressing animal imagery and pro-vegan narratives designed to elicit guilt.

For the last twelve years, Parkinson's research has examined the use of animals in entertainment. She produced the first sustained academic work on animal stars which has been more recently extended to argue that forms of animal stardom influence trends in pet keeping that have impacts on animal welfare and biodiversity [3]. Parkinson's research on food and companion animals has provided important insights into how human-relationships function to reinforce stereotypes and problematic constructions of human social identity [1, 6]; how film and other media portrayals shape practices and public debates on companion and wild animals; and the impacts of pet keeping practices on human and animal welfare and wellbeing [1, 3].

Parkinson has been involved in research on dangerous dogs since 2004 when she completed the first study on media coverage of dog attacks and dog fighting in the 1980s and 1990s. This research was presented as conference papers in 2006, written up as book chapters in 2007 and subsequently published in two edited collections in 2011 where Parkinson argues that press reporting directly impacted legislation (Dangerous Dogs Act 1991) and reinforced marginalised social identities [7]. This resulted in the demonization of human social groups and dog types but has not been effective in reducing dog bites. She has argued that 'stock images' of 'dangerous dogs' used by media and government organisations and ambiguity over the definition of the pit bull terrier 'type' have reinforced public misunderstanding of dog bite risk. Parkinson returned to this research to give an invited talk at University of Manchester in 2013 on a history of press representations of dangerous dogs from 1970- 1991. In a publication the same year [6] she examined how pit bull 'fighting dogs' are represented in reality television.

3. References to the research

- 1) Parkinson, C., (2019) *Anthropomorphism, Animals and Mediated Encounters*, Routledge: London. [Research monograph]
- 2) Parkinson, C., Twine, R & Griffin, N. (2019) *Pathways to Veganism: Exploring Effective Messages in Vegan Transition: Final Report*. EHU. 141 pages. [Peer review of the report by three academic reviewers was commissioned by The Vegan Society]
https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/20745213/Pathways_Final_Report_June_2019_Parkinson_and_Twine.pdf
- 3) Parkinson, C (2019) 'Animal stars: a critical view of creaturely celebrity' *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities* Special Edition on Stars and Stardom, 2019 (1), pp.40-51. [Peer reviewed journal article]
- 4) Parkinson, C (2018) 'Animal bodies and embodied visibility' in *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, Volume 44, December 2018, pp 51-64. [Peer reviewed journal article]
https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/36986293/ANTENNAE_ISSUE_46_pages_52_65.pdf
- 5) Molloy, C (2016) 'Propaganda, Activism and Environmental Nostalgia' in Molloy, C. & Tzioumakis, Y, (eds) (2016) *Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics*, Routledge, London, pp.139-150.
- 6) Molloy, C., (2013) 'Animal cruelty and reality television: a critical review' in Brewster, M. & Reyes, C. (eds) *Animal Cruelty: An interdisciplinary approach*, Carolina Academic Press, North Carolina. [Peer reviewed chapter for edited collection]

- 7) Molloy, C. (2011) 'Contested meanings and canine bodies' in Carter, B. & Charles, N. (eds) *Human and Other Animals: Critical Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke & New York, pp.93-111. [Peer reviewed edited collection]

4. Details of the impact

- 1) Informing business, charity, and advocacy groups' digital content, public communication and campaign strategies about sustainable choices and veganism

The 'Pathways to Veganism' project offered a series of recommendations for advocacy groups, health professionals and campaigners. Veganism has grown considerably in the UK since 2014; however, it was unclear which methods of vegan outreach are successful [Dii]. The 'Pathways' research was designed to directly address the need for greater clarity around effective vegan messaging. This research was of particular interest to The Vegan Society, whose core work involves campaigns, education, advocacy, outreach, trademarking, and work with policy makers (Di). The Vegan Society Research Officer confirms that the 'Pathways' research findings have "*informed The Vegan Society policy, future organisational strategy and research, as well as individual team plans*" [G]. The research was key to the development of campaigns in 2019 and 2020. In a letter, The Vegan Society Chief Executive explains: "*The findings from the research have directly informed much of our campaign work including our Vegan & Thriving and Future Normal campaigns. As a result of the research we have a much improved understanding of perceptions towards veganism, and have been able to develop specific messaging to reach specific audiences*" [F]. The 2019 'Vegan and Thriving' campaign, developed as part of the 75th celebration of the founding of The Vegan Society was a result of the research recommendations that The Vegan Society should focus on plant-based nutrition, develop easily adaptable meal plans, work with health professionals, and consider family dynamics, to better communicate with the public about veganism (Diii). The campaign referenced the research findings (Div) and addressed research recommendations by: updating and expanding vegan recipes; working with health professionals to communicate pro-vegan messages; and using examples of vegan sportspeople. ITN created a news package with The Vegan Society that featured messages identified by the research to be important to the positive public communication of veganism to non-vegan audiences [G]. The Vegan Society CEO states: "*The Vegan & Thriving campaign achieved our objective of targeting an older audience with positive messages about the nutritional quality of a vegan diet. Our campaign video received 10k views, and the website received 13.5k unique visitors during the 6 weeks of live activity. Our qualitative feedback shows this information was well received and perceptions towards veganism were positively influenced*" [F].

Due to the research on the reception of pro-vegan animal ethics messages, The Vegan Society invested in the national Future Normal campaign, launched in 2020. The Vegan Society Research Officer confirms that the content for the Future Normal campaign "*was developed from the research findings of the Pathways project which provided key insights into how non-vegans respond to images of different animals [...] how audiences perceive 'emotional manipulation' [...], their feelings about vegan celebrities, the types of narratives that non-vegan audiences identify with or reject, the contexts in which anthropomorphism functions positively, and the importance of family dynamics and parent child imagery in conveying animal ethics messages*" [G]. Parkinson and Twine also provided short think pieces for the campaign. The Vegan Society CEO confirms that "*The Future Normal campaign achieved our objective of reaching those who considered themselves to be animal lovers but are not yet vegan with messages of empathy and compassion. Our campaign film had almost 2 million views, and the website received 78k unique visitors during the 2 months of live activity*" [F].

The findings from the Pathways to Veganism project were also used to create a toolkit for advocacy groups and campaigners. The toolkit focuses specifically on recommendations for pro-vegan and plant-based stories and messaging. By October 2020, the toolkit had been directly requested by 24 vegan and animal advocacy organisations. The Executive Director of Animal Equality UK states that "*The comprehensive 'Vegan Pathways Toolkit' includes many useful insights that are especially relevant to Animal Equality's existing and upcoming projects*" [J]. As a result of the toolkit and, following a meeting with Parkinson, Animal Equality have made amendments to campaigns. These changes include adjustments to the 'LoveVeg' initiative: "As

per the toolkit provided by Edge Hill researchers, the new and improved version will provide relatable examples of challenges that consumers may face when transitioning to plant-based and offer solutions. It will also receive endorsement from scientists and sportspeople” [J]. Other changes focus on anthropomorphism in advocacy messaging “particularly regarding chickens and aquatic animals, who are killed in the largest numbers, yet are typically harder to evoke public sympathy for” [J]. Based on insights from Parkinson’s work on anthropomorphism Animal Equality UK made changes to a campaign to change legislation to better protect aquatic animals at the time of killing [J]. In a letter, the Executive Director states about the toolkit: “These are just some of the changes that we have made in a matter of months and I expect we will make many more thanks to the insights that we received through this report” [J].

Since 2015, Parkinson has advised Planet Shine Limited, a media organisation which specialises in work with high profile ethical brands. Parkinson attended a series of meetings with key personnel from the company to provide summaries and presentations of her research on anthropomorphism, mobilising engagement with animal and environmental messages and the finding of the ‘Pathways’ research. The CEO of Planet Shine has stated that [H] “*The research to which we have had access has been invaluable in that it provides both academic and scientific substance to our creative process which helps to engage our client base, growing our business and increasing revenue, and which ultimately means that our campaigns and film projects perform well*” [H]. Parkinson’s research was used by the company in the development of a series of films for Quorn Foods which had a global PR reach of 630 million people. Findings from the interim report of the Pathways to Veganism project that demonstrated the requirement for pro-vegan messages to communicate the ease of finding vegan food and recipes to address the perception of inconvenience were used to inform the development of a Hippeas x Veganuary film project [H]). The Pathways research findings also informed a feature length film pitch for Quorn foods, and a series of short films for The Vegan Society [H]. The Hippeas x Veganuary film project achieved 35,000 views. Parkinson’s research on mobilising audience engagement also informed a film project for the Silentnight Eco Mattress range which achieved 22,000 views. Parkinson’s research has also been the impetus behind the company’s recent rebranding. The CEO states that the rebrand is “*a direct result of Professor Parkinson’s guidance and advice*”; a result of which is that the company is now “*targeted to reach 1 million monthly visitors by the end of this year*” [H].

2) Informing government policy on ‘dangerous dogs’.

In 2018, Parkinson submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Dangerous Dogs: Breed Specific Legislation inquiry. Underpinned by her research on dangerous dogs Parkinson’s evidence detailed why the legislation was problematic from its inception, why and how it had failed to protect the public from dog bites and dog bite fatalities [A]. Parkinson’s submission was cited in the committee’s final report as evidence that “*Since the Act was introduced, injury and fatality rates from dog attacks have increased*” which brought into question “*the adequacy of the Government’s approach to tackling dangerous dogs*” (B p.5). Several of the recommendations made by Parkinson in her evidence were included in the final committee report conclusions and recommendations. These included recommending a reconsideration of Section 1 of the Act, specifically in relation to euthanizing a dog due to how they ‘look’ [B p.30], to allow rehoming centres to rehome section 1 dogs [B p.31], education of children and dog owners, and coordinated communications [B p.31]. The committee report led directly to a Government commissioned independent review of the effectiveness of DDA1991 and dog control legislation (C). The government agreed to action the recommendations on the education of children, dog owners and coordinated communications [C recommendations 5 and 6].

3) Raising public awareness of issues relating to food and companion animals and animals used in exhibition and entertainment.

In 2011, Parkinson was invited to be an advisor to the Animal History Museum, Los Angeles. Informed by her research on dangerous dogs and ineffective legislation, Parkinson worked with the Museum to create an online public collection of photos and essays that challenged media representations of pit bulls and their humans. This began as a social media competition and

eventually became an online public gallery in 2014. The Executive Director of the museum explains that “*Professor Parkinson has published research on the failures of breed specific legislation (BSL) and the representation of pit bull terriers in the media. The issue of pit bull terrier representations was one of the key topics that the Animal History Museum explored. The museum ran a social media competition which asked pit bull owners to send in pictures and stories about their families and dogs. The aim of the competition was to change the way in which the public perceives pit bull terriers and break the stereotype. The competition had over a hundred entries and received more than one thousand comments on Facebook.*” Based on her extensive research on animals in film, Parkinson advised the Animal History Museum on exhibits related to film, media and animals which included working with the curator of the ‘Dearest Creature’ exhibition in 2015. The founder and Executive Director of the museum states: “*we benefitted greatly from her expertise*” and notes “*particularly her work on the use of live animals in film and the treatment and ethics of animal use, and the history of wildlife filmmaking and natural history documentaries. Claire was the ultimate scholar [...] her scholarship was accessible to our very wide audience*”.

Based on her research on media and animal agriculture Parkinson gave talks at Green Party Conferences in 2013 and 2014 on how food marketing sustains problematic narratives about animal agriculture, the practices of which are damaging to human and animal health and wellbeing and to the environment (via carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, water and land usage). These talks were invited and given on behalf of The Vegan Society. The Vegan Society Research Officer confirms “*Both talks were very well received, and the proposals put forward enabled The Vegan Society to strengthen relationships with Green Party representatives*” [see letter J]. In 2018, Parkinson was interviewed about her research on Dangerous Dogs legislation for Knowing Animals, a premier animal studies podcast with an international audience [I]. This podcast widened considerably the international public audience for Parkinson’s research on dangerous dogs.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Parkinson, C., (2018) Written evidence submitted to Parliamentary Inquiry ‘Dangerous Dogs: Breed Specific Legislation’ (DDL0200)
<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/84257.html>
- B. House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Controlling dangerous dogs Ninth Report of Session 2017–19
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvfru/1040/1040.pdf>
- C. Government response to EFRA report
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvfru/1892/189202.htm>
- D. The Vegan Society website:
 - i) <https://www.vegansociety.com/whats-new/news/social-relationships-and-health-found-most-effective-vegan-advocacy> (Press release)
 - ii) <https://www.vegansociety.com/about-us/research/research-projects/pathways-veganism> (Press release)
 - iii) <https://www.vegansociety.com/news/blog/vegan-and-thriving> (Interview with The Vegan Society Head of Campaigns, Policy and Research and Senior Communications and Campaigns Officer)
 - iv) <https://www.vegansociety.com/get-involved/campaigns/vegan-thriving/facts>
- E. Statement from Animal History Museum founder and executive director
- F. Statement from The Vegan Society CEO
- G. Statement from The Vegan Society Research Officer
- H. Statement from Planet Shine CEO
- I. Statement from Knowing Animals podcast producer
- J. Statement from Animal Equality Executive Director