

How do people with animal companions and without respond to movement communications?

Research Report 2:
Understanding narrative interventions



Animal
Think Tank

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Introduction

Narrative strategy is about recognising that people are persuaded by different messages, stories and narratives, dependent on the ideas they already hold about other animals.

In this study, we set out to understand the helpful and harmful narratives people draw on when they think and talk about other animals, and how different messages can **activate** their most compassionate, solution-focused thinking while keeping them open, curious and willing to stay in the conversation.

Our aim is to identify messages that amplify hopeful, change-affirming narratives and crowd out harmful ones, so that people hear themselves speaking positively about changing how we treat other animals. Over time, defensive stories shaped by harmful industries and outdated ideas can lose their dominance, and what feels like common sense in the public's understanding of animal freedom can shift in a more compassionate direction.

Viewing the UK public as a **spectrum of allies**, there's a key segment our movement can focus on: 'persuadables' – those ambivalent or conflicted about animal freedom, yet potentially open to change. They're likely to make up the largest portion of the public, so it's crucial to understand what kinds of narratives and communication approaches they find persuasive.

Previous Animal Think Tank research found that many active supporters of animal freedom were initially inspired by their relationship with another animal.

Building on this finding, we explored whether sharing a home with animal companions influences openness to animal freedom messaging compared to those without animal companions.

In 2024, we conducted focus groups with **people who live with animal companions and those who do not** to:

- understand the helpful and harmful narratives each group holds about other animals, and how these differ
- identify which narratives are most persuasive for engaging each group
- draw practical insights for animal freedom movement communications

This report is one of two connected reports on how people with and without animal companions respond to movement communications, with this report focusing on narrative interventions, and [Understanding the journey to animal freedom](#) applying a [journey model](#) lens to the same research. The *Understanding these responses* sections of this report are informed by the combined analysis of shared research across both reports.

Methodology

Animal Think Tank conducted six online focus groups with members of the public, recruited via a research agency. Three groups included participants living with animal companions, and three groups without animal companions.

Each group had 4–5 participants, diverse in genders, ethnicity, and age. Sessions lasted around two hours.

Facilitators introduced a series of narrative prompts, meaning short spoken messages framed in different ways of talking about other animals and the possibility of change. Participants were invited to discuss each prompt in turn, while the facilitator remained neutral.

Each narrative intervention prompted a range of responses across the two groups. Within each group, and often within each individual, the same framing could evoke both helpful and harmful narratives. Participants might express empathy and curiosity in one moment, and defensiveness or justification in the next.

No narrative is without tension. However, using a narrative framework, we identified which narrative interventions were persuasive, which needed more careful framing, and which were likely to be unhelpful or best avoided across the two groups.

Analytical framework

We analysed participants' responses, looking at three areas:

1. Narratives brought to the surface

We looked at the helpful and harmful narratives about other animals that each prompt surfaced.

For example, did people lean on ideas such as 'other animals exist to serve humans', or did they describe other animals as 'thinking, feeling individuals'?

2. Justifications people used

We examined how people justified current practices. For example, did they say a practice is still necessary or no longer necessary? Did they talk about change as possible or too hard? And did they accept the information in the prompts, or dismiss it and criticise the messenger?

3. Mindsets and emotional responses

We paid attention to people's overall mindset and emotional tone.

For example, were they curious, open-minded and engaged in the discussion, or did they shut down or react with anger, frustration or defensiveness?

Key takeaways for the animal freedom movement

Some clear takeaways for the animal freedom movement's communications emerge from this study. Alongside the key insights, narrative-by-narrative findings and recommendations, these takeaways highlight key principles for how we create persuasive messages about other animals, how we connect with different audiences, and how we can encourage people to think about change.

Match narratives to the audience and where they are on their journey

Different audiences hold different helpful and harmful narratives about other animals and about change, so the same narrative can bring very different ideas to the surface. Noticing who you are speaking to and where they are on their journey can guide which narratives are most likely to land well.

Work with people's identities to keep them open and engaged

Everyone wants to be seen as a 'good person', whether they identify as an 'animal lover' or as a 'meat-eater'. Choosing narratives that allow people to feel accepted and unashamed helps them stay open, reflect, and feel able to change their mind, rather than shutting down to defend their identity.

Centre other animals and deepen the narratives people hold about them

Use narratives that keep other animals in focus as thinking, feeling beings with rich inner lives, and that highlight our similarities and shared world. Build vivid, resonant stories about farmed and tested-on animals so that, over time, they feel as real to people as animal companions and wildlife.

Talk about change as social progress we make together

To avoid people feeling personally criticised or under pressure to act immediately, talk about change in the context of social progress: something we do collectively over time, positioning animal freedom as a social justice issue alongside other issues we already see as part of social progress.

Grow helpful narratives to soften deep harmful ones

Resistance is rooted in two deep narratives: that other animals exist to serve humans, and that eating animal products is necessary. Use narratives that grow their opposites, that other animals live for themselves and humans can thrive on plant-based food; over time, hearing themselves say these things can help people loosen their grip on the old ideas.

Communicate a vivid vision of animal freedom

At the moment, most people can only picture slightly kinder versions of the current system, with high-welfare tweaks. People need to see a clear picture of what a different world could look and feel like, where other animals are no longer used but are living for themselves; sharing this vision can help lift imaginations beyond 'high welfare' and open up space for deeper change.

Key insights

1

The most persuasive narratives for both groups centre who other animals are



Narratives that centre animals' abilities and inner lives are among the most consistently helpful across both groups. Highlighting other animals' emotions, relationships, minds, and abilities prompts people to talk positively about them and to express empathy, curiosity, and solution-focused ideas, with relatively low reactance.

2

Identity threat is the main reactance trigger for both groups



When a narrative feels like a criticism of who people are, whether as a 'good person' or 'animal lover' in the animal companion group, or as a 'meat-eater' or 'consumer' in the non-animal companion group, they move quickly into defensiveness, justification and futility.

3

Across interventions, the same deep harmful narratives keep resurfacing



Two dominant harmful narratives underpin limiting and defensive responses: that other animals exist to serve a purpose, and that eating animal products is necessary for survival. Together they make using other animals feel unavoidable and leave no real alternative. These narratives reappear even when people express strong care for animals.

4

'High-welfare' justifications are a dominant escape route from discomfort



High-welfare justifications allow people, especially in the animal companion group, to say they care about other animals while continuing to use them. This move shows up across multiple narratives and becomes the default answer whenever not using other animals starts to surface, making high-welfare a sticking point for deeper change.

5

People avoid talking directly about farmed and tested-on animals



Both groups steered away from farmed animals and animals used in testing, and were more willing to talk about animal companions, wildlife, and animals used in entertainment, zoos, and hunting. When farmed animals did come up, talk focused on people's food choices and justifications, rather than on farmed animals' experiences.

Key insights

6

Social progress narratives make change feel possible rather than threatening



Narratives which talk about social progress, such as 'A kinder, fairer society' and 'social progress', help people talk positively about change. Their collective framing and longer-term view of change distance people from feeling personally criticised or under immediate pressure, and keep them more open to exploring possibilities and solutions for improving life for other animals.

7

Speciesism is unfamiliar, pushing too far too fast can backfire



Speciesism is a new and unfamiliar term, so moving quickly into direct comparisons with human oppressions often confuses people and triggers reactance. Without a shared understanding of speciesism as a system we have inherited rather than designed, terms like 'speciesist' are heard as accusations about individual identity.

8

Narratives about change land better when the 'why' is already in place



People without animal companions tend to be less familiar with other animals, and less aware of the harms they experience. As a result, messages that move too quickly to calling for change are more likely to trigger defensiveness. People with animal companions are more likely to already have that context in place, making them more receptive to narratives about the need to change the status quo.

9

Narrative framing that gives people reflective space is more persuasive



When messages are framed in ways that invite reflection, questions, and space to join the dots, people are more likely to stay open and curious. When framed in ways that feel heavy-handed, with lots of facts, or as though they are being backed into a corner, they are more likely to criticise the messenger and react with defensiveness.



























10





People struggle to imagine life for other animals beyond human use



Across narratives, participants found it hard to picture other animals living in ways that serve their own interests rather than human needs. Even when they agreed other animals should have more rights and freedoms, they tended to imagine this within the existing system and existing 'roles' – as 'companions', 'food', or 'educators' – which keeps change limited to 'kinder' forms of use.

Responses to narrative intervention by participant group

Narrative intervention	Animal companion responses	Non-animal companion responses
Psychological harm to animals		
Social progress		
Animal abilities		
A kinder, fairer society		
Plant-based transition		
Psychological harm to humans		
Psychological harm to the public		
Industry disinformation		
Comparison between animal companions and farmed animals		
Definition of speciesism		
Human superiority		
Linking speciesism and human oppression		
Adopting animal companions		

-  **Persuasive**
 Likely to surface helpful ideas about other animals, including empathy, recognition of their sentience, and reflection on their treatment.
-  **Requires careful framing**
 To avoid confusion or defensiveness requires careful framing or pairing with complementary narratives.
-  **Risky/avoid**
 Reinforces attitudes that work against animal freedom and may therefore be best avoided with some audiences.
-  **Did not test with this group**
 Due to the semi-structured format and time constraints, this narrative was not tested with this particular group.

Comparison between animal companions and farmed animals

Introducing the idea of speciesism without using the term.

+ Animal companion responses

Encouraged proud reflection on British identity as an ‘animal-loving’ society; perceived improved treatment of animals was understood as a sign of social progress; prompted criticism of factory farming and some to report reducing their own consumption of animal products; prompted recognition that humans treat animals differently depending on their species (speciesism – the term itself was not used); prompted limited recognition of animals’ sentience.

"Britain's often called a nation of animal lovers... And it seems to be the case from what you see in the supermarkets, more and more vegan and animal-friendly products."

"I am extremely concerned about mass farming. I stopped eating meat completely. I'm not buying leather shoes and leather sofas anymore like I used to. I'm extremely concerned about pigs."

"I like all animals, but I think cats and dogs in the UK are the animals we have a bond with."

+ Non-animal companion responses

Prompted recognition that humans treat animals differently depending on their species (speciesism – the term itself was not used); prompted recognition that humans have an impact on animals’ lives; prompted some recognition of animals’ sentience and need for love and affection, beyond having practical needs met; prompted some reflection that perceptions of animals can change; prompted some criticism of factory farming.

"The interactions we have with animals... we actually influence and have a lot of control on the environment and how we engage with them."

"All of them [cats, dogs, chickens and pigs] need feeding, watering, and taking care of... and they desire love, affection and warmth. So they [pigs and chickens] have the same hierarchy of needs as any other animal kept in a domestic environment."

"People might think some animals are scarier than they are. And it's just changing people's perception on it."

Comparison between animal companions and farmed animals

Introducing the idea of speciesism without using the term.

— Animal companion responses

Participants understood 'concern for animals' as ensuring similar practical treatment (food, water, shelter), aligning with a high-welfare framing; reinforced human-centred ideas of care and concern tied to ownership and prioritising human interests; surfaced the idea that animals exist to serve human needs, often expressed with a sense of nostalgia (animals have always worked for us); animals' own interests were largely not considered; veganism was raised in defensive or self-justifying ways.

"As a country, we've always had a good affiliation with animals. We've used animals for working purposes in the Industrial Revolution. We have a big heritage with horses. So we think beyond cats and dogs, we embrace other animals. We're an agricultural country."

"People are having more unusual pets: newts and lizards. There's a neighbour of mine who has a tarantula, even. So we do care about other animals."

"Whilst I do appreciate veganism, for myself, I have a gluten allergy, and I've recently been diagnosed as diabetic as well. So my diet is very restricted... I have total respect for people who choose to be vegans. But I do feel that we are pushing too hard in that direction sometimes."

— Non-animal companion responses

Surfaced the idea that animals exist to serve human needs; prompted rejection of farmed animals having personalities; downgraded animal companions by highlighting perceived negative traits (rather than uplifting farmed animals); prompted confusion and fear about bringing farmed animals into human homes; reinforced species hierarchies as natural and fixed; prompted a sense of separation between humans and other animals; prompted high-welfare thinking framed in terms of "good and bad" owners and farmers, with love and affection seen as something that is provided by both; animals' own interests were largely not considered; prompted some cognitive dissonance about diet that shifted quickly into an 'ignorance is bliss' stance.

"Personality is the wrong word because that humanises them [farmed animals]... you could humanise domestic pets, but that's not right for farm animals."

"Humans don't eat their young. Unfortunately, some animals do. There's plenty of friends who, having had eight puppies with their dog, come down to seven."

"In biology, every species has a function and a reason it's here on the planet, and one of the few that was bred for food is pigs. Pigs don't have any other function, that's what they were bred for."

Comparison between animal companions and farmed animals

Introducing the idea of speciesism without using the term.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: taps into positive ideas about identity and social progress, and can open space to question factory farming, notice speciesism and reflect (a little) on animal consumption.
- Careful framing: draw attention to other animals' feelings, individuality, and present improving life for all animals as part of our ongoing social progress.
- Use with caution: without this individual, animal-first framing, it risks allowing people to fall back on harmful narratives that normalise owning animals, rather than thinking about individual best interests.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Some positives: can prompt some helpful ideas about animals and some recognition of speciesism.
- Why it's risky: the comparison mostly reinforced deep-seated, harmful narratives about animals. Participants spent much of the discussion talking negatively about animals, heavily outweighing any positive comments.
- Mindset concern: the comparison prompted negative feelings, such as confusion and fear about bringing farmed animals into the home, and ignited an "ignorance is bliss" mindset.

Understanding these responses

People **with animal companions** are starting from a place of familiarity with other animals. They see them every day, know their personalities, and see themselves as 'animal lovers'. We also know this group are keen to tell us they buy 'high welfare' animal products, so it's likely this comparison feels affirming rather than threatening, i.e. 'I already care about animals and make good choices.' That identity safety makes it easier for them to reflect and spend more time in helpful, pro-animal ideas.

People **without animal companions** are much less familiar with other animals, with some describing genuine fear or discomfort. They tend to be more strongly tied to a 'meat-eater' identity. When this narrative gently touches on eating animals and farming, it can feel like a nudge to that identity. To manage that discomfort, it becomes easier for them to keep animals at a distance: othering them and doubling down on negative ideas about animals.

Across both groups, **what's missing is a clear vision of what a good life for other animals could look like beyond ownership.** At the moment, when people imagine animals in homes as the best option, it pulls them into ownership and high-welfare frames – good owners and kind farmers – rather than helping them imagine animals living in ways that reflect their own best interests and freedom, as individuals with their own lives to lead.

Definition of speciesism

Introduces speciesism as a hierarchy where some animals are seen as morally less important than others and exploited, without referring to humans.

Animal companion responses

Prompted recognition of speciesism, although participants had not heard the term before; prompted some criticism of certain human practices perceived as unnecessary or cruel in the UK (e.g. hunting for sport); unprompted inclusion of humans within the hierarchy; prompted reflection on how different species are treated; prompted explicit questioning of human superiority; some suggestion that animals do not exploit or harm each other in the same way humans cause harm; implication that other animals are, in some respects, morally “above” or “better than” humans; elicited sadness and discomfort about humans’ treatment of other animals and other humans.

“I’m not sure that any animal is capable of exploiting other animals in the way that humans do or discriminating against other animals in the way that humans do.”

“... to say that one species is more important than another implies that humans must be the most important. It’s quite an off-putting idea really.”

“... there’s no other species that is as effective as us in going to war and killing ourselves and destroying the climate.”

“I feel a bit bad for not really thinking about it... I think it’s a bit sad; depending on what you are, that’s what your life is.”

Non-animal companion responses

Prompted recognition that speciesism exists, although participants had not heard the term before; unprompted inclusion of humans within the hierarchy; prompted some criticism of human treatment of certain species (e.g. trophy hunting); for one participant, prompted some questioning of human power, with human intelligence and technology seen as fuelling arrogance over other species; for another participant, the idea of speciesism elicited discomfort.

“That [speciesism] doesn’t really sit very well with me... On what basis is that made? I obviously need a lot more explanation, but my first thoughts are: why? It sounds like it is a strange thing to do.”

“Our intelligence gives us a sense of arrogance over every other species; because we’re able to make tools and devices that can kill any other species of animal, we plonk ourselves at the top of the hierarchy.”

“I think the, the worst thing is obviously the animals that are becoming extinct due to the human interaction, especially with elephants and the elephant tusks.”

Definition of speciesism

Introduces speciesism as a hierarchy where some animals are seen as morally less important than others and exploited, without referring to humans.

■ Animal companion responses

Exploitation was understood narrowly as animal cruelty or using animals for reasons perceived to be 'unnecessary' by this group (e.g. entertainment, fur, hunting), and was framed as something that happens in other countries or is done by 'other people'; thinking was constrained by dominant ideas of other animals having a purpose; did not prompt reflection on participants' everyday use of animals or how they partake in speciesism (e.g. using animals for food).

"... they're all part of a huge ecosystem which is relying on everything else if you break that it all falls apart."

"Birds and rabbits are [seen by some as] disposable and can be killed just for fun, which is disgusting. It's not even as if they can justify using it for food."

"In [other countries], animals aren't seen as pets; they're seen as working animals, so dogs aren't in the house, they're kept outside, they're used for hunting. [Other countries] don't have a particularly good record with looking after animals... the prosecution levels are very low over there."

■ Non-animal companion responses

Speciesism was accepted as natural, evolutionary, historically established and unchangeable, reinforcing ideas of human superiority; species hierarchy was justified by closeness to humans, with animals perceived as more connected as deserving more care (speciesism); human superiority was framed as necessary to ensure safety, prompted by fear-based reasoning; intelligence was understood in human-centred terms, with other animals judged against human standards of intelligence; animal testing was described as necessary; exploitation was understood in terms of using animals for reasons perceived to be 'unnecessary' (e.g. entertainment, fur, hunting), and framed as something that happens in other countries or is done by 'other people'; did not prompt reflection on participants' everyday use of animals or how they partake in speciesism (e.g. using animals for food).

"Once man learned how to make a spear from a piece of flint, man was able to kill animals, and that set that hierarchy; it's all come from then."

"I do think there's a hierarchy... And that's mother nature."

"In terms of our hierarchical system... anything else [other animals] is less intelligent, less able to comprehend things that we are able to understand. So it's making sure that we keep and maintain ourselves at the top of that list."

Definition of speciesism

Introduces speciesism as a hierarchy where some animals are seen as morally less important than others and exploited, without referring to humans.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: prompts recognition that speciesism exists, encourages positive ways of talking about other animals, and evokes discomfort about the status quo.
- Use with caution: if left too abstract, this group tends to externalise the problem (blaming “other people”) and keep a narrow view of exploitation, without reflecting on their own everyday involvement.
- Careful framing: frame speciesism as an unfair system we’ve grown up inside (not an individual failing); pair with narratives that challenge the idea other animals have a purpose for humans and emphasise that their lives are for them; combine with a social progress framing to show changing this system is possible.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Some positives: can prompt recognition that speciesism exists, and for a small number of people, some discomfort with the idea.
- Why it’s risky: mostly reinforces human dominance and superiority as natural and unchangeable, and normalises caring less about animals seen as “lower” or less connected to humans, leading to far more negative than positive talk about animals.
- Mindset concern: taps into fear-based reasoning, where maintaining the hierarchy is seen as necessary for human safety, and strengthens the idea that humans need to assert themselves at the top of the hierarchy.

Understanding these responses

People **with animal companions** see themselves as animal lovers who buy ‘high welfare’ products. They feel sure they are ‘good people’ when it comes to animals. This identity safety makes it easier for them to recognise speciesism and critique some harms. To protect their ‘good-person’ identity, they keep their view of exploitation narrow, placing the problem onto ‘other people’ and more extreme practices and they avoid applying it to their own everyday use of animals.

People **without animal companions** are more inclined to maintain the status quo. They are less familiar with other animals and strongly identify as meat-eaters. The idea that speciesism should change feels threatening to a worldview where eating animals is normal, so they double down on justifications to keep things as they are. For those who are afraid of other animals, maintaining or even strengthening the existing hierarchy can feel necessary to stay safe.

Human superiority

Describes speciesism as a hierarchy that places humans above other animals, resulting in their ownership, exploitation, and killing for human benefit.

Animal companion responses

Prompted strong dislike and some anger at the idea of human superiority; prompted reflection on human behaviour (e.g. war, greed, environmental destruction); highlighted moral inconsistencies and cognitive dissonance (loving some animals while consuming or using others), and prompted ethical reflection and discussion of these inconsistencies; recognised that, in reality, humans are in control and other animals have limited choice.

"We've kind of had this weird sort of relationship where most of us love animals, we want animals as pets, we have our companions, we care for them, but we also consume them."

"We think that we're superior, but we're the only animals that are damaging the planet that we live on."

"Who are we to decide that we're better than any other species on the planet? It just makes me feel really angry."

Non-animal companion responses

Prompted recognition of human superiority as the current status quo; prompted expressions of sadness from a small number of participants; prompted some recognition that all animals have a right to live; for a few participants, prompted cognitive dissonance and recognition of moral inconsistency in how different animals are treated.

"[I feel] quite upset because if there's an insect or there's a bee, I don't try and swat it. It's got just every right to live as I have, and I try to protect any kind of species."

"I wouldn't even kill an insect. I've never killed an insect, knowingly. I can't bring myself to do it... yet there I am, eating my meat and my chicken. So it's a conflict there with myself."

Human superiority

Describes speciesism as a hierarchy that places humans above other animals, resulting in their ownership, exploitation, and killing for human benefit.

■ Animal companion responses

Reflection often led to a sense of futility, attributed to social conditioning, commercialisation and entrenched cultural norms; exploitation was primarily interpreted as 'unnecessary' killing (e.g. fox hunting, dog fighting, trophy hunting, fur), while practices seen as 'necessary' (e.g. killing animals for food) were justified under certain conditions (e.g. 'high-welfare').

"We can't help being that way, because my point was that we're conditioned to consume animals from when we grew up."

"We are meat eaters, naturally... We have eaten meat in the past and people eat meat today. So, to eat meat, animals have to be killed. Are we killing more than we need? More than likely, yes. But what does that mean, exploitation? Are we doing it in a humane way? Are we doing it unnecessarily?"

"I feel like people have more understanding of what goes on when they eat their food. People are concerned about the rights of animals, workers, etcetera. We're doing what we can, but I'm still not entirely convinced that this is going to change any time soon."

■ Non-animal companion responses

Reinforced human superiority as natural, evolutionary and backed up by laws and legislation that maintain this hierarchy; encouraged speciesist language and perceived differences between humans and other animals; the term 'exploitation' criticised as too extreme; exploitation understood as 'unnecessary' practices (e.g. using animals for entertainment or fashion) carried out elsewhere by 'other people'; repeated assertions that human life is a priority, justified by a perceived greater human intelligence; prompted fear-based reasoning, with concerns about potential threats to human safety used to justify maintaining human superiority.

"Thinking about foxes, mice, rats: they're all vermin and people want to avoid them. No one wants to invite in anything like that, and most people wouldn't be upset if something bad happened to them."

"I agree with it [definition of human supremacy]. I don't think it's wrong. I think that's just nature..."

"I've seen so many videos on Instagram and social media of dogs biting human beings... I genuinely believe that humans are at the top because we're intelligent enough to know it's not okay to go around killing people."

Narrative intervention: Framing the problem – speciesism

Human superiority

Describes speciesism as a hierarchy that places humans above other animals, resulting in their ownership, exploitation, and killing for human benefit.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: invites criticism of human behaviour and the status quo, and can spark cognitive dissonance.
- Use with caution: can easily tip into futility ('that is just how the world is') and a narrow view of exploitation as only extreme or 'unnecessary' cruelty, stalling change and leaving everyday uses of animals untouched.
- Careful framing: emphasise that what feels like a fixed or necessary way of living with other animals is changeable, and that human supremacy is a learned belief system, not a fact; combine with a social progress framing to show humans can change practices and live more fairly alongside other animals.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Limited positives: for a small number of participants, prompted cognitive dissonance and limited reflection on human behaviour and treatment of other animals.
- Why it's risky: animals were mostly spoken about in derogatory ways. For most participants it reinforced human superiority as natural and permanent, and strengthened harmful ideas about the need to maintain the current hierarchy.
- Mindset concern: taps into fear-based reasoning about safety, where keeping humans "on top" is seen as non-negotiable, reducing openness to change.

Understanding these responses

People **with animal companions** work hard to protect a good personal identity when it comes to animals. This narrative gives them a relatively safe way to do this: they can criticise extreme human harms (war, greed, animal cruelty) and feel sad about 'the way the world is', while mainly treating these as problems caused by other people or places rather than looking closely at their own lives, which keeps any cognitive dissonance and deeper reflection at a distance.

People **without animal companions** are strongly attached to the status quo. Because eating animals is part of their identity, they have little contact with other animals and some are afraid of them, challenges to the hierarchy often feel threatening, so they double down on 'natural order' justifications to keep, or even strengthen, the existing hierarchy.

Both groups lack a clear vision of what a different way of living alongside other animals could look like, so it is hard for them to imagine an alternative system to replace the one that already exists.

Linking speciesism and human oppression

Connects speciesism to systems of human discrimination by presenting it as a form of prejudice that parallels racism and sexism.

Animal companion responses

Introduced a new idea that was confusing but prompted reflection and cognitive dissonance; reflection on human attitudes towards other animals and power; prompted perspective-taking with other animals through parallels with human justice struggles, including imagining what animals might ask for; encouraged reflection on social progress, recognising harmful past actions while seeing further progress as possible; when understood as a systemic issue, prompted some participants to recognise their own participation in speciesism.

"We hear on the news that people are oppressed... This has made me feel guilty for not thinking about animals in the same way. They can be harmed and feel pain as well, so oppression should absolutely apply to them too."

"Imagine if we could understand animals... they'd probably be telling us what they do and don't like that we do to them, they'd be trying to survive, like we are."

"We should definitely be more conscious of our power and do our best not to abuse it, in the ways we have done in the past and maybe when we didn't have an alternative. Now we've got alternatives."

Non-animal companion responses

For some, prompted reflection on the power dynamic between humans and other animals and recognition that humans often dominate or oppress them; helped some participants question whether the status quo is fair and notice that we treat most animals badly; for a minority, sparked new connections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of some human groups.

"I find this conversation really strange because I've never ever actually thought about it."

"I think all animals have a degree of living a bad life. It just depends what kind of circumstance, whether they're a pet, live in a zoo, in the wild, or they're just bred for people to have their roast dinner."

"Actually, all [speciesism] is, is humans thinking they're a superior race to animals, which is similar to what the Nazis thought, that they were a superior race."

"All of us species occupy the Earth, but we feel that we're better than animals and we dominate them."

Linking speciesism and human oppression

Connects speciesism to systems of human discrimination by presenting it as a form of prejudice that parallels racism and sexism.

■ Animal companion responses

Prompted strong rejection when understood as an individual identity label, associated with negative traits (e.g. narcissism, closed-mindedness, lack of empathy) and extreme examples (e.g. serial killers); oppression often understood as isolated or 'unnecessary' acts of cruelty (e.g. animal cruelty, factory farming), leading participants to externalise the problem as something 'other people' do; appeals to 'natural hierarchies' in the animal kingdom were used to normalise violence and dominance; evoked ideas of human–animal separation; prompted feelings of futility when participants recognised the depth of speciesist norms and cultural or religious barriers.

"If I met someone and they were sexist, racist and speciesist, I probably wouldn't be that attracted to them. I wouldn't want to hang around them."

"Religion has gone on for thousands of years; how hard is it going to be to change? A lot of people are stuck in their ways. They value themselves based on how they've been raised by their parents and their traditions, and a lot of people are going to struggle to step away from that."

"They say with most serial killers that they started out by killing cats and animals. So I don't think, if you hurt animals for no reason, that you're a good person, and generally you will probably lack empathy for humans."

■ Non-animal companion responses

Prompted rejection of narrative, viewed as "extreme" and "ridiculous"; prompted reactance, confusion and extreme responses (including associations with mental illness or sexual deviance); taken as a personal accusation equating meat-eaters with racists or sexists; comparison dismissed as absurd/extreme; doubled down on human superiority and perceived human–other animal differences; speciesism not engaged with as systemic oppression, only as individual cruelty; prompted no empathy or perspective-taking.

"It's saying that because I eat animals, and animals are reared just to be killed for my plate, I could have racist views or be against some cultures or races?"

"I think it's ridiculous that someone would compare sexism or racism to [speciesism]; it's far fetched and outlandish."

"Human beings are not animals; we may be animals, but we're more evolved animals; we're back at the top of the food chain."

"That's so silly, isn't it? I don't see the connection at all [between racism, sexism and speciesism]; I don't think it's related at all."

Linking speciesism and human oppression

Connects speciesism to systems of human discrimination by presenting it as a form of prejudice that parallels racism and sexism.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: Invites perspective taking, reflection on personal behaviour, and opens up social progress thinking about fairer ways to live with other animals.
- Careful framing: Clearly frame speciesism as an invisible system that normalises the use of animals and can be changed or dismantled together. Avoid framing that implies speciesism is part of an identity or only something cruel individuals do, as this can make people feel personally attacked or let them shift blame onto others and avoid personal reflection.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Some positives: For a small minority, helped them recognise the idea of speciesism and briefly reflect on human treatment of other animals.
- Why it's risky: For most, triggered strong reactance and defensiveness, reinforced ideas of human–animal separation and human superiority, and led to hostile rejection of the comparison. Because speciesism was a completely new concept, comparing it directly to racism or sexism created significant confusion.

Understanding these responses

People in both groups had never heard of speciesism before, so they filtered this narrative through their existing worldviews and identity needs, which meant it rarely led to genuine personal reflection.

People with animal companions work hard to protect a 'good person / animal lover' identity, so they interpreted speciesism as unnecessary cruelty by a few bad individuals, shifted responsibility onto others, and kept a shallow view that focuses on extreme harm rather than animal use as a whole.

People without animal companions are tightly bound to the status quo and a 'meat-eater' identity, so the racism/sexism comparison felt like a direct moral attack, triggering reactance and shutting down empathy and curiosity.

Because neither group yet understands speciesism as an invisible, shared system we have all been socialised into, the leap from 'speciesism describes how we treat animals' to 'this is a form of oppression like racism or sexism' is likely to feel too big and too accusatory, limiting their ability to engage with the comparison as a call to change the system.

Psychological harm to animals

Highlights the psychological harm animals experience, framing exploitation and confinement as causing emotional and behavioural distress.

Animal companion responses

Perceived as credible and factual; prompted strong emotional responses, empathy and perspective taking; questioning of human behaviour and morality; recognition of hypocrisy and inconsistencies in human–other animal relations; reflection on perceived unnecessary practices such as zoos and entertainment; for some, prompted deeper reflection on personal consumption and society's role in harming animals, including asserting that they already think about and sometimes choose different options when it comes to eating animals.

"I think this is a statement of fact; I'm not a scientist, but I'm totally in agreement with that."

"It makes you feel sad, you think about what you would feel like if that happened to you."

"Imagine an alien came down and talked to us about animal issues and said, 'Oh, okay, so you love your dog, but you eat other animals and you wear leather shoes?' How would I explain that? Not well, I'm not going to lie!"

"I often think about that because my friend is vegan, and I buy more vegan food for her... I try and look for other options now... I'm not a massive meat person to be honest."

Non–animal companion responses

Strong agreement with the statement; prompted strong emotional responses, empathy and perspective-taking towards certain animals (e.g. dogs, horses, animals confined in zoos); recognition that animals and humans share emotions and that humans can detect their unhappiness, linking this to morality and seeing it as outdated to ignore their distress (in this day and age); participants described avoiding zoos, petting farms and similar animal entertainment as unnecessary and distressing; reflection that farming can be harmful for animals; calls for stronger legal protections.

"[exploitation] leads them [animals] to be subdued and frightened, and it hurts them the same as it would a human."

"I used to love going to the zoo, but years now I won't go. I don't want to see animals in cages, restricted like that and not living in their natural environment. I think it restricts their lives and causes them upset. I think enclosures aren't great for any animal."

"I think, as humans, we know what's right and wrong and we can tell when an animal is not happy, so seeing that still happen is upsetting."

"I think maybe the law should protect animals a little bit more."

Psychological harm to animals

Highlights the psychological harm animals experience, framing exploitation and confinement as causing emotional and behavioural distress.

■ Animal companion responses

Justified continued animal use through perceived necessity (e.g. needing meat to survive); referenced extreme or distant examples of cruelty (e.g. bear bile farms abroad) to distance themselves from responsibility; normalised complicity by appealing to shared habits, conditioning, and a sense of futility about change (“everyone does this, what can you do?”).

“I wouldn't want to meet anybody who disagreed with the statement [confinement and exploitation cause psychological harm to animals], like where they keep the bears in the cages for their bile.”

“They tell women when they reach a certain age that they need to eat a lot of protein and there is only so much Greek yogurt that I can take.”

“We're quite blasé and we're quite good at compartmentalising what's going on in our world. I am definitely guilty of it. I'm not doing it maliciously, I'm just starving, I need some food, but then you're not thinking about where that food's come from. This is going on all over the place.”

■ Non-animal companion responses

Exploitation understood as perceived ‘unnecessary’ practices; farmed and laboratory animals only considered when prompted; high-welfare narratives used to justify continued farming; some animal uses defended as acceptable when animals are perceived to enjoy them (e.g. dog agility, racing horses); animal suffering framed as a human-centred concern (e.g. risk of consuming unwell animals) rather than about animals’ own rights; recognition that humans and other animals share emotions, but resistance to giving animals similar legal protection, with responsibility for change shifted to industry and better legislation.

“[farming animals] is a very unfortunate side of human life... but most people accept it because it's always been like that.”

“You can make conditions better... In the coops you can tell they're [chickens] not happy, their feathers are scruffy and they look unwell, whereas when they're roaming they look healthier. Surely there has to be a knock-on effect to us when they come into the food chain, whether it be the eggs or the meat.”

“I don't think the law really protects animals in the same way it does humans; not that it should, but it seems you can really mistreat animals, which to me is quite inhumane.”

Psychological harm to animals

Highlights the psychological harm animals experience, framing exploitation and confinement as causing emotional and behavioural distress.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: prompts strong empathy, emotional engagement and perspective taking, with people readily imagining how confinement and exploitation feel for animals.
- To boost impact: extend their concern for certain animals (e.g. animals in zoos, entertainment and as companions) to farmed and tested-on animals. Pair this with messages that frame animal use as ‘unnecessary’ and stories of personal and social change, so people can imagine moving away from harmful uses altogether and see themselves as part of that shift.



Non-animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: prompts empathy, emotional engagement and perspective taking, confined in zoos, exploited in entertainment and mistreated as companions.
- To boost impact: extend their concern for certain animals (e.g. animals in zoos, entertainment and as companions) to farmed and tested-on animals. Pair this with messages that frame animal use as ‘unnecessary’ and social progress stories about changing norms and public attitudes, so people can see society moving away from harmful uses altogether and feel that, to belong, they can be part of that change.

Understanding these responses

Unlike many of the other narratives, this one did not trigger reactance. The idea that animals can suffer psychological harm felt like common sense to **people in both groups**. Agreeing with the narrative helped them affirm their identity as good, caring people and signal belonging with the majority who ‘obviously’ see it this way.

The focus on emotions in this narrative likely lowers the barrier to empathy: it is an easier step to think how an animal might feel, using emotions people already know themselves (sadness, distress, frustration), than to imagine inhabiting an animal’s physical experience.

Research shows that perspective taking can be especially persuasive in shifting attitudes and even reducing animal product consumption, so letting this psychological-harm narrative do as much of the work as possible on its own can be powerful. Rather than getting drawn into debating high-welfare or insisting that farming and testing inevitably cause severe psychological harm to other animals, which risks either reinforcing high-welfare fixes or prompting futility, this narrative can centre animals’ emotional lives and give people reflective space to join the dots and decide their own next steps.

Psychological harm to humans

Highlights the psychological harm caused to humans involved in killing animals (slaughterhouse workers, farmers), framing repeated participation in violence as causing emotional and moral distress.

Animal companion responses

Acknowledged emotional harm from killing animals; prompted empathy with humans in these roles (more so for farmers than slaughterhouse workers); questioned personal capacity to kill; highlighted the societal disconnect between killing and eating animals, prompting reflection on complicity in harm and guilt about outsourcing killing to others; raised awareness of less transparent aspects of animal agriculture (e.g. slaughterhouse work); opened curiosity and openness towards transitions away from animal use (e.g. farmers moving into non-animal livelihoods).

"I think killing anything is going to have an impact. Even if you're farming and have to do that, you can switch off and desensitise yourself in the job; it would still hit you."

"I'd like to say I would [kill an animal] if I had to, but I still don't know if I could. But I probably have not enough guilt about other people doing it for me."

"[I watched] a really interesting documentary about a chicken farmer who was talking about the horrendous conditions... At the end of it, he was growing mushrooms instead, which I thought was really nice."

Non-animal companion responses

Acknowledged emotional harm from routine killing of animals and recognised this as not normal human behaviour, requiring emotional suppression; reflection on personal capacity to kill and, for some, feelings of hypocrisy about consuming animals; comparisons between killing animals and killing humans, including use of the term "murder"; highlighted the gap between media portrayals of farming and the likely psychological reality of farming and slaughter; reflection on relationships with animal companions and the emotional difficulty of euthanasia; for a minority, brief questioning of the necessity of killing animals for food (e.g. evolving beyond "caveman" survival needs).

"It's almost like that part of their emotions is cut off because they're so used to seeing blood and guts and being able to do this. It has to have some kind of mental effect."

"It's the same as murdering a person. They may not be as intelligent as a person, but you're killing a living animal, whether it's human or animal, and I wouldn't like to do it."

"When you watch 'On the Farm'... they're very merry... they pick [animals] up and take them off to the slaughterhouse... we don't get to see [the reality]."

Psychological harm to humans

Highlights the psychological harm caused to humans involved in killing animals (slaughterhouse workers, farmers), framing repeated participation in violence as causing emotional and moral distress.

■ Animal companion responses

Centred human suffering and human-centred solutions (e.g. mental health support for workers), detracting from ethical scrutiny of killing animals; high-welfare mindsets reframed the problem as how killing happens, shifting focus away from the morality of killing; eating meat framed as necessary, normalising killing and prompting gratitude that “someone must do this work”; participants maintained a positive moral self-image (“I couldn’t kill animals”) with little reflection on their reliance on others to do so; focusing on farming rather than slaughter work triggered sympathetic industry narratives about farming’s economic fragility (e.g. supermarket dominance, Brexit), limiting scrutiny of farming’s central role in killing animals.

“...people working in those environments should have mental health services available to make it more manageable.”

“What’s unnatural is the environments in which [slaughter] happens, the industrial scale at which it happens, and the way it has to happen to keep society going.”

“I’m grateful people are prepared to do it [kill animals]. Unless the way the animals were treated or killed was not in line with regulations, I could understand it causing you stress then. But if you decide to work in a slaughterhouse, you have an understanding of what to expect.”

■ Non-animal companion responses

Limited self-reflection and ethical scrutiny of killing itself; killing framed as normal and necessary (“someone has to do it”), prompting gratitude that others do the work and framing slaughter work as a public service suited to certain people; psychological harm framed as an unfortunate side effect; centred human suffering and solutions that locate responsibility with those doing the killing; comparisons to euthanasia cast killing as kindness; discussion on ‘acceptable’ killing (speciesist and fear-based justifications); reinforced human superiority.

“People like to be nurses; I couldn’t do what nurses do. You get people where it’s within their DNA; they can do that kind of thing.”

“We all have options. If people are clearly getting PTSD from these slaughterhouses and it’s affecting them, they should get out, and hopefully these organisations are providing services like EAP or therapy to assist them if they don’t want to leave or if they can’t, and to help them get a job somewhere else.”

“Is it very similar to the vet that has to put down a wounded cat and say it’s better for the animal, whether we’re going to put it to sleep or give it that lethal injection?”

Psychological harm to humans

Highlights the psychological harm caused to humans involved in killing animals (slaughterhouse workers, farmers), framing repeated participation in violence as causing emotional and moral distress.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: opens up conversation about killing animals and raises interest in transitions away from animal use.
- Use with caution: centres human suffering leaving animals' experiences and the morality of killing largely unexamined.
- Careful framing: keep animals in the frame by linking human distress explicitly to the harm being done to animals, using stories of farmers' and slaughterhouse workers' emotional conflict and transition as examples, and consider pairing with persuasive narratives about animal abilities and psychological harm to animals to keep them central to the story.



Non-animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: opens up conversation about killing animals and surfaces some cognitive dissonance around them.
- Use with caution: centres human suffering leaving animals' experiences and the morality of killing largely unexamined.
- Careful framing: keep animals in the frame by linking human distress explicitly to the harm being done to animals, using stories of farmers' emotional conflict and transition as examples, and consider pairing with persuasive narratives about animal abilities and psychological harm to animals to keep them central to the story.

Understanding these responses

This narrative allows **people in both groups** to do three things at once, helping them talk about killing animals without feeling attacked, complicit or morally challenged, and allowing them to resolve cognitive dissonance quickly and keep reactance low.

- First, it keeps the focus on humans' experiences and psychology rather than on animals, which feels safer and more comfortable.
- Second, it lets people maintain a 'good person' identity by saying they could not kill animals themselves. They can acknowledge that killing is upsetting and still see themselves as kind and compassionate because they are not the ones doing the killing.
- Third, they manage guilt by both othering and elevating the people who do the killing. They describe those involved in slaughter as a particular type of person, say that if someone struggles they should leave because the job is only suited to some or that the industry should support them more, and liken them to respected roles such as nurses, vets or soldiers, reframing killing as honourable, necessary, or even a kindness.

Psychological harm to the public

Highlights the psychological harm caused to the public, framing suppressed empathy and normalised cruelty as damaging society's moral and emotional health.

Animal companion responses

Affirmed that humans should trust our emotional responses to animal suffering; reflected that we now take too much from animals and are increasingly separated from them; recognised that society and profit-driven systems condition us to suppress empathy and normalise animal use; reflected that humans should extend care beyond our own species to include other animals; criticised experimenting on animals, especially for cosmetics, as unnecessary; criticised human behaviour (greed, overconsumption), linking animal use to profit and powerful organisations manipulating public attitudes; prompted solution-oriented thinking about leaving the world in a better state for animals; recognised that views on animal use and killing have evolved over time and can continue to change.

"We're certainly taking more than we give back from animals now than we've ever done."

"We should aim to leave the world in a better state than we found it. That means rebuilding [animals'] habitats... we should do more rewilding, giving animals more safe spaces to live where they do not come into conflict with us so much."

"I do think that big business is hiding things from us; they don't want us to know the facts."

Non-animal companion responses

Recognition that emotions guide moral understanding and signal when something feels wrong; participants asserted empathy as part of their identity; prompted cognitive dissonance (contradictions between empathy and continued meat-eating); acknowledgement that other animals have feelings, emotions and individuality and share emotional capacity with humans; recognition that regular close contact with animals can reduce willingness to eat them and that witnessing or carrying out slaughter would have an emotional impact; criticism of the meat industry for lack of transparency and for shaping public attitudes around meat, alongside acknowledgement of consumer complicity in not wanting to know; observation that more people are turning away from meat out of concern for animals, seen as a sign of social progress.

"Our emotions regulate our minds. I do believe that animals have emotions as well. When we see animals getting slaughtered, it will affect us."

"I'm the most empathetic person. I cry over everything. But here I am saying I don't care as long as I get my meat... Is that horrible? Am I a bad person?"

"It is a form of psychological brainwashing by the meat industry, in dialling down your empathy towards what you're eating."

Psychological harm to the public

Highlights the psychological harm caused to the public, framing suppressed empathy and normalised cruelty as damaging society's moral and emotional health.

— Animal companion responses

Perceived the framing as extreme, prompting calls for “balance”; criticised leaning into empathy as overindulgent or making society “soft”; framed empathy as a matter of personal capacity and choice; focused on which killing is “necessary” versus “unnecessary”, normalising animals’ purpose as serving human needs; justified killing for food as necessary to feed the population; relied on high-welfare and efficiency justifications (ethical, local, organic, reducing overproduction and waste); avoided linking emotional distress to the morality of killing; human-centred reasoning reduced empathy for animals (e.g. focusing on risks to people from consuming distressed or unwell animals rather than concern for animals’ suffering).

“If you can't take the screams, get out. Don't expose yourself to it because it will cause you mental harm... if you're an adult you should be able to face up to things.”

“Animals have always provided food for humans. When humans first roamed the Earth, we weren't just eating plants.”

“We're in a growing population worldwide and we can't all hunt for what we need, and we have these organisations that produce food on that massive scale.”

— Non-animal companion responses

Prompted strong attachment to a meat-eater identity, linking meat eating to personal, family and cultural lineage and describing it as entrenched and unchangeable; anxiety about veganism focused on health and nutrition (e.g. worries about children’s health or genetics); normalised animals’ purpose as serving human needs, with animals framed primarily as food “destined for the plate”; acknowledged “ignorance is bliss” as a coping strategy around animal suffering; prompted cognitive dissonance but left it unresolved, with participants shutting down emotionally or justifying continued consumption through necessity, tradition and enjoyment; prompted repeated high-welfare justifications.

“We should understand our emotions when it comes to animals, but my whole lineage, we've all eaten meat, so I don't know what's gonna happen to my kids if they become vegan.”

“We need to reflect on if it's okay for us to kill, which it isn't, but I still wouldn't want the [meat] industry to end, otherwise I'd be a vegan and I don't want to not eat meat.”

“I care they're [animals] having the best rearing and I try and get my head around that's what they're there for, animals like the cows, they're for our dairy or for our beef... It's very conflicting, but I'm certainly not going to stop eating it, so I have to switch off.”

Psychological harm to the public

Highlights the psychological harm caused to the public, framing suppressed empathy and normalised cruelty as damaging society's moral and emotional health.



Animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: prompts recognition that empathy for other animals is being suppressed, and sparks ideas about more socially progressive relationships with them.
- Use with caution: centres humans and their justifications, keeping animals in the background, and frames low empathy as a fixed personal trait rather than something changeable.
- Careful framing: present empathy for other animals as an aspirational, shared value and highlight how profit-driven systems and values like greed can crush our natural empathy; pair with narratives that keep animals' experiences at the centre such as *Animal Abilities* and *Psychological Harm*.



Non-animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: prompts people to connect their empathy with their actions around eating animals, bringing cognitive dissonance to the surface.
- Use with caution: discomfort is often resolved through varied justifications that reinforce a meat-eater identity and normalise killing other animals.
- Careful framing: present empathy for other animals as a shared social norm and positive identity. Pair with social progress and social proof framing that shows shifts away from meat-eating are normal and increasingly common, so discomfort has somewhere constructive to go rather than back into justification.

Understanding these responses

People in both groups hold on to a 'good person' identity and keep deeper reflection at bay by acknowledging that empathy matters while also stressing the need to live in the 'real world'. Heavily influenced by the dominant narrative that eating animal products is necessary for human survival, they draw empathy into a survival logic, positioning themselves as good but pragmatic and striking a balance between empathy and realism.

People with animal companions express concern about society becoming 'too soft'. They blend empathy with hard choices, treating some killing as kindness (e.g. putting trapped animals out of their misery) and stressing that we need to feed a growing population. They blame big business for lacking empathy instead of reflecting on their own personal choices.

People without animal companions handle cognitive dissonance between empathy and eating animals by falling back on a real-world mentality, accepting that industry hides things and consumers do not want to know, and treating meat-eating as too entrenched to seriously question.

Animal abilities

Highlights animals' emotional, cognitive, and creative capacities, framing them as intelligent, feeling beings with rich inner lives and intrinsic value. Included reference to animals resisting or escaping captivity.

✚ Animal companion responses

Broad acceptance of animals' abilities, recognising them as intelligent, emotional, beautiful and awe-inspiring; widely believed that most people would agree animals are amazing; drew on first-hand experiences with companions and 'working' animals to affirm that animals have rich emotional lives; questioned human superiority, recognising that animals may surpass humans in some abilities and that humans do not fully understand their communication, intelligence or emotions; evoked positive associations with nature and wildlife documentaries; highlighted interdependence between humans and other animals (e.g. ecological balance and survival); prompted criticism of factory farming and for a minority, prompted some questioning of using animals for food.

"I find most animals incredibly intelligent. We couldn't do what many of them are doing."

"We've only got the barest grasp of how [other animals] communicate or their range of emotions... [Tells anecdote about misunderstanding his dog.] That goes to show how little we know, even about the pets that we live with, never mind the whales in the ocean or the animals in the rainforest."

"If humans were wiped off the Earth, the animals would survive better without us than us without them. We think we're superior; we're not at all."

✚ Non-animal companion responses

Broad recognition that animals are sentient; narrative itself resonated strongly only with a small minority who expressed empathy and moral concern; for some, recognition that escape stems from captivity and suffering; for a few, desire to prevent suffering and improve conditions.

"I do think that animals are sentient, and they do feel and they do get stressed and they do have fear, so to not take that into account is quite brutal. And the way a lot of them are treated... they shouldn't be treated like that."

"They are living creatures, and they have feelings and emotions. That [narrative] really strikes a chord with me. I think the brutality of it all should be stopped if possible."

Animal abilities

Highlights animals' emotional, cognitive, and creative capacities, framing them as intelligent, feeling beings with rich inner lives and intrinsic value. Included reference to animals resisting or escaping captivity.

— Animal companion responses

Framed animals primarily at the species level, with little recognition of individuals; reflected an “animals have a purpose” narrative through an environmental lens (ecologically vital, ecosystem roles), and maintained a human-centric focus with discussion, empathy and moral concern largely limited to admired or familiar species (‘wild’ or animal companions), with farmed animals rarely considered unless explicitly prompted; ‘exploitation’ interpreted as unnecessary or wasteful use and felt jarring when applied to farmed animals, generating mild defensiveness about consuming them; reinforced high-welfare narratives; accepted some animal use as appropriate, distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable exploitation.

"Every animal, every species has its purpose, but it's not a human purpose... It's a purpose to help the Earth stay alive."

"Animals in the world are beautiful and interesting, and they shouldn't be exploited. That doesn't mean we can't kill them, but exploited is a very different term altogether. Exploiting something is using it unnecessarily, damaging it, wasteful."

"We could certainly be in danger of over-farming and, as is happening, creating these huge industries where animals are tortured because they're not farmed correctly."

— Non-animal companion responses

Focus on escape dominated interpretation, overshadowing reflection on animals' abilities; triggered a fear mindset framing escaped animals as threats to human safety; sanctuaries or animal protection seen as social burdens; reinforced human superiority (humans as responsible for managing animals to maintain social order, justifying killing as necessary and rejecting coexistence by framing other animals as unruly or untrainable); extended high-welfare framing into fatalistic acceptance that slaughter is unavoidable to manage populations; prompted an ignorance-is-bliss mindset about eating meat; dismissed farmed animals' intelligence and emotions; prompted separation between humans and other animals.

"If an animal's escaped, the first thing is it's a threat to humans. You want it to be captured straight away, regardless of its feelings."

"There's no humane way of doing it [farmed animals existing], other than slaughtering them to keep them controlled and managed in a way that they don't overrun society."

"I would question how long the mother [cow used for dairy] would remember their baby being taken away from them. So, us as intelligent animals, we're going to remember, but they may not remember the same way that we do. So, it may be 24 hours of sadness for them and then they may move on."

Animal abilities

Highlights animals' emotional, cognitive, and creative capacities, framing them as intelligent, feeling beings with rich inner lives and intrinsic value. Included reference to animals resisting or escaping captivity.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- **Persuasive:** strongly affirms other animals' intelligence, emotions and inner lives, and prompts open questioning of human superiority over other animals.
- **To boost impact:** keep using this narrative so it becomes normal to talk about all animals in these terms, including those who are farmed or tested on; emphasise individual animals to help people move from abstract, species-level talk to thinking about specific lives; avoid using the term 'exploitation', which risked triggering defensiveness and high-welfare justifications.



Non-animal companion group Requires careful framing

- **Has strong potential:** wider message testing at Animal Think Tank suggests Animal Abilities is a highly persuasive narrative.
- **Use with caution:** references to animal resistance or escape can strengthen human-animal separation, and increase hostility and dismissal towards other animals.
- **Careful framing:** keep the focus on animals' abilities, personalities and emotional lives, avoiding references to escape or threat, and present this as observational information to give people reflective space to join the dots and decide their own next steps.

Understanding these responses

A harmful, dominant 'animals have a purpose' narrative is deeply embedded in how people in the UK understand other animals: environmental and nature messaging present them at a species level with roles in ecosystems, and exploitative industries frame other animals as food or test subjects.

People with animal companions get vivid proof at home that the animals they live with are emotional, intelligent individuals, and they reference enjoying wildlife documentaries that highlight 'wild' animals' impressive abilities and beauty. But because there are very few mainstream stories that show farmed or tested-on animals as feeling, thinking individuals, outside of animal freedom work, the idea that these animals exist for a human purpose tends to prevail, making it much harder for people to apply an animal abilities lens to all animals, especially those they use or consume.

People without animal companions have little day-to-day contact with other animals. When the narrative mentioned resistance or escape, this distance fed a fear mindset rather than curiosity: animals were quickly framed as potential threats and attention shifted to keeping humans safe. It is difficult to access empathy, wonder or curiosity when feeling afraid, so participants moved into fear-based justifications about "dangerous" animals who need to be managed, leaving little space to notice anything positive about animals' abilities.

Plant-based transition

Highlights a transition to a plant-based food system and the end of factory farming as a positive and necessary change, outlining benefits for health, the environment, communities, and animals.

Animal companion responses

Prompted strong rejection of factory farming (cruel, large-scale, environmentally destructive, unnecessary for human survival); criticised excessive human consumption; prompted some to highlight that they now eat less meat and more plant-based food (e.g. "I'm three-quarters vegetarian"); prompted assertions that dairy is unnecessary and unnatural (meant for baby cows, not humans); prompted solution-oriented thinking, such as redirecting subsidies away from animal agriculture and shifting to fruit and vegetable production.

"We don't need to eat animals that are forcibly factory farmed."

"I would say that humans don't need meat to live. It's debatable whether we should or not, but we don't need it."

"We don't need to drink cow's milk; it's meant for cow's babies, not humans."

"... to live on a plant-based diet, as I do most of the time, I am three-quarters vegetarian. I eat very little meat myself."

"I think it could slowly be turned around and all the subsidies [redirected]... farmers don't get many subsidies... I think we could produce fruit and vegetables on a far cheaper scale if it was done on a large enough scale."

Non-animal companion responses

Brief acknowledgement that factory farming is not good (e.g. "nobody likes factory farming"); prompted talk about modest dietary shifts (e.g. meat reduction, meat free Mondays), often linked to personal health; recognition that society is cutting down on meat with perceived public health benefits (e.g. reducing obesity, cholesterol, and pressure on the NHS); minimal and brief sympathy for animals, acknowledging stress in factory farms or during transport.

"I'm a bit conflicted because I like my meat, I pretty much have meat every day... I've never really thought about cutting back, but if prices went up and I couldn't afford it and there were better substitutes, then possibly."

"I see the trucks crammed full with sheep or cows, and I think they're all in a tight space, they don't know where they're going, and that must be stressful."

"You can say, on a Monday, we go plant-based. I think people have cut back, I hear about that all the time."

"[Reduced meat consumption], it's probably going to save the government money, the NHS; there will be less people with obesity and chronic health issues."

Plant-based transition

Highlights a transition to a plant-based food system and the end of factory farming as a positive and necessary change, outlining benefits for health, the environment, communities, and animals.

■ Animal companion responses

Rejected society giving up meat entirely; prompted "balance" appeals, backing smaller farms and more plant-based foods over abolishing farming animals; prompted high-welfare justifications; shifted focus away from animals to human needs and environmental issues; positioned animal welfare and human poverty as competing concerns (e.g. some people can only afford cheap factory-farmed meat); raised concerns that a fully plant-based transition could harm some animals (e.g. animal companions seen as needing meat).

"If we humanely, kindly and organically rear animals for meat, I don't have an issue with that. I have an issue with mass-produced factory farming."

"I think it could slowly be turned around and all the subsidies... we could produce fruit and vegetables on a far cheaper scale if it was done on a large enough scale."

"I'm not saying 'don't eat meat'. I'm advocating you don't need to factory farm on the scale we do, because of the cruelty involved, the waste products, the damage it's doing."

"If we did away with factory farming, for people who are on a very limited budget, would they be able to afford the amount of vegetable-based and plant-based products to sustain themselves and their families?"

■ Non-animal companion responses

Predominantly human-centred, with minimal consideration of animals; frequent assertion of identity as meat-eaters, both individually and as part of a group (e.g. "other meat-eaters would feel the same"); eating meat justified as personal choice and natural; high-welfare justifications; economic and equality arguments in favour of continued meat production; distrust of plant-based foods; introduction of a more detailed prompt (listing benefits for animals, environment and communities) shifted discussion into loss aversion, futility and cynicism; climate-denial responses; criticism of the messenger; rebutted factual claims point by point (e.g. land use, pesticides, rewilding), shifting from reflection into counter-argument.

"You're limiting someone's choice, their natural way of life, if you're forcing someone to just go plant-based..."

"You have to look at the other side [of the argument] as well... I'd like to see more proof as to where the statistics come from."

"I can't go a hundred percent [without meat] because I've heard there's issues with soya that gives men man boobs; there's stuff out there that tells me vegan's not the best thing."

"At my age, eating a meat meal is a bit too heavy on my stomach; [so cutting back would be] more for health reasons than ideological reasons, to be honest."

Plant-based transition

Highlights a transition to a plant-based food system and the end of factory farming as a positive and necessary change, outlining benefits for health, the environment, communities, and animals.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: Prompts a strong rejection of factory farming, gets people talking with pride about the shifts they are making in their diets, and opens up solution-focused discussion about change being possible.
- To boost impact: Pair with narratives centring animals' experiences to keep the focus on animals themselves, so thinking moves beyond high-welfare, consumer-focused reasoning towards picturing what a plant-based transition would mean for all of us.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Some positives: Prompts brief acknowledgement that factory farming is not good, and some recognition of possible human health benefits from changing our food system.
- Why it's risky: Predominantly human-centred discussion that triggers strong identity-based defensiveness around meat-eating and criticism of the messenger rather than reflection.
- If used at all: Pair with narratives centring animals' experiences to counter the strong human focus.

Understanding these responses

This narrative lands well for those with **animal companions** because it aligns with their existing values and gives them many ways to perform and reinforce a good-person identity. They can condemn factory farming as a symbol of greed and overconsumption that clashes with their values, show how globally aware and caring they are by talking about the environment and people on low incomes, and highlight their own 'good' actions, such as reducing meat, choosing 'better' products, and supporting welfare reforms.

Though they don't advocate giving up meat entirely, from an animal freedom movement perspective, it is still a persuasive narrative because, it encourages them to talk positively and in a solution-focused way about ending factory farming and moving towards a more plant-based food system.

For those **without animal companions**, this narrative clashes with core values of choice and freedom and with a strongly held meat-eater identity. A shift towards a more plant-based food system feels like a direct threat and a major loss, so they respond with reactance.

Because it is possible to stay human-focused with this narrative, and they are less connected to animals in their own lives, it does not create much tension between empathy and action, leaving little space for genuine reflection.

A kinder, fairer society

Presents the idea that extending rights and freedoms to animals could shape a kinder and fairer society, shown through contrasting framings of potential benefits and perceived risks or losses.

Animal companion responses

Agreement that all animals deserve more rights and freedoms, with recognition that lack of these causes suffering; prompted reflection on personal animal use (e.g. wearing leather, eating meat), alongside reluctant recognition that, eating less meat would be good for personal health; prompted reflection on fairness and an assertion that the 'golden rule' should extend to animals, highlighting inconsistencies and evoking guilt; criticism of greed and selfishness in society; empathy and perspective-taking towards animal companions, with in-principle support for adopting rather than buying; criticism of breeding practices; reflection on and criticism of zoos, with many no longer visiting them.

"Our health would improve... maybe it would force my hand to eat less [meat] if I couldn't afford it so often."

"People bought animals during lockdown, and then when they went back to work said, 'Well, I don't want this anymore.' But those animals had feelings; they formed bonds with families... Imagine being in their position, just being discarded."

"We need to think about things more carefully, rather than this evil of greed coming into everything... If we all make a little change, I know I'm going to... I'm thinking more about where the food has come from."

Animal companion responses

Dominated by human-centred discussion, with limited consideration for animals; prompted high-welfare justifications; suggested that increases in animal rights should be gradual, citing perceived risks to the economy and public anger; triggered the food frame for farmed animals (food rather than individuals); invoked natural and normal justifications for consuming animals; triggered feelings of futility about the possibility of large-scale change; surfaced moral inconsistencies which participants did not recognise (including speciesism, i.e. animal companions as family versus farmed animals as food, and the belief that companions should not be treated as property whilst still asserting a right to own them); limited personal reflection, with responsibility shifted to big corporations, other consumers, and careless or unkind 'owners'.

"Animals should have rights and freedoms, but introduced very carefully, because if we start limiting what people are offered... the price of meat is going to skyrocket, and there could be a lot of anger and kickback."

"People should still be able to eat meat, but responsibly farmed meat, not factory meat."

"[Extending rights to farmed animals] makes it sound like humans would have to become a plant-eating species... That wouldn't be natural in our history as a species, so I'd be worried."

A kinder, fairer society

Presents the idea that extending rights and freedoms to animals could shape a kinder and fairer society, shown through contrasting framings of potential benefits and perceived risks or losses.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: Positive framing prompts recognition of the need for animals to have more rights and freedoms, supports perspective-taking, and encourages reflection on personal choices and on greed and unfairness in society.
- To boost impact: Regular use of this narrative will normalise the idea that animals need more rights and freedoms and that society should be a kinder, fairer place for all animals, including those who are farmed or tested on. Pair with perspective-taking narratives such as *Psychological Harm* and *Animal Abilities* to keep the focus on what life is like for animals themselves, and avoid framing in terms of human risks or losses.



Non-animal companion group Did not test

Due to the semi-structured format of the focus groups and time constraints, this narrative was **only tested with the animal companion group**.

Understanding these responses

This narrative lands well with **the animal companion group** because it fits their existing worldview: they see society and other people as driven by greed, individualism, and overconsumption, whereas they would prefer a kinder, fairer way of living. It allows them to express empathy for animals and agree that things should change without feeling personally blamed.

However, when the narrative touches on more rights and freedoms for animals who are farmed for food, participants reach for harmful narratives to ease cognitive dissonance. They talk about eating animals as natural and necessary, framing it as inevitable rather than a real choice. They then protect their 'good person' identity by advocating better welfare reforms for farmed animals, showing they care about kindness and fairness.

Adopting animal companions

Frames animal freedom as a future in which animals are no longer bred, bought, or sold as commodities, encouraging reflection on how breeding contributes to the growing number of animals in shelters.

Animal companion responses

Recognition that animal companions are sentient individuals (e.g. a dog's purpose is for themselves); deep care for animal companions and support for stronger legal protection for them; positive recognition of rescue centres and shelters, and of adopting and fostering; acknowledgement that shelters look to rehome a diverse range of animal companions; prompted empathy for animals' psychological well-being in shelters (miserable, lonely, bored); recognition that adoption enables good matching, as shelters know individual animals' characters and needs; criticism of breeding practices, particularly for aesthetic reasons; rejected the idea of 'dangerous breeds', placing responsibility on humans.

"As a cat owner, the idea of an animal being lonely and having a life that's dull and boring [in a shelter] makes me relate more."

"I think a dogs purpose is to be able to enjoy their life."

"I don't believe in breeds having particular temperaments; I think that's more individual, like a person."

"There is a big problem saying, 'These are all aggressive dogs, we've got to kill them all.' I don't agree with that. You can't have one label for an entire breed; it is down to the owners and the way [dogs] are treated."

Non-animal companion responses

Reflection that animals in shelters are suffering and deserve homes and care; some agreement that adoption and fostering are preferable to breeding; harmful breeding practices highlighted as unnatural (causing suffering and health problems, producing weaker animals rather than stronger, healthier ones); some reflection on the systemic link between breeding and shelter populations; solution-focused thinking on education and support for people caring for animals to prevent abandonment and improve welfare.

"Shelters do due diligence to check that you're suitable, but the breeder doesn't... they just go, 'It's 200 quid, please.'"

"You need to address the reasons why people can't look at them in the first place; there should be more courses and training for people who are inexperienced dog owners."

"A lot of dogs can't breathe now because they're so overbred. The pedigree's becoming crazy, it's almost like a designer baby, so you're getting all these cross-breed animals that is not doing the dogs any good; I think take a pet from a shelter."

Adopting animal companions

Frames animal freedom as a future in which animals are no longer bred, bought, or sold as commodities, encouraging reflection on how breeding contributes to the growing number of animals in shelters.

— Animal companion responses

Limited reflection on how buying from breeders impacts shelter populations; defensive responses, shifting blame onto others' failings (neglect and abandonment), with no acknowledgement of their own role in the system when they buy animals; human-centred entitlement, including criticism of shelters refusing adoptions; transactional ethics, treating harm as offsettable (e.g. "I buy from breeders but donate to shelters"); animals seen as existing for human purposes (companionship, work); high-welfare, "necessary", "natural" and "traditional" justifications for breeding; prompted futility about change; attachment to breed identities and derogatory views of "mixed-breed" dogs.

"I think it's [breeding] for people's safety. I don't think you can have a pet which might bite a child because it's been crossbred with something which may have a dubious background."

"I certainly wouldn't want to see a mixed bag of mongrels."

"There's lots of breeds that are useful for a purpose... sheep dogs, working dogs, certain breeds that have been proven to be efficient [for] people that are visually impaired."

"I don't feel that when I've purchased my pets that any other animals had to suffer as a result."

— Non-animal companion responses

Minimal reflection on how breeding affects shelter populations / the scale of the problem; objectifying language normalising buying and selling animals; breeding justified as 'natural' and 'necessary' (to meet human needs, support economies, prevent breed extinction); fear-driven appeals that breeding is necessary to 'control numbers'; animals in shelters associated with 'defectiveness'; focus on physical traits rather than emotional lives; ending breeding seen as futile, it would continue (black market, unenforceable); reinforced the view that animals exist for human purposes (companionship, comfort, service).

"The whole buying and selling of animals... it's like anything: if you're going to buy an item of clothing and you're going to go Vinted and get something maybe second hand, or you're going to go to the shop and get something brand new."

"People don't want to take risks if they're going to spend money. They want something new, not an older dog with problems, health issues or anxiety."

"It would be sad that, in essence, we're making certain breeds of cats or dog extinct. We talk about species of animals in zoos going extinct, and yet we'd be doing a similar thing ourselves."

"The black market would go crazy if you can only get it from a shelter. People will find ways to get what they want."

Adopting animal companions

Frames animal freedom as a future in which animals are no longer bred, bought, or sold as commodities, encouraging reflection on how breeding contributes to the growing number of animals in shelters.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- Risky/avoid: Triggers defensiveness among people who have bought from breeders, reinforcing ideas of ownership, personal choice and animal use.
- Persuasive: Among people who have adopted animals, helps centre animals as individual emotional beings and opens space to apply this lens beyond animal companions.
- If used: Raise awareness of the systemic link between breeding and buying animal companions, and shelter populations, as this appears to be a gap in awareness, even amongst pro-adoption participants.



Non-animal companion group Risky/avoid

- Why it's risky: Risks reinforcing human-centred norms of ownership and a consumer mindset rather than a caring citizen role. Prompts objectifying language that diminishes animals as autonomous, resilient, emotional individuals.
- Mindset concern: Taps into fear-based reasoning about safety and human risk leaving little room for empathy.
- If used at all: Create relevance by highlighting mutual safety and care benefits for humans and other animals, emphasising that we share the same communities (e.g. *'Bigger Us'* narrative).

Understanding these responses

For people in the **animal companion group who have adopted animals**, this narrative feels affirming because it fits and reinforces how they already see themselves as good people. It allows them to centre animals as individual, emotional beings, feel proud of making caring, responsible choices, and be open to stronger protections for animal companions.

For people in **the animal companion group who have bought from breeders**, this narrative can feel like a criticism of their past choices, so it threatens their good-person identity. They reach for justifications about why breeds are needed and present themselves as responsible buyers; as adopters criticise breeding during the discussion, their discomfort and defensiveness increase.

For the **non-animal companion group**, this narrative does not feel personally implicating, so they are not especially defensive or reactive. Because they lack lived experience with animal companions and shelters, they apply a human, consumer-focused lens, making sense of the narrative through familiar ideas about buying and selling, so the discussion stays human-centred rather than considering the animals themselves.

Social progress

Frames society's treatment of animals as something that can and will improve over time, highlighting past progress and encouraging hopeful views of future equality for animals.

Animal companion responses

Evoked pride and optimism about society's capacity to improve how other animals are treated, highlighting past wins and shared progress; fostered belief that change is possible and necessary and a solution-focused mindset towards ongoing challenges; expressed empathy towards other animals; normalised shifts away from meat consumption by citing growing numbers of vegetarians and vegans as social proof.

"The successes should be celebrated. The banning of wild animals and circuses, fur farming and fox hunting. They used to happen on a large scale in this country."

"You shouldn't be able to go to a zoo and see a lion sitting in the snow."

"With regard to eating [animals], that already is changing. There's more vegans, more vegetarians in the world than there's ever been."

"There are a lot of people that are selfish and a lot of industries that are greedy, but you've still got to have hope."

Non-animal companion responses

Acknowledged that society does not treat animals well and that this should change; linked improved treatment of animals with moral progress, framing it as an aspirational goal for society; prompted ideas for actions and solutions; criticised human behaviour for harming animals and the planet; villainised supermarkets for driving consumerism and prioritising profit, while framing people as victims of these profit-driven systems.

"[We should be treating animals] more humanely. I think it reflects good on us as humans, how we treat our animals."

"I think it's negative the way we treat them [animals]; improving how we treat them should be part of our long-term plan."

"[Supermarkets are] all arguing about the price of lamb, who can do the cheapest lamb leg for Easter. And so whilst there's that constant fight to bring prices down, to draw consumers in and be selling more, more, more all the time and making greater and greater profits, it's going to be incredibly difficult to change [our eating habits]."

Social progress

Frames society's treatment of animals as something that can and will improve over time, highlighting past progress and encouraging hopeful views of future equality for animals.

— Animal companion responses

Prompted futility rooted in negative beliefs about human nature (people are inherently selfish/greedy and will always exploit animals); high-welfare and necessary justifications for eating meat; deflected personal reflection and action by blaming others (non-animal lovers, politicians, global systems); asserted themselves as 'animal lovers' and adopted a morally superior stance over those who 'do not care', undermining the narrative's sense of shared progress; framed UK progress as futile because other countries will continue exploiting animals; prompted discussion of global problems (e.g. deforestation, climate change, war), reinforcing feelings of overwhelm and futility.

"We have made some wonderful developments, but human nature in itself, we are a very greedy, selfish beast."

"We can do as much as we can in this country, but we haven't got regulations over other countries, so it's still going to go on."

"Whether you'd ever stop the entire species eating meat, I'm not sure that would be a good thing anyway, because surely we've always eaten meat for a reason."

"All of us answering these questions are all animal lovers. There's going to be a lot of society that aren't, and I don't know whether they would be so receptive to change of their own lifestyles."

— Non-animal companion responses

Surfaced a belief that things are actually getting worse and society is moving backwards; expressed futility and overwhelm about population growth and global crises; reinforced the idea that eating meat is an unchangeable norm; high-welfare justifications; narrowed thinking to food and consumer contexts with no perspective-taking towards animals; participants asserted themselves as meat-eaters and consumers (rather than citizens); elicited ridicule of animal freedom through exaggeration (e.g. chickens with passports moving in next door).

"If the aim is for greater animal welfare, then I think that no one in this room can disagree with that. I certainly want that as a consumer."

"If we're advocating for every animal to be released and chickens to roam freely where they would like on my land, then I would clearly have an issue with that, as I would with family of chickens wanting their own passports and moving next door."

"We need to slow down the growth of the population in order not to keep expanding into territory that used to belong to animals; I think we're going in the wrong direction."

Social Progress

Frames society's treatment of animals as something that can and will improve over time, highlighting past progress and encouraging hopeful views of future equality for animals.



Animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: Prompts recognition that the current treatment of animals is unacceptable, that change is needed and possible and encourages a solution-focused mindset.
- To boost impact: Counter futility by pairing with stories of global progress and shared values of care and fairness. Include animals' perspectives and experiences using narratives such as *Animal Abilities* and *Psychological Harm* so their lives are centred in visions of social change.



Non-animal companion group Persuasive

- Persuasive: Prompts recognition that animals should be treated better and that changing the status quo is possible, alongside a clear sense that they themselves are harmed by profit-led systems.
- To boost impact: Connect with narratives that centre animals' experiences (e.g. *Psychological Harm*, *Animal Abilities*) so their lives are included in visions of social change, and frame in ways that encourage an empowered, citizen-based identity rather than a consumer identity.

Understanding these responses

The collective framing of this narrative means it is about society rather than individuals, and presents change as something we do together over time. This allows people **in both groups** some distance from their day-to-day choices, so they feel less threatened and their responses show less reactance and defensiveness. The reminder that, as a country, we have already made progress for animals (circuses, fur, fox hunting) lets people feel proud and hopeful, and sit in a story of ongoing social progress rather than shame.

For **the animal companion group**, this narrative allows them to maintain a good person identity: it lets them say they want a kinder, fairer society for animals, while expressing doubt or futility about change through shifting responsibility onto other people or other countries instead of examining their own ability to change.

For **the non-animal companion group**, this narrative gives them space to support social progress for animals without feeling their meat-eater and consumer identity is under direct attack. Responsibility for change is shifted towards global crises and profit-led systems, so they can talk about improving conditions for animals in general terms while keeping their own habits in the background. Light humour or ridicule, such as jokes about "chickens with passports", marks the point where they feel change might go too far.

Industry disinformation

Introduces the idea that animal exploitation industries use a range of strategies to mislead or misinform the public in order to sell animal products and maintain profit, using framings such as false advertising, misleading labels, and lobbying efforts to influence legislation.

✚ Non-animal companion responses

Acknowledgement that corporations and industries mislead the public to protect profits and suppress empathy; blame and accountability extended to include government complicity; assertion that government and industry interests are closely aligned, increasing distrust; misleading practices framed as dishonest, manipulative, and unfair, prompting calls for transparency and accountability; repeated insistence that the public has a right to know how animals are treated; indication that demand for transparency reflects some genuine concern for how animals are treated, alongside self-interest.

"I do think the labelling of things can be misinterpreted or sort of manipulated a little bit to make us believe something's better than it is."

"We should all be able to make up our own mind. So as long as [industry] gives us the information then we can then make up our own mind if we purchase meat, if we want to become vegan."

"If the government are certifying to make sure that animal welfare has been met then that should be the case. Those certifications should be a seal of approval that we know that this [animal product] has passed every test we as a society feel morally acceptable."

▬ Non-animal companion responses

High-welfare justifications; high-welfare framing and focus on reform rather than questioning animal use or killing; prioritised human welfare (such as health, safety, value for money, and jobs) over animal suffering; frustration at industry manipulation centred on loss of consumer choice rather than concern for animals; admitted shared complicity in keeping ignorance intact; criticised the message by questioning its statistics, accuracy, and credibility; industry manipulation and dishonesty were accepted as inevitable, normalising deception and prompting futility; justified animal use as essential for survival, livelihoods, and the economy, framing meat consumption as necessary; curiosity and reflection limited by beliefs about necessity, normality, and entitlement.

"I don't know if this [information shared about misinformation] is actually true. I know for a fact that with trading standards and all these government agencies, a company can't say X and present Y to mean Z. Maybe people believed that back in the day, but now, with the internet, definitely not."

"How do we know what to buy? Where do we buy it from? What can you trust? Who can you trust?"

"This is the world we live in, right? It's lobbying for everything. Israel, Palestine, vegan, meat eaters. So this is normal."

Industry disinformation

Introduces the idea that animal exploitation industries use a range of strategies to mislead or misinform the public in order to sell animal products and maintain profit, using framings such as false advertising, misleading labels, and lobbying efforts to influence legislation.



Animal companion group Did not test

Due to the semi-structured format of the focus groups and time constraints, this narrative was **only tested with the non-animal companion group**.



Non-animal companion group Requires careful framing

- Has strong potential: Raised awareness of industry practices, highlighted systemic power, prompted curiosity, and opened space for reflection.
- Use with caution: Could narrow responses to consumer-focused thinking if not supported by narratives that centre animals.
- Careful framing: Most persuasive framings were comparisons to tobacco industry tactics, lobbying and legislative influence, and misleading labels; pair with perspective-taking narratives (psychological harm, animal abilities) to avoid a purely consumer-focused lens.

Understanding these responses

For the **non-animal companion group**, this narrative opens up the uncomfortable possibility that the checks and balances they assume exist for animals may not be there, but it does so in a way that lets them cast themselves as victims of manipulation and powerful industries as the villains, rather than feeling personally at fault. This creates space for curiosity and anger at industry behaviour without triggering strong reactance or defensiveness about their own habits.

As the implications of industry misinformation sink in, some begin to feel there may be no genuine ethical way to eat animals, which evokes discomfort and tension because it threatens their identity as meat-eaters. They often resolve this by sliding into futility and a sense that 'this is just how the world works', sometimes placing themselves back on the side of industry and acknowledging their own complicity, or by questioning the messenger and attacking the credibility of the information.

The comparison with tobacco industry tactics is particularly engaging for this group because it roots the story in social progress and makes systemic change feel more palatable, suggesting it could unfold gradually over many years, as it did with tobacco, without demanding an immediate identity shift or sense of personal loss.

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