



Towards more sustainable food practices:

a Social Practice Theory perspective
on change to plant-based food practices
among Dutch youth.

Foreword

While I was writing my thesis, the news broke that the Dutch government has removed 'limiting your meat consumption' from a list of recommendations that people can follow to combat climate change personally. Apparently, the suggestion by the government that eating less meat would be better for the planet caused too much of a negative reaction among people. As a result, government decided to ignore scientific research that shows eating less meat is more sustainable and removed the recommendation from the list. This news broke after part of Germany and Limburg had recently been flooded and I had heard from Italians how much hotter the summer had been than what they considered normal. To me this news indicates that problems are wicked in the Netherlands and require solutions. While my master International Development Studies would suggest that a thesis like this one would likely encompass cases in faraway places, I strongly disagree with this application of the notion of development. I am thus thrilled that I was given the opportunity to apply the skills that I have obtained during my master program to research a topic relevant in the Global North, in the Netherlands. Additionally, the collaboration with ProVeg Nederland, a Dutch NGO that encourages the consumption plant-based food, provided a clear societal relevance and practical application for this research that has motivated me throughout the process.

Since I am a food lover that never really understood the importance of meat in a meal, the topic of plant-based food practice is a topic close to my heart. What makes this especially fascinating for me is that food practices are central to daily life but in my opinion can be taken for granted. I feel fortunate that this research has not only provided insights on an academic level, but also many points for reflection on a personal level. Altogether, combining my fascination for food and the academic skills obtained during my masters have resulted in this final thesis.

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

A plant-based diet has been associated with sustainability because of the lower environmental footprint it has compared to the dominant Western diet. However, as is the case with many sustainable practices, questions remain about how practice change to a plant-based diet can be encouraged. This research studied plant-based food practices from a Social Practice Theory approach to create a broader understanding of how practices change and to provide further insight into how practice change can be encouraged. In this research I focus on interconnections between three elements of practice: meaning, material and competence. This research distinguishes itself from other Social Practice Theory research because of its study of the changing process of a practice. A distinction in the process of practice change is made between the phase of transition and the phase of continuance. Following Bourdieu's recognition of the university as a site for social and cultural reproduction, equity in practice change is approached by addressing differences between Dutch youth with different educational backgrounds. The consideration of differences between youth in the process of practice change towards more plant-based food practices incorporates a dimension of equity in the study of a sustainable practice.

Semi-structured interviews with twenty-two Dutch youth show that practice change to plant-based food practices is initiated by the repetitive incorporation of new plant-based ingredients. This incorporation is encouraged by shifts to plant-based values (meaning) as well as by knowledge and knowledgeability of plant-based products (competence) during transition. Furthermore, this research has suggested that youth with mbo and hbo backgrounds are more uncertain about their competences to change their food practices than youth with a wo education. This indicates that absence or insufficient presence of knowledge and knowledgeability of plant-based food products makes practice change to plant-based food practices more difficult. While during transition shifts in meaning were concerned with valuating plant-based food values, during continuance the element of meaning is concerned with reinforcing plant-based values with additional changes in material scripts. How often this occurs differs from person to person and from meal to meal. What does seem constant during continuation is the development of competence through interaction and a trial-and-error approach. All in all, while all elements play a vital role in practice change, this research shows that competences play a vital role in practice change and should be taken into consideration when encouraging sustainable practices.

Keywords: practice change, sustainability, equity, behavioural change, plant-based diet, plant-based food, food practice.

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Chapter 1: Problem definition

Sustainability problems of change

As a reaction to a multitude of environmental disasters and predictions such as climate change, droughts, heatwaves, loss of biodiversity, natural disasters and others, a growing number of social science scholars are calling for ways to understand and initiate social and environmental change (Strengers and Maller 2014). Much policy on sustainability has been influenced by studies that have taken a behavioural approach and assumed that behaviour is an outcome of a rational process (Hargreaves, 2011). However, to set these sustainability problems of change as a problem of human behaviour provides a one-sided approach (Shove, 2010). Shove (2010) remarks that the most dominant paradigm that has inspired policy has been the ABC paradigm. The ABC in this paradigm signifies attitude, behaviour and choice, thereby indicating that every individual has a certain attitude (A) that leads to a certain behaviour (B) based on a choice (C). The main problem seems to be that these studies do not account for the breach between values that individuals hold and the actual practices that they are engaged in; the otherwise called value-action gap (Garnett et al., 2015). This dominant behaviour-based approach to social change offers a limited understanding of the social world and how it changes.

Equity

Simultaneously, another issue regarding research on sustainability issues and policy is equity. Some scholars argue that inequalities can cause greater environmental degradation and that a more equitable distribution of power and resources would improve environmental quality (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Zepharovich et al., 2021). While there has been some attention for challenges around sustainability and for challenges around equity, little systematic work can be found on the interlinkages between the two (Leach et al., 2018). To explain the role of equity within research on sustainability, it is useful to set out a distinction between inter- and intra-generational equity. Agyeman (2008) describes how inter-generational equity is concerned with building a sustainable future for all generations, including the generations to come. Emphasis is often on the future generation and ensuring a sustainable future for unborn children. This is different from intra-generational equity that is concerned with creating a sustainable future for all people of existing generations. Intra-generational equity emphasizes the different groups that exist within generations and how they are included in the sustainability discourse.

Inter-generational equity has been more prominent in the sustainability debate and is linked to the New Environmental paradigm. According to this paradigm a green agenda of environmental protection and biodiversity is required to ensure a healthy planet for future generations. Intra-generational equity is linked to the Environmental Justice paradigm in which a brown agenda of poverty alleviation, health and education are needed for generations now. The main difference between green and brown agendas are in terms of how issues of race and class, justice and equity play out in goods and services, not in terms of environmental protection (Agyeman, 2008). In other words, the New Environmental paradigm and the Environmental Justice paradigm are both apprehensive about the environmental boundaries of the planet. However, they differ in their concern with who has access to goods, skills and services that can facilitate a better-quality life.

In this research I follow the definition of sustainability as:

‘The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems’ (Agyeman et al. 2003, 5).

This definition of sustainability originates from the field of “just sustainability” and was introduced by Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2003). This definition aims to bridge the equity-deficit between inter- and intra-generational equity, by acknowledging both types of equity as important for building a sustainable future.

Plant-based food practice

This research focusses specifically on plant-based food practices, since a plant-based diet has been associated with sustainability because of the lower environmental footprint it has compared to the dominant Western diet in which meat is prominent (Aleksandrowicz et al., 2016; Duchin, 2005). Furthermore, food practices are an essential part of daily life and have the daily potential to be made more sustainable. Most research on plant-based diets has been done on the environmental impacts on a macro scale and on motivations and barriers to adopting a plant-based diet from a sociopsychological perspective (de Boer et al., 2017; Lea et al., 2006).

The importance of equity within the study of plant-based food practices is confirmed by internal research by the Dutch branch of an international NGO (ProVeg, personal communication, December 2020) that encourages plant-based eating. As a result of this research, they too have realised that their audience is rather homogenous and similar to how Agyeman (2008) describes the general audience of the environmental sustainability movement: mainly white, educated, and middle-class. Research on equity in plant-based food practices can provide a better understanding of why some people are included in practice change to plant-based food practices and other may not.

Research focus

In this research plant-based food practices are a central focus point because of its connotation as a sustainable practice. Furthermore, this research studies how plant-based food practices change among Dutch youth from different educational backgrounds. The specific attention for differences between youth from different educational backgrounds includes a dimension of equity in this research. Lastly, the focus of this research is on how food practices change to plant-based food practices, rather than studying how plant-based food practices work.

What makes youth a specifically interesting group to study within this research is that youth are at the crossroads of social reproduction in their transitions from childhood adult life (Shildrick et al., 2009). While other life phases also involve transitions, new cultural trends or significant social developments are arguably seen first or most obviously in youth as they transition to adulthood (Shildrick et al., 2009).

Within this research different people described their transformations to plant-based food practices. These descriptions were analysed with Social Practice Theory and focussed on how practices changed rather than how behaviour changed. In doing so, this research contributes to a growing body of literature as part of the ‘practice turn’ (Yolande and Maller 2014). Previous studies within Social Practice Theory have often studied practice change through historical documents to gain larger understanding of how practices change (Strengers and Maller 2014; Shove and Walker 2010). What distinguishes this research within the body of literature of Social Practice Theory is that the focus of this research is on a practice that is changing, analysed through the accounts of carriers of practice.

Research questions

This study revolves around the following research question: How do food practices change to plant-based food practices among Dutch youth?

The answer to this question is formulated with the help of the following sub-questions:

1. How do food practices change among Dutch youth during the transition to plant-based food practices?
2. How does practice change of plant-based food practices continue among Dutch youth after transition to plant-based food practices?
3. How does change in food practices differ among Dutch youth with different education backgrounds?

Outline of the thesis

The following chapter will set out how equity is approached through the study of differences between youth of different educational backgrounds. I will elaborate on Social Practice Theory as used within this research and give a description of the three elements of practice used: meaning, material and competences.

This thesis has two chapters that describe the empirical results of this research. The two chapters are about the transition and continuation of plant-based food practices. Both chapters follow the structure of the elements of practice as described in the following chapter. Each chapter ends with concluding remarks on transition or continuance.

After the two chapters, a short comparison and description of practice change as analysed in the empirical chapters. This thesis concludes with a discussion section that addresses the findings as well as the relation between Social Practice Theory as Behavioural Theory.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will first set out how equity is defined within this research. Secondly, I will go into the Social Practice Theory used as in this research. Additionally, I will elaborate on how elements of practice are defined within this research.

Including equity

Many sociologists argue that some kind of stratification principle exists and has existed in societies (Lawton, 1975). According to them, societies are divided into layers or ranks of some sort. Currently the most prominent social divisions are ethnicity, gender, and class (Anthias, 2013b). Social class is one of the structuring concepts offered. At its foundations this concept has economic characteristics i.e., capital influences social class (Lawton, 1975). However, the influence of capital does not create clear boundaries; the boundaries of social class are rather fuzzy. This leaves room for interpretation of what can be considered a social class. Additionally, the use of class as a concept has been limited since the ‘death of class’ was announced (Caínzos & Voces, 2010). This left gender and ethnicity as prominent social divisions. However, I question that differences between groups of people can be explained by the sole focus on characteristics such as the gender and ethnicity of a person.

Following Bourdieu’s recognition of the university as a site for social and cultural reproduction through a cumulative logic and the inheritance of cultural capital (Gripsrud et al., 2011), I therefore focus on educational background as a stratification principle in this research. Through this focus, I will pay attention to the way enculturation processes at educational institutions can enforce cultural differences between different groups of people. To gain understanding of how differences in educational background affect change in practices, this research pays specific attention to differences in food practice change between Dutch youth from different educational backgrounds.

Additionally, intersectionality between educational background and other social categories should be addressed. Intersectionality suggests that different social divisions interrelate and affect the social relations in people’s lives. These multiple social divisions simultaneously generate experiences and practices (Anthias, 2013a). While each person has their own assembly of social categorisations, some might be more prominent in particular contexts. Additionally, the way social boundaries are drawn differ. Gender boundaries tends to be more binary, while ethnicity is often considered more of a spectrum. In this research we take what McCall (2005) calls an intra-categorical approach to intersectionality. That means the different social categories are recognised, but that the focus of this research will not be on the connection and relation between these categories. The emphasis of this research will be on class relations interpreted by educational background. The social category of gender is included in this research through a distribution of gender that is as equal as possible. The social category of race will not be specifically addressed in this research, because of its intersection with education as is evident from other research on racial inequality in education (Stevens et al., 2011).

Now that I have addressed how this research contributes to the study of equity within the field of sustainability, the following paragraph will go into what practices are and why they should be studied according to Social Practice Theory.

Social practice Theory

The concept of practice is not new in social sciences, since a first generation of theorising can be traced back to the late 1800s and the first part of the last century (Miettinen et al., 2010; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). Strengers and Maller (2014) describe how attention for social practice theory

has resurfaced because of dissatisfaction with theories of behaviour. They name this increase in attention a 'practice turn'. The focus by Social Practice Theory on daily practice moves the focus away from the individual, since Social Practice Theories study repetitive practices of daily life as a unit of analysis, instead of individuals, citizens, societies, social groups or even sociotechnical systems (Shove & Walker, 2010). However, practices are not sites around which consumers and systems interact (Shove, 2010), but dynamic entities of their own. A multitude of different Social Practice Theories exist, which is why they are often described through the aspects they have in common (Miettinen et al., 2010).

One of the aspects where social practice theorists find middle ground is in their shared desire to move beyond dualisms such as the structure-agency opposition (Hargreaves, 2011). Practices could be an interesting entity to study as the bridge between structure and agency, because practices are sustained and changed through repetitive performance. In other words, existing practices shape and restrict the actions of the people who carry out practices. At the same time practices are changed by the actions of the carriers; the driver and the driven are one (Jarvis, 2018; Shove, 2010). If we consider practice to be the basic unit of analysis of social inquiry, people and things are carriers of practices (Reckwitz, 2002).

Practices do not exist in isolation but are linked together in bundles of practice (Blue et al., 2016). Practices in bundles of practices are interlinked. Daly (2020) coins the term "mealing practices", which encompasses multiple interlinked practices that are concerned with eating food. Etiquette can be considered part of mealing practices because it is specifically concerned with how food should be eaten. In this research I use the term "food practices" for the bundle of practice that encompasses all practices needed to organise a meal. Buying groceries, ordering food and preparing food are examples of practices that are interlinked and part of food practices.

Studying how practices evolve, capture and loose carriers while at the same time studying how systems and complexities of practice itself form and splinter provides an opportunity to better understand social change (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, 2010). Reckwitz (2002) refers to practice as depending upon the specific inter-connectedness of many elements – forms of bodily activities, mental activities, things and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how and notions of competence, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. In other words, the interconnection between different elements makes up a practice. While different categorisations of elements of practice exist, Røpke (2009) sets out how Social Practice Theories by Reckwitz, Schatzki, Shove and Pantzar materialized Social Practice Theory by introducing the element of material to Social Practice Theory. The added focus on material can provide insight into understanding of inequalities in access to goods, services, skills and understanding within groups of people in society (Blue et al. 2016).

In this research I will use the conceptual framework provided by Elisabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson (2012). This framework argues that practices are formed through three interconnected elements: meaning, material and competence. I have chosen this framework specifically, because the work of Elisabeth Shove has illustrated that this Social Practice Theory can be particularly useful for gaining insight into environmental and sustainability issues (Halkier et al., 2011). The following section will elaborate on each of the three elements of practice.

Elements

A practice cannot be reduced to one of its elements but consists of the multitude of them and their interconnections (Halkier et al., 2011). These elements can thus not to be confused with domains or fields of study, because they are quite literally the ingredients of practice (Shove & Walker, 2010). Shove et al. (2012) describe three layers of elements that constitute a social practice; meaning;

materials, and competence. It should be noted that the elements mentioned are reproduced, eroded or carried through dynamic integration in repeated performance (Hargreaves, 2011). While practices are always in the process or formation, re-formation and de-formation, elements are relatively stable and can circulate across time and space (Shove et al., 2012). It is the different elements that make up practices (Meier et al., 2018), which means that modifications of practice are enabled by renewed links between elements used for a practice. The following section will address the three elements specifically.

Meanings

According to Shove et al. (2012) ascriptions of meaning are unavoidably relative, situated and emergent. In other words, practices are adjusted to social norms and values, shared by other people in specific circumstances (Meier et al., 2018). These meanings of practices evolve, which makes it interesting to study their circulation and movement over time (Shove et al., 2012). An example concerning meaning about plant-based eating can for example be reflected in notions of what is a healthy meal and how these notions might change. Reckwitz (2002) describes meaning as mental activities, emotion and motivational knowledge. Shove (2010) elaborates on this by describing meaning as symbolic meaning, ethics, aspirations, norms, and values.

Materials

Actions are materially scripted (Shove & Walker, 2014). One way to describe materials is by talking about resources, infrastructure, technology, or even as mere things (Reckwitz, 2002). The presence of things seems to be rarely questioned, mainly because some materials are essential for the performance of a practice. For example, to study the practice of gardening, one must assume the presence and access to soil that can be cultivated and gardening supplies to do so. The emphasis within social practice theory tends to be on what and how materials are used to facilitate a practice, rather than if, how and why they are present or changing (Shove & Walker, 2010). If the availability of materials is needed to perform a certain practice, availability and access to materials provide interesting angles to study how this influences practice change.

Competence

Another important element to practices are competences or skills. Since actions are materially scripted, actors should know how to use the materials that are part of the action to be able to perform a practice. This specific knowledge has to do with how people do things and how materials work, if materials and situations can be accurately decoded (Shove et al., 2012). Brown and Duguid state that a capability is embedded and is thus shared through interactions (Orlikowski, 2002; Reckwitz, 2002). However, A distinction can be made in capabilities between knowledgeability of a practice (knowing) and knowledge (Orlikowski, 2002). Knowledge is concerned with what needs to be done. Knowing has to do with know-how, enacting knowledge in practice. In other words, knowledge is concerned with exercise of the mind, while knowing is concerned with bodily expression and experience. It is one thing to know what it is to take a ride on a sled. However, the experience of sledding down a hill and knowing what that constitutes, is a combination of knowledge, skills and emotions altogether. I argue that studying how knowledge and knowing travel and evolve through interactions over practices can provide interesting insight into how practice change occurs.

The three elements distinguished provide a theoretical framework of elements needed to constitute a practice. However, operationalising the focus on the action instead of the actor, even with the framework of elements, does meet challenges in practice (Halkier et al., 2011). To gain a better understanding of how carriers of practice are recruited to a certain practice and how this practice is sustained, this research pays attention to patterns in practices between interviewees, changes in elements of practice, and interaction between carriers of practice.

Chapter 3: Research methods

Data collection

To collect data on the elements of plant-based food practices, twenty-two in-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Before the interviews were scheduled, I have been in contact with all interviewees via telephone. The goal of these telephone conversations was to make sure expectations of the interviews were aligned, to gain some background knowledge about interviewees, to build trust between the researcher and the interviewees, and to schedule the interviews. Information gained was generally about study background, living situation, preferred way of eating, age and contact information. Some information provided during the telephone conversations was referred to in the interview of the interviewee to gain a deeper understanding of the practices of the interviewee.

After a successful phone conversation, interviews were scheduled. Interviewees received a confirmation of their scheduled interview via email, accompanied with the information discussed in the phone conversation. All interviews were conducted in Dutch and recorded. Interviewees were informed about the recording via phone conversation and email, to give them the opportunity to object when they preferred not to be recorded. Additionally, the recordings of the online interviews could also be downloaded by the interviewees at the end of the interview. None of the interviewees objected to the recording and many said that they would mind if their name was shared in this research. I have chosen to keep all interviewees anonymous within this research to maintain the focus on the practice rather than the individual.

Interviews were conducted between April 18th, 2021, and June 8th, 2021. Apart from two interviews, all interviews took place in an online setting via Microsoft Teams software due to measurements taken considering the Corona pandemic. The choice for semi-structured interviews was made to be able to give interviewees the opportunity to elaborate on practices and experiences that they shared during the conversations.

The questionnaire initially followed different practices as part of the bundle of food practices as topics with the idea to ask questions close to the lived experience of interviewees. However, after testing it turned out that some practices were more prone to change than others. For example, the topic of doing groceries was not a topic that was elaborated on much, so it was not widely addressed in the final topics. Instead of following different practices in the interview, the final interview guide stayed closer to topics that could have a closer link to elements of practice. Examples are asking reflective questions such as how interviewees regard meat/fish eaters, asking about how one decides what to eat, or asking what people look for in meals. Additionally, attention was paid to interaction between different groups of people. The distinction between transition and continuance in interview question was mainly made by asking about past changes in practice (transition) and more current changes in practice (continuation). The interview guide (Dutch) can be found in the appendix.

Target group

In total, 22 people have participated in this research. The main requirement for people to participate in this research was that they are striving to eat as plant based as possible for them at that point in time. To gain more insight into how practice change takes place, various ways in which people approach plant-based food were included and a specific plant-based diet was not required for participation. Half of the research participants follow a vegan diet. A diverse variety of plant-based diets such as vegetarian, flexitarians or flexonists make up the other half of the research participants.

Aside from eating more plant-based, all research participants are currently following an education. Because this research pays specific attention to differences among youth from different educational backgrounds, it is important to provide some context on what the Dutch educational system looks like and how these educational backgrounds differ from each other within the system. The Dutch educational system consists of different educational paths that have a different ratio of theory and practice present in a study direction. MBO is mainly practical and has 4 different levels of education that people can obtain. The fourth level is more theoretical than the first level. HBO is more theoretical than MBO, but still has a clear practical component that is part of the study path. In English, HBO would be translated to university of applied sciences. WO is university education and is the most theoretical orientation. While this distinction seems clear, educational background cannot always be as clearly differentiated. For example, an interviewee can have completed an HBO education and continued a WO education after that. This makes educational boundaries blurrier. These interviewees have been classified according to their current study direction except for one. This interviewee was finishing a high-school degree and plans to start a study on hbo-level this year. This person has been categorised in the group with an mbo education.

A variety of networks was used to approach students to participate in this research. Research participants were contacted through various youth organisations, schools, via the ProVeg network and through other research participants. As a result, the research group resides in different places throughout the Netherlands. The provinces where participants live are Friesland, Overijssel, Limburg, Noord-Brabant, Utrecht, Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland.

In the research, specific attention was paid to the equal representation of educational background of the interviewees within the research. Eight people that are currently pursuing a wo-degree have been interviewed. Seven people enrolled at a hbo-study have been interviewed and the group of interviewees with a mbo-study background consists of seven people.

The youngest research participant was 17 years of age, and the oldest participant was 26 years of age. On average the research participants were 21 years old. The goal of this research was to approximate a 50/50 balance in gender participation. The final research population is comprised of 9 men, 11 women, 2 non-binary people.

Initially the idea was to interview students that no longer lived at home, but it soon became clear that too many students would be excluded if this condition would be maintained. In the end, 10 out of 22 research participants were still living at home. Most mbo-students still live at home with one or two parents. The majority of hbo and wo-students no longer live with their parents.

Table 2: Overview of characteristics of research participants

| Indicators | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Educational background | Mbo | 7 |
| | Hbo | 7 |
| | Wo | 8 |
| Gender | Women | 110 |
| | Men | 9 |
| | Non-binary | 2 |
| Age | Youngest | 17 |
| | Oldest | 26 |
| | Average | 21 |
| Living situation | With parents | 10 |
| | Without parents | 12 |

Analysis

Analysis of the data took place in two-fold and was completed without the assistance of software. In a first run through of the interview transcripts several subjects that resurfaced most were coded: initiation of change, positive interaction, negative interaction, prejudice, expectations, gender, new information, meat replacements and farming. In addition, analysis was needed to identify the elements of practice in the experiences of interviewees.

Secondly, these identified subjects and their link to elements of practice have been positioned based on timing to be impacting during transition or continuance of plant-based food practices. Furthermore, the topic of equity was expected to resurface in different interactions, so analysis of interactions regarding educational background was conducted. However, when no clear results emerged, other repetitive subjects were analysed for differences between groups as well.

To make sure that results were not written as personal hypotheses based on unfounded data, specific attention was paid to quantifying reoccurring subjects and comments throughout the process of data analysis.

Limitations

While this research aims to take multiple factors into account, naturally there are some limitations. The first limitation is concerned with how interviewees have been reached to participate in this research. Most research participants have links to organisations active within the field of sustainability. Others have friends that are active within these organisations. By making use of existing networks to find research participants, I have selected a specific type of research participant that may stand out among their peers for their extra-curricular activities. Therefore, questions can thus be raised about how representative interviewees are of youth with specific educational backgrounds.

Furthermore, this research is based on the experiences of 22 people, collected through interviews. While this provides some insight into practice change among Dutch youth, the sample size is not

large enough to provide results that can be generalised to a larger all research participants actively responded to my research to participate. Their views could be different from fellow youth and students that did not respond to my call for this research or were not part of the networks of youth organisations. Regardless, I believe that the experiences of these youth can provide new insights into how practice change to plant-based food practices occurs.

Thirdly, while this research paid attention to different educational levels, the type of education that interviewees follow was not taken into consideration. For example, interviewees studied chemistry and IT, while others studied journalism and communication. These differences in educational direction make it more difficult to compare students from different educational levels, because different study directions are not considered. Results about differences between youth from different educational backgrounds may have been clearer when all students would have followed an education in the same field (such as medicine or business), but on a different educational level.

Chapter 4: Transition

The following two chapters will go into the empirical results based on the twenty-two interviews conducted for this research. The chapters are divided into two phases that can be recognised in change of food practices: transition and continuation. This first chapter is concerned with transition. Transition is the phase in which practice change is initiated, practices first start to change. In this chapter I will first shortly address how plant-based eating is defined by participants. Second, I will go further into the elements of practice that play a role in the transition towards plant-based food practices.

Varieties in plant-based diets

During the first contact with interviewees, it became clear that many interviewees associate plant-based eating with a vegan diet. However, among the interviewees a variety of diets that limit the consumption of animal products can be recognized. While some research participants are just beginning to limit their consumption of animal products with occasional cheat days, others are newly discovering plant-based dairy products, yet others have been eating vegan for years. Some interviewees do follow a vegan diet, but it is important to note that there is variety among vegan diets as well. There are people on a vegan diet that eat a lot of processed food, there are people on a vegan diet that are more focussed on eating whole foods, and there are many varieties in between. How vegan choices are made in other areas of daily life, such as shoes, clothing and furniture, fall outside the scope of this research. To include all varieties in plant-based food practices, I will mostly refer to the diet varieties of participants as plant-based diets.

What all varieties of plant-based diets have in common is that the number of animal-based products is lower than in the previously adopted omnivore diet. The dominant way in which interviewees prepare their food is through home cooking practices. Both interviewees living at home and interviewees living independent from their parents mention cooking meals with friends as well as occasionally eating out or ordering in as activities. Eating out or ordering in is not mentioned as a consistent practice, but rather as an occasional activity. Nine of the twenty-two research participants have been living with one or two parents during the research. The interviewees that are living at home are not responsible for food provisions within the family and they participate to various degrees in food practices at home. All interviewees living at home consume evening meals together with the family members that they live with.

In the chapters, an occasional reference to vegan and vegetarian diets will be made when significant. While it is not always entirely clear what is considered a vegetarian or vegan diet, because opinions can differ between informants about specific ingredients such as additives, a general guideline on what a vegetarian and vegan diet is agreed upon. A vegetarian diet does not include the consumption of animals, while a vegan diet does not include animal-based products. Both diets are preceded by a grey area in which limitation of animal products and animal-based products is pursued. Consequently, a person can find themselves in one of the four stages in which practice change towards plant-based food practices takes place: flexitarian, vegetarian, flexanist, vegan. Someone on a vegan diet has more altered practices in comparison to someone on a diet in any of the other three stages. Therefore, one could say that a vegan diet is more radically different from an omnivore diet than the other stages. However, this does not mean that practice change towards a vegan diet is inevitably a radical change of food practices.

In this research, initiation of practice change is the first alteration of food practice towards plant-based food practices. How practice change is established can take multiple shapes. A first step in practice change for interviewees can be an introduction to any of the four stages. A change towards

plant-based food practices can mean that a person stops eating any animal-based products, but it can also mean that the amount of eating meat is reduced. Both examples illustrate practice change. However, limiting meat consumption is often considered a smaller change in food practices than when a person completely changes their diet from omnivore to vegan. In this research, all alterations from a previous diet are seen as a change in food practices and the start of transition phase.

Transition to plant-based food practices is concerned with making plant-based food practices a regular part of a diet as, not an occasional event. Continuation of plant-based food practices means that the food practices as part of a diet are increasingly becoming more plant-based, regardless of the initial point in any of the four stages towards which practice change started. The following part of this chapter will go into how practices change by discussing shifts that take place in elements of practice during transition to plant-based food practices.

Meaning

In this section I will go into the meaning that interviewees give to plant-based food practices. First, I will address the values interviewees link to plant-based food practices. Secondly, I will go into shifts in meaning. Lastly, I will address influences that seem to impact meaning given to food practices.

Interviewees repetitively make diverse mentions of plant-based food practices. These topics can be separated into three groups: animal wellbeing, the environment and personal health. I will refer to these three topic groups as the main values of plant-based food practices. Personal health was the main value of a plant-based diet for only one participant¹ but a link between plant-based food and personal health is mentioned by eight interviewees². All other participants were mainly drawn to the subjects of animal wellbeing and the environment. While the main values of plant-based food practices are also present during continuance, I address these values here because they become more established during transition. During continuance these plant-based values have become a norm.

The specific values mentioned by interviewees in relation to plant-based food practices are slightly different within the topic groups. Within the theme of animal wellbeing two interviewees³ specifically mention that they are against the meat industry because of animal cruelty and don't want to contribute to the industry. In this case, interviewees are not necessarily against eating meat, but are against practices in the meat industry to which they don't want to contribute. This is different from three other interviewees⁴ who talk about the relationship that they have with animals. To them animals, and thus meat, cannot be considered food. Differences in values can also be regarded within the theme of environment. The value of a plant-based diet is most often mentioned in relation to the environment by emphasizing the harm that animal-based products have on the environment. Higher CO₂ emissions of the animal industry in comparison to the plant-based food industry is mentioned by four interviewees⁵. The high impact of animal-based products on the planet in relation to plant-based product is mentioned by six interviewees⁶. This shows that the value of plant-based food practices in terms of the environment is measured through comparison to animal-based practices. How plant-based food practices and animal-based food practices are compared can differ. Personal health was a main value for one participant that

¹ Interview reference number: 0106c.

² Interview reference numbers: 1904, 2804, 2904, 0705, 1305, 2605, 3105a, 0106c.

³ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 1205.

⁴ Interview reference numbers: 1904, 0705, 0306

⁵ Interview reference numbers: 1205, 2005, 2605, 3105b

⁶ Interview reference numbers: 0505, 1305, 1706, 2605, 2805, 0306.

experienced direct bodily effects when consuming animal-based food and thus tried to avoid these products. Animals and the environment were taken into consideration to a limited degree. Other interviewees mention personal health benefits as an additional advantage but value the groups of animal wellbeing and the environment more. Additionally, meaning given to food practices can continue to shift for each person and multiple values can overlap.

The meaning given to food practices influences how actors practice food practices. This became clear when interviewees talked about situations in which a plant-based food practice was not performed accordingly. Multiple interviewees mention that the last time they were served an animal-based product was unintentionally. When it was discovered that a dish was not plant-based, some interviewees decided to eat the animal-based products, because they did not want the food to go to waste. Other interviewees did not eat the animal-based products, because they did not want to eat animals. This shows that while all four interviewees practice plant-based food practices, they are recruited to these practices based on different values and these values influence how interviewees act.

Another way in which differences in values surfaced was through the expression of emotion. Feelings of guilt have been mentioned six times throughout the research. Three interviewees⁷ mention a lack of guilt because they no longer ate any meat, or feelings of guilt over accidentally eating meat. All three interviewees highly value animals and their relationship to them. Three others⁸ highly value the environment and compared their plant-based food practices to animal-based food practices to legitimize their occasional consumption of animal-based products. These interviewees specifically express the absence of feelings of guilt for consuming animal-based products. This shows not only interviewees that hold different values, but also that interviewees recognize values that other people may give to plant-based food practices. Even when they do not hold these values themselves. Additionally, interviewees report how friends and family prepare and consume plant-based meals on a regular basis, but do not subscribe to the same plant-based values that they do. In other words, plant-based food practices carry meanings that can be recognised by actors, but recognition it does not guarantee that all actors share all values that a practice holds. The next section goes into how shifts in meaning among interviewees took place.

Shifts

“It was so hot, and I saw a video about pigs that had to wait at the slaughterhouse. I remember thinking: “I really don’t support this”. I find it awful, but why do I eat that? So, I became a vegetarian.”⁹

Two shifts in meaning can be recognised in empirical data. Looking at how meaning about food practices changes initially does not seem to concern food practices. Instead, meaning about food practices shift because information flows in society encourage questioning of food practices and their values. Podcasts, news, books, social media, and people are mentioned as sources for information on plant-based food practices and its values. Four interviewees¹⁰ mention that interaction with other people on a plant-based diet have been influential in the transition to plant-based food practices. Additionally, video is mentioned as a source in the previous quote. However,

⁷ Interview reference numbers: 0106b, 0706a, 0706b.

⁸ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 1705, 2005.

⁹ Dutch: “Het was zo warm en ik zag een filmpje van varkens die moesten wachten bij het slachthuis en toen dacht ik: daar sta ik gewoon echt niet achter. Ik vind het zo erg, waarom ga ik dat dan eten? Dus toen ben ik vegetariër geworden.”

¹⁰ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 1205, 2005, 0706b

one influence stands out. A total of nine interviewees¹¹ mention documentaries as source of new information on plant-based food practices. While documentaries are rarely viewed more than once, they seem to provide a relatively easy way to consume a lot of new information. In other words, the first shift in meaning is concerned with questioning food practices, encouraged by information flows in society. This results in an appreciation of plant-based food values.

In the second shift, plant-based food values are integrated in food practice through changes in food practice. In other words, food practices are aligned with plant-based food values. Alignment of values and practices can go together with rejection of values of previous food practices but that does not have to be the case. Practices with plant-based values and practices without plant-based values can be performed interchangeably by the same actor. Where the first shift in meaning is still a passive shift in meaning, the second shift in meaning is an active shift in meaning that initiates practice change. Both shifts are illustrated in the previous quote that is a recollection of earlier events by an interviewee.

All interviewees adopted plant-based food practices, but none of the interviewees can consciously recall how and when they started to question their food practices. Nevertheless, some interviewees have mentioned factors that could have contributed to their shifts in meaning. The following two sections will shortly address two influences that affect meaning given to food practices according to this research.

Gender

While this research did not start out with specific questions on gender expectations around plant-based eating, gender dimensions did stand out. Throughout the research, I have asked all participants what they consider to be healthy. In six interviews¹² weight loss became a topic of conversation. For three participants weight loss was welcomed, while three others were cautious of weight loss, likely due to earlier experiences. This was striking because five of the participants identified as women, while in total eleven participants in this research identified as women. The sixth person that also talked about weight loss identifies as non-binary. So, within this research, almost one in two women is consciously dealing with concerns around weight, while none of the people identifying as man have in any way referred to their weight in this research. The connection between concerns around weight and change of food practices remains to be studied, but this research gives some indication that beauty ideals for women's weight can unconsciously have an influence on change in food practices.

While men may not be dealing with issues around weight, they did stand out as a group for a different reason. Four participants¹³ brought up meat as something that is considered masculine. When asked how the link between meat and masculinity can be noticed in practice, the main response was through jokes that were made. There was also mention of prejudice regarding appearance and being made fun of in moderation when you are a man that eats plant based. This suggests that being a male vegetarian or vegan is valued differently and can mean that as a man that eats plant-based you are taken less seriously. However, more research is needed to better understand the relation between meat and masculinity and its connection to practice change in food practices.

Furthermore, what stood out most is the numerous times that interviewees mention that men of a nuclear family where the only ones that insisted on eating meat. Five interviewees¹⁴ set out how

¹¹ Interview reference numbers: 0505, 0705, 2505b, 1705, 3105b, 2805, 3105a, 0706b, 2904.

¹² Interview reference numbers: 2505a, 2805, 0106c, 1904, 0706a, 0106a.

¹³ Interview reference numbers: 1205, 2605, 2805, 1305.

¹⁴ Interview reference numbers: 2505a, 1705, 2605, 2805, 0106b.

their brothers and fathers insist on eating meat. The arguments that these men provided valued the taste of meat and marked plant-based food practices as radical. Additionally, male friends have been mentioned five times¹⁵ in the context that they are less open to plant-based food and would rather eat meat. In total, ten interviewees¹⁶ mention a link between eating meat and the male gender. This acknowledges that expectations around what it means to be a man can influence change in food practices. Taking both the stories about men and women into account, expectations around gender roles in society are influential to change in food practices.

Profession

Aside from the role of gender as influential on practice change, another aspect stood out during this research. Five interviewees¹⁷ mention a different mentality in people that live in farmers communities or work as farmers. According to interviewees, a strong appreciation of meat and dairy in food practices can be linked the profession of animal farming for human consumption. Because meat and dairy are central products in the livelihoods of these families and communities, these products are highly values in farmers communities. As a result, plant-based food practices are experienced as a threat to the income of the farmer and its community. The profession of animal-farming thus influences the meaning given to food practices. Inevitably, this meaning influences the potential for practice change to plant-based food practices.

Material

This section goes into how the element of material contributed to the interviewees' transition to plant-based food practices. Material can be described within social practice theory as the objects used in practice. This can concern both materials that are used in practice, such as kitchen tools as well as ingredients for food practices. I address materials in the context of ingredients for food practices. I will first discuss materials in terms of availability. Secondly, I will address how the use of materials is affected by influences in daily life. Lastly, meat replacements are discussed.

Available food options

All interviewees shop their groceries at supermarkets and have access to supermarkets. There was a single mention of the market and an occasional mention of other shops such as toko's, which are Asian food stores in the Netherlands. Interviewees mention that supermarkets are fairly uniform throughout the country. In other words, all interviewees have access to a similar infrastructure of plant-based products. The infrastructure is slightly different when looking at options to order in and eat out. Five interviewees¹⁸ mention the degree of urbanization of an area as influential for plant-based food options for eating out and ordering in. Depending on where interviewees live themselves, they would mention seeing the area of Randstad as more open to plant-based food practices or they would mention large cities within Randstad as being more open to plant-based food practices than smaller cities and villages. So, while supermarkets everywhere have materials available for plant-based home cooking, options available for eating out can differ depending on geographical location.

¹⁵ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 1705, 0106b, 2605, 0106a.

¹⁶ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 1705, 0106b, 2605, 0106a, 1205, 1305, 2505a, 2805, 0106b.

¹⁷ Interview reference numbers: 2605, 2805, 0706b, 1904, 3105b.

¹⁸ Interview reference numbers: 3105a, 2904, 2505b, 2304, 1904

“I think I would be okay with eating the plant-based version of many dairy products. I do eat yoghurt every morning, but I would not mind if that would be plant-based yoghurt. The only problem is that I think plant-based dairy is quite expensive.”¹⁹

Practices are materially scripted. The challenge in transitioning to plant-based ingredients lies not only in locating plant-based products that an actor can use in the material script of a food practice, but also in finding ingredients that simultaneously tackle other influences in daily life. The previous quote mentions one factor that can be influential in daily life: budget. Interviewees mention several other factors that have an influence on the practice that will be performed and the materials that will be selected for that food practice: time available, difficulty level, social expectations around occasions, how filling a meal is and taste. The following section will address the use of a product that is frequently mentioned to play a role in transition to plant-based food practices.

Steppingstones

“The first three months I only ate meat replacements, because I did not know what else to eat. [After those three months] I started taking more initiative and looking for recipes, then you realise that a lot is possible. I also started cooking more and finding out more things.”²⁰

Meat replacements were mentioned in one way or another by eighteen research participants²¹. Four participants²² mention that they used to eat a lot of meat replacements when they were just starting to eat plant-based, because it was an easy way to substitute meat. Four other interviewees²³ mention that meat replacements are currently central to their diet. These interviewees are currently eating according to a vegetarian and pescatarian diet. According to interviewees, meat replacements make the step towards a plant-based diet easier, because meat substitutes can replace meat in meals without the need for much new knowledge or competences to be acquired. It was mentioned that cooking with meat replacements is easier because they only have to be heated up instead of cooked through, as is the case with meat. As a result, meat replacements are included in food practices because they require similar skills and knowledge to existing food practices, while at the same time carrying different values than food practices with meat.

The convenience of meat replacements is especially evident in interaction, as mentioned by four participants²⁴. Meat replacements make it possible to share a meal with people that want to eat meat, without having to make multiple dishes. Either the meat is substituted by a plant-based meat replacement, or both meat and a meat replacement are prepared and added to a dish according to preference. This makes using meat replacements an easy way for people that are not on a plant-based diet to cook for people that do follow a more plant-based diet. Because meat replacements require little extra knowledge or skills and are an easy substitute for meat, meat replacements can function as a steppingstone towards plant-based food practices.

¹⁹ Dutch: “Van veel zuivelproducten zou ik het denk ik prima vinden om die plantaardig te eten. Ik eet wel gewoon elke ochtend yoghurt, ik zou het prima vinden als het plantaardige yoghurt zou zijn. Maar dan is het probleem denk ik dat het nu toch best wel duur is. [...]”

²⁰ Dutch: “Ik weet wel dat ik de eerste drie maanden alleen maar vleesvervangers had gegeten, omdat ik niet wist wat ik anders moest eten. ... [Na die drie maanden] ben ik zelf meer initiatief gaan nemen en recepten gaan bekijken, dan kom je er toch wel achter dat het gewoon wel kan. Ik ging ook steeds meer koken en komt achter meer dingen.

²¹ Interview reference numbers: 2304, 2804, 2904, 1205, 1305, 1705, 2005, 2505a, 2505b, 2605, 2805, 3105a, 3105b, 0106a, 0106b, 0106c, 0306.

²² Interview reference numbers: 2605, 3105b, 1305, 1205

²³ Interview reference numbers: 2904, 2005, 1705, 0106b

²⁴ Interview reference numbers: 3105a, 2605, 0106a, 2805

Competences

Where the previous section already touched upon the role of competences in relation to the element of material in plant-based food practices, this section will further address competences in transition. I will first address competences by discussing how interviewees become knowledgeable of plant-based food practices through recognising and engaging with materials. Secondly, I will address how material scripts are altered to become plant based. Furthermore, cooking skills are addressed and finally I will go into how a lack of competences can be an obstacle to practice change.

Knowledgeability

“In the beginning I didn’t always know what to eat. I should probably have prepared myself better beforehand. Sometimes we are sitting on the sofa, and we are looking online for vegan and vegetarian recipes. We are searching for a long time, but we could not find what we were looking for.”²⁵

Six interviewees²⁶ mention becoming knowledgeable of plant-based ingredients as a skill that develops during transition to plant-based food practices. Becoming knowledgeable of plant-based food products is two-fold. To be knowledgeable means that an actor has knowledge of what a plant-based product is; to recognise a product. Additionally, this actor would know how to use plant-based products as part of a practice; to engage with a product. Knowledgeability of plant-based products is important because this is required to alter material scripts of practices, and to read material scripts of new food practices. If knowledge and knowledgeability are limited, practice change can be challenging. The previous quote illustrates how it can be a challenge to find new plant-based material scripts.

Changing materials

To perform plant-based food practices, an actor can adopt completely new food practices with new material scripts, or the material script of a previous food practice can be altered to be made plant based. Alteration of material scripts changes the meaning of the practice, but many other aspects remain similar, such as the competences needed for the practice and the time needed to perform a food practice. However, to change a material script, competences are needed. One way in which the material script of a practice can be made plant-based is through what interviewees call *veganising*. Veganising a dish to make that dish more plant-based is mentioned by five interviewees²⁷. To veganise a practice is to replace the animal-based products in a practice by plant-based products. In other words, knowledge and knowledgeability of plant-based products is needed to be able to veganise a recipe. Veganising is mostly applied in the context of making a meal suitable for a vegan diet but replacing products can be applied in various ways in various diets. Through veganising, a previous practice is not discarded but adjusted by replacing animal-based ingredients with plant-based ingredients in the material script.

“I often see recipes that are not vegan and then I look at the instructions. If they add something that I usually do not use, like a bit of mustard, then I take that step from the recipe and apply it to my own food.”²⁸

²⁵ Dutch: “In het begin was het wel echt nog zo van "hè, ik weet niet wat ik moet eten". Daar had ik me beter op moeten voorbereiden van tevoren eigenlijk. Maar soms dan zitten we ook op de bank en dan gaan we op internet zoeken naar vegetarische en veganistische gerechten. Dan zitten we super lang te zoeken en komen we er niet uit.”

²⁶ Interview reference numbers: 1305, 0106a, 0106b, 1904, 0505, 0706b.

²⁷ Interview reference numbers: 0705, 0706a, 0106c, 3105b, 1904

²⁸ Dutch: “Ik zie ook vaak recepten die niet veganistisch zijn en dan kijk ik hoe ze dat doen. Dit doe ik er normaal niet in, bijvoorbeeld een beetje mosterd erbij. Dan pak ik dat beetje mosterd uit dat recept voor bij mijn eigen eten.”

Knowing how to use plant-based ingredients can generally be described as having cooking skills. Both participating and observing other people perform food practices are mentioned as beneficial to gaining cooking skills. However, interviewees don't distinguish between plant-based cooking skills and animal-based cooking skills, but merely discuss knowing and learning how to cook. Additionally, the previous quote illustrates that not all cooking competences require alteration when a person transitions to a more plant-based food practice. Rather a selective set of competences that are used to prepare animal-based products are no longer used. As a result, other competences are applied more often.

Achievability

Throughout the research a total of thirteen participants²⁹ mentioned ways in which they used to perceive plant-based eaters, how they currently perceive people that eat more plant-based than they do, or how they have noticed other people perceive vegetarians and vegans. The remarks mentioned by interviewees about plant-based food practitioners can generally be split into two groups. One group of remarks is targeted at competences around plant-based food practice. This type of repetitive remark highlights a plant-based diet as very strict. Adopting a plant-based food diet would limit food options and force others to adjust to your food demands. The main tendency of these remarks is that plant-based food practices are too difficult and cannot be done. This type of remark challenges competences around plant-based food practices by assessing them as impossible. Additionally, seven interviewees³⁰ mention confusion by others about what vegan food is and if it can taste good. This shows a limited knowledge of what plant-based food is. As a result, lack of knowledge and skills call the achievability of plant-based food practices into question. If plant-based food practices are perceived as unachievable, this is an obstacle to practice change to plant-based food practices.

What is most striking about the remarks shared on plant-based food practices is that concerns about competence originated from hbo-students and mbo-students and were not expressed by wo-students. This could indicate an influence of educational level on transition and continuance of plant-based food practices. However, this research does not have sufficient data to provide insights into how this difference emerges. No additional differences emerged from the data.

The second type of repetitive remark will be addressed in the meaning section of the next chapter.

Concluding transition

The findings have shown that multiple shifts in elements of practice have taken place during interviewees' transition to more plant-based food practices. The study of the element of meaning revealed that plant-based food values can be divided into three groups that constitute the meaning of plant-based food practices. While interviewees recognise these values, sharing values is not necessarily needed to perform plant-based food practices. An initial shift is signified by the appreciation of plant-based food values influenced by information flows in society. A second shift in meaning is where practices start to change in alignment with newly appreciated plant-based food values. Meaning given to food practices among the interviewees are also influenced by societal beliefs around gender and practices such as the profession of animal-farming.

The study of the element of material shows that ingredients for plant-based home cooking practices are widely available to interviewees. What ingredients are used in plant-based food practices is affected by influences in daily life such as budget and time available. Meat replacements are

²⁹ Interview reference numbers: 0106b, 2805, 1305, 0106c, 2505a, 0705, 1505c, 3105a, 0505, 1205, 2605, 2304, 1904

³⁰ Interview reference numbers: 0306, 0106b, 0106c, 2804, 2505b, 3105b, 1904

mentioned as ingredients that are often used because little extra knowledge or skills are required to use these substitutes.

The study of the element of competence demonstrates that skills for plant-based food practices develop during transition. Two types of skills to perform plant-based food practices are mentioned. The first skill is concerned with recognising plant-based ingredients. The second skill is concerned with incorporating plant-based ingredients accordingly in material scripts. Both skills are required to read material scripts of plant-based food practices and to alter material scripts of food practices to be more plant-based. Furthermore, no difference is made between cooking skills for plant-based food practices and for animal-based food practices. Lastly, the only differentiating aspect that emerged from this research between youth with different educational backgrounds is concerned with how competences are perceived in relation to changing food practices. Youth with a mbo or hbo educational background mentioned being less convinced of their abilities to change their food practices than youth with a wo educational background.

Chapter 5: Continuance

“I always thought that it would be very difficult [not to eat meat] in the beginning, but that it would eventually just become part of your system. On the one hand that is the case, but I have noticed that [...] I consider my options every time and consciously make a choice. That also makes me happy with my choice every time. Because of that, it remains something that keeps you occupied all the time.”³¹

The previous chapter discussed different shifts in elements of practice that contribute to interviewees’ transition towards plant-based food practices. This chapter focusses on how shifts in elements of practice contribute to the continuance of plant-based food practices because change is not a single action, but it is continuously shaped in daily practice. The term continuance is chosen here specifically, because throughout the research it became clear that when people started to change food practices, they remained continuously open to debating and reorganising the ways in which they perform their food practices. Practices are not static or maintained, rather they are continuously questioned. The questioning of food practices was different among interviewees and could be more unconscious or conscious as is evident from the quote displayed.

The transition to a plant-based diet ensures that food practices are becoming more plant-based. Continuance of plant-based food practices is about the way plant-based food practices are plant based, rather than being concerned with if they are plant based or not. This chapter will go into how elements of practice continue to shift after transition to a more plant-based diet is initiated.

Meaning

This section will go address meaning in two different ways. I will first address how meaning and norms around food are discussed in interaction and what challenges can arise here. Secondly, I will address how meaning continues to shift in interviewees during continuation of plant-based food practices.

Norms

“To me [plant-based food] is just normal food. Regardless, it does define who I am. A lot of people know that I am a vegan, and they don’t know a whole lot more about me. I find it unfortunate that being vegan is something that defines you. But naturally it is also an important part of my life.”³²

In the transition phase, interviewees were becoming carriers of plant-based food practices. In this chapter on continuance, interviewees have become carriers of practice. In other words, interviewees have changed what is normative to them around plant-based food practices. However, as the previous quote shows, while plant-based food practices can be normative to a carrier of practice, these food practices do stand out as being different and diverge from a general norm. In the previous quote it is made clear that to eat meat is the norm and is considered a neutral position that needs no mentioning, while to eat plant-based is different and is stated.

³¹ Dutch: “Ik dacht altijd dat het in het begin heel moeilijk zou zijn [om geen vlees te eten] en dat het erna gewoon in je systeem zit. Enerzijds is dat ook wel het geval, maar toch merk ik wel dat ik toch wel vaak bewust die beslissing maak om niet die bitterbal te pakken of om niet een (vlees)kroket te bestellen, maar te gaan voor die kaassoufflé. Het blijft toch elke keer weer een overweging die je maakt en een bewuste keuze. Daardoor ben ik ook altijd weer achteraf blij dat ik die keuze heb gemaakt. Daardoor blijft het de hele tijd wel iets waar je je mee bezig houdt.”

³² Dutch: “Voor mij is het gewoon normaal eten. Ondanks dat definieert het mij wel weer tot wie ik ben. Heel veel mensen weten ook wel dat ik veganistisch ben en meer weten ze niet heel veel van mij. Dus ik vind het juist wel jammer dat dat iets is dat je moet definiëren. Maar natuurlijk is het wel een belangrijk deel van mijn leven.”

At the end of the previous chapter, I address repetitive remarks mentioned by thirteen interviewees about plant-based food practitioners. These remarks have been made by interviewees or by people known by the interviewees and are always about people that eat plant based. This could implicate themselves or others that eat plant-based in a different way. The first type of repetitive remark is concerned with competences and has been addressed previously. The second type of repetitive remark labels of people on a plant-based diet as activist and thus challenges meaning of plant-based food practices. People on a plant-based diet have been described as naggers, intrusive and toxic, because they allegedly portray eating plant-based as the only 'good' option without leaving room for other perspectives. People that eat plant-based are considered weird, because their practices diverge from the dominant norm in food. This framing of plant-based food practices portrays plant-based food practices as a threat to normative food practices that contain meat and other animal-based products. In doing so, the values that plant-based food practices hold are framed as undesirable and incompatible to values that normative, daily food practices with animal-based products hold. While interviewees mention that these remarks are incorrect, it does not prevent the framing and challenging of that plant-based food practices. How plant-based food values are challenged in interaction and the role that this interaction plays in continuance of plant-based food practices will be addressed in the next section.

Meaning in interaction

What stands out when looking at the conversations mentioned during this research is that the values carriers of plant-based food practices hold are rarely brought up in conversation. When meaning does come up in conversation, that conversation is not always pleasant. Seven interviewees³³ mention that during conversations with other people, their efforts, and arguments for adopting plant-based food practices have been disregarded by others. Disregard can differ from casual comments about how the one changed diet is not going to change the world, to hijacking a conversation by disregarding arguments given for a plant-based diet and drowning them in counter arguments. Additionally, when values of plant-based food practices are disregarded in conversation, the efforts that carriers of practice have put into their practice change are disregarded at the same time. To avoid confrontation in interaction, nine respondents³⁴ mention that they avoid the topic of plant-based eating all together. Avoidance of plant-based food values as topic in conversation is mentioned most as a strategy in family settings.

Interviewees show that when disagreement in conversations occurs, this does not lead to shifts in their own plant-based food practices. This is illustrated by two interviewees³⁵ that independently from each other experienced a similar conversation. During the conversation, someone in their circles had said consuming soy is bad, because rainforest is burned down for soy production. Both interviewees dismissed the argument against soy as untrue but were unaware that the soy planted on former rainforest territory is planted for the meat industry at the time of the interview. Furthermore, both interviewees mentioned that the opposing person in the conversation still believes that consuming soy is bad for the rainforest. In short, when norms around food are challenged, this challenge is resisted rather than questioned by interviewees. As a result, food values remain unaltered.

Constructive conversations on plant-based food practices do take place, but less frequently. Four interviewees³⁶ mentioned that they had conversations with people that listened to and agreed with the arguments given for plant-based food practices. Moreover, agreement on values does not

³³ Interview reference numbers: 0706a, 0106b, 0706b, 2505a, 2904, 0705, 0505.

³⁴ Interview reference numbers: 2904, 2605, 2304, 3105a, 1305, 2805, 1705, 1205, 0706b.

³⁵ Interview reference numbers: 0106b, 0505.

³⁶ Interview reference numbers: 2605, 3105b, 3105a, 2804.

guarantee practices will change, since none of the people that agreed with the arguments as mentioned by the interviewees had taken practical steps to change their food practices.

Additional shifts

Information flows in society about plant-based food practices remain present during continuation of plant-based food practices. Four interviewees³⁷ mention that new information on plant-based food values plays a decisive role in the continuation of plant-based food practice. Other influences mentioned by interviewees that contribute to their continuance are to have more time and encouragement or joined continuation by others. Additionally, four interviewees³⁸ mention that their continuance to plant-based food practices was taken in small steps that eventually led to a point where they were eating according to a specific plant-based diet.

“For a long time, I have avoided the confrontation [with specific information]. I would not watch a video, because I knew I could not eat certain products afterwards. But eventually I would watch that video and realise that I would have to change what I ate, because it didn’t agree with consuming those products. So, then I did change what I ate”.³⁹
~ interviewee on excluding egg from their diet

What stands out in the additional shifts during continuance is that the two shifts of questioning and alignment that can be more clearly distinguished in the transition phase, are morphed together in the continuance phase. In other words, where during transition questioning of food values was needed before food practices were altered, during continuance new information on plant-based food values influences practice change more directly. This is reflected in the previous quote where an interviewee sets out how they avoided information on plant-based food values, because they anticipated that it would influence their food practices. At the same time this quote also proposes that interviewees time the continuance of their practice change in accordance with other influence in daily life. Being mentally ready and having sufficient time available for practice change are two influences out of daily life that are mentioned to affect the moment in which continuance of practice change is pursued. In short, additional shifts in meaning reinforce plant-based food values rather than altering values and are coordinated with circumstances.

One way in which new information is spread is through social media. A total of ten people⁴⁰ mentioned to follow specific social media accounts online related to plant-based eating. Social media accounts reportedly provide educational information, information on competences, and information that confirms a plant-based norm around food practices. Strikingly, nine of the ten people that have mentioned to actively follow social media accounts about plant-based food are currently following a vegan diet. This raises questions on the role of information flows on social media. Information flows on social media could work confirming by attracting plant-based food practitioners that already agree with the values portrayed. Alternatively, information flows on social media could attract practitioners that will inevitably grow to agree with the new information provided when they follow certain social media. In short, the question that remains regarding social media is concerned with what was first. Did the followers already have plant-based food values before they started following social media or did they gain them through social media? The question remains unanswered in this research.

³⁷ Interview reference numbers: 3105b, 0106b, 0505, 2805.

³⁸ Interview reference numbers: 2505a, 2005, 2304, 1904.

³⁹ Dutch: “ik ben heel lang de confrontatie uit de weg gegaan. Ik keek iets niet, omdat ik wist dat ik het dan niet meer kon eten. Maar uiteindelijk heb ik het wel gekeken en dacht ik "nee, dit kan gewoon echt niet. Dit is gewoon zo raar". Dus toen ben ik daar ook wel mee gestopt.

⁴⁰ Interview reference numbers: 1904, 0505, 0705, 1305, 1705, 2805, 3105b, 0306, 0706a, 0706b.

Material

In this section I will go into how shifts in materials take place during continuance of plant-based food practices. I will first shortly address infrastructure of plant-based food materials. Secondly, I will go into when new ingredients are welcomed more into food practices during continuance. Thirdly, I will discuss how ideas about how plant-based food practices should be performed can lead to the introduction of products to a diet.

For most interviewees supermarkets and their plant-based assortment are a central part of their infrastructure before and during practice change. As a result, few changes in infrastructure were mentioned. The extended assortment in supermarkets in comparison to previous years has been mentioned as influential to making materials more easily accessible, but interviewees did not have personal experience with this change in assortment of supermarkets.

“Groceries are done more on autopilot. I only read the ingredients when I don’t know a product really. Most things I know, and I buy them regularly.”⁴¹

During transition material scripts of food practices are adjusted to be made plant-based and new plant-based material scripts are introduced. This adjustment requires new plant-based materials for food practices. However, during continuance daily practices are more established and less new products are acquired because less adjustment of food practices takes place. This is reflected in the previous quote that illustrates how doing groceries is a regular and repetitive activity. However, different aspects can play a role in the introduction of new materials during continuance. A demand for new materials can differ from meal to meal. Most interviewees mention to have a similar breakfast routine each morning. Regarding lunch, there were more differences in terms of how regularly a food practice was performed. Evening meals are most prone to change with only three interviewees⁴² mentioning that their meals are picked from a steady selection of dishes that are only occasionally altered or supplemented. The majority interviewees look for new recipes on a reoccurring and sometimes even daily basis. Most searching for recipes is reportedly done online, via websites more than via social media. Cookbooks are also mentioned as an occasional source. The frequent use of new recipes increases the possibility for including new ingredients and products, but this is not a guarantee since new recipes can entail of a new assembly of known materials rather than new materials. Being open to the use of new materials can differ from person to person. Interviewees that expressed a joy in cooking, were more open to the use of new ingredients in new dishes.

“I started taking multivitamin when I started to look at how I can eat well as opposed to only looking at how I can eat plant-based. Because off course I am taking in things differently on a vegan diet.”⁴³

One type of material that is introduced during continuance of plant-based food practices stood out during this research. Seven interviewees⁴⁴ mention that they started taking supplements to make sure that they would include all the vitamins needed as part of their diet. The introduction of this material was the result of the additional shifts concerning how a practice should be performed, in this case in a healthier manner. Additionally, changes in daily life can influence the materials used

⁴¹ Dutch: “[Boodschappen doen] gaat meer op de automatische piloot en eigenlijk doe ik het labels omdraaien alleen nog als ik een product niet ken. De meeste dingen weet ik wel en koop ik regelmatig.”

⁴² Interview reference numbers: 2605, 2505a, 2904.

⁴³ Dutch: “[Ik ben multivitaminen gaan bijslikken] Toen ik wel een beetje meer begon te kijken naar oké, hoe eet ik goed? In plaats van puur en alleen, hoe eet ik veganistisch. Omdat je natuurlijk wel op een hele andere manier dingen moet gaan binnenkrijgen.”

⁴⁴ Interview reference numbers: 1205, 0705, 2605, 1305, 3105b, 2805, 0706b

and the practices performed. Increased exercise, a tighter budget, time available and different living situations are mentioned as influential to material circumstances and facilitate a change in plant-based food practices.

Competences

In this last section about competences, I will go into when a need for competences arises and how interviewees gain competences. Lasty I will shortly address how becoming competent in one food practice influences how other food practices are regarded.

Interviewees also mention that change in circumstances can influence how plant-based food practices are performed. One example is moving out of the house. For some interviewees moving out of the house meant that they could start to eat more plant based. Other interviewees encountered challenges to continue their plant-based food practices when they moved out of the house, because they now had to perform food practices that they didn't have to do before. In both cases skills must be gained to perform plant-based food practices. This raises questions about how competences are gained.

“I had heard from people that jackfruit would have
a meaty structure, but it did not turn out like that when I made it.
So, maybe I should try again.”⁴⁵

Seven interviewees⁴⁶ mention a close relative that started to eat more plant-based before them. Six of these interviewees express how they used to think that plant-based food practices of these relatives were nonsense. In most cases, these relatives had changed their food practices several years ahead of the interviewees before interviewees started questioning values around food practices themselves. This suggest that the presence of other people on a plant-based food diet does have an influence on practice change but does not necessarily inspire practice change to plant-based food practices. The previous quote illustrates how other actors provide suggestions for food practices. Interviewees mention suggestions for food practices by others such as parents, family, friends, and roommates. These suggestions can concern plant-based products as well as how food practices can be performed. For example, parents were mentioned to demonstrate specific cooking skills such as ways to cut and cook vegetables. Other actors were mentioned to introduce dishes from other cuisines or introduce new plant-based products. Altogether, carriers of plant-based food practices tend have little influence on shifts in meaning but have a larger impact on the development of competences for plant-based food practices by others.

Where knowledge and some knowledgeabilities are shared through interaction, it is frequently mentioned that cooking skills are gained by putting knowledge in practice. New knowledge can include new knowledge on products, techniques, and dishes. Eleven interviewees⁴⁷ mention becoming knowledgeable by ‘doing’ a practice. The mantra here is ‘if it doesn’t work, try again’, as displayed in the previous quote. The previous quote demonstrates that becoming knowledgeable by doing is not always a success but is a process of learning from the things that go wrong and trying again. This trial-and-error approach is applied to various degrees by interviewees. Some interviewees enjoy experimenting with food practices and becoming more knowledgeable. Others prefer food practices that they are familiar with. Additionally, the following quote illustrates how becoming more knowledgeable about certain food practices influences how other food practices

⁴⁵ Dutch: “Nou, ik had van mensen gehoord dat [jackfruit] echt een vleesstructuur zou zijn, maar dat was het niet helemaal geworden op de manier waarop ik het had gedaan. Dus misschien nog maar een keer proberen.”

⁴⁶ Interview reference numbers: 2804, 1904, 0706b, 2505b, 2505a, 0705, 2605.

⁴⁷ Interview reference numbers: 0106a, 1205, 2304, 0306, 0106b, 1705, 2505b, 2605, 0106c, 2505a.

are regarded. Here, the consumption of cheese used to be considered too tasty to be challenged, until this interviewee became more knowledgeable about other food practices that are also tasty.

“One teacher in high-school told me that it is easy to stop eating cheese for the planet. At that point I thought I would never be able to give up cheese, because I think it is so tasty. Now I see that there are many things you can eat on your bread. That is kind of funny, how that did change.
Back then I thought I wouldn’t want to give up cheese,
now I think that maybe I can give it up.”⁴⁸

Concluding continuance

Empirical data has given insights into the continued alteration of plant-based food practices after initiation of practice change towards plant-based food practices. Data on the element of meaning show that plant-based food practices provide a challenge to dominant food norms. However, confrontation of values with people that hold different values does not lead to shifts in meaning on the interviewees’ food practices, but rather endorses existing values. Furthermore, new information can lead to additional shifts in meaning that interviewees hold. These additional shifts in meaning reinforce plant-based food values rather than altering values.

Empirical data on materials show that there is no clear difference in availability of material between transition and continuance of plant-based food practices. During continuance, new materials are incorporated in material scripts differing from meal to meal and from person to person. Furthermore, additional ideas about how plant-based food practices should be performed can influence the products and ingredients that are included as part of a plant-based diet.

Lastly, empirical data on competence address how new competences are continuously gained during continuance by acquiring new knowledge and putting knowledge in practice. Interaction plays a role in transferring knowledge and knowledgeability. Trial-and-error plays a role in increasing knowledgeability. During continuance, knowledge and knowledgeability continue to increase because of daily practice.

⁴⁸ Dutch: “Op de middelbare school was een docent die tegen mij zei dat het makkelijk is om voor de planeet geen kaas te eten. Toen dacht ik echt dat ik kaas nooit op zou kunnen geven, want ik vind het zo lekker. Nu denk ik, er zijn genoeg mogelijkheden aan dingen die je op je brood kan doen. [...] Dat is wel grappig, dat het wel is veranderd. Toen dacht ik zelf dat ik het niet zou willen, maar nu denk ik dat het wel kan misschien.”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to increase the understanding of how food practices change to plant-based food practices and to provide insight into how sustainable practices can be encouraged. With a Social Practice Theory approach this research has studied how elements of plant-based food practice alter among Dutch youth to increase understanding of practice change. To address differences in practice change over time, a distinction is made between the transition and continuance phase. This resulted in the following two sub questions; 1. How do plant-based food practices change among Dutch youth during the transition to plant-based food practices? 2. How does practice change of plant-based food practices continue among Dutch youth after transition to plant-based food practices? In this section I will discuss the answers to these two questions by discussing the main findings for each element and the interconnections between the elements of practice, since according to Halkier et al. (2011) a practice cannot be reduced to its elements but consists of a multitude of them and their interconnections. Additional attention is paid to the third sub-question about differences in practice change among Dutch youth of different educational backgrounds to address equity in practice change. Conclusively, answers to the sub questions are descriptions of the main shifts in elements of practice that provide insight how food practices change to plant-based food practices among Dutch youth. I will follow the structure by discussing the three elements in this section but will address how each element links to the other two.

Transition

Firstly, I will address the element of meaning during transition. Shove et al. (2010) state that meaning of practices evolve, which is what makes the element of meaning an interesting element to study. Empirical data gives insight into how meaning evolves. During the phase of transition, questioning values of animal-based food practices does not result in immediate change in practices of interviewees. Instead, a period in which questions are raised about values of animal-based food practices tends to proceed change in practice that is being made. Information flows on plant-based food values, gender expectations and occupation in the meat industry are influential to this first shift in meaning that I have previously called ‘questioning’. It is during this questioning phase that norms animal-based food practices are shifting to plant-based food values. However, this first shift in meaning seems to happen quite separately from the other elements. When the second shift in meaning occurs and practice change is initiated, links with material and competence become clearer. Data has shown how meaning influences the ingredients consumed or avoided because of the appreciation of a plant-based food value. As a result, the use of some ingredients over others influences which competences are used in practice by performing some practices rather than others.

Secondly, the element of material. Shove and Walker (2014) state that actions are materially scripted. In other words, when a material script changes, a practice changes. When food practices change to plant-based food practices during transition, more plant-based materials are included in the material scripts of practices than before transition. What is remarking is that changes in material scripts during transition have little influence on the infrastructure used by interviewees. The main source for materials mentioned before and after food practice change is the supermarket. However, new material scripts do affect the element of competence since competences are concerned with how materials work (Shove et al. 2012). Material scripts in food practice change by adopting new plant-based material scripts or by adjusting previous material scripts. When a food practice is adjusted to be more plant-based, animal-based products are exchanged for plant-based products. To adopt and adjust material scripts knowledge and knowledgeability about plant-based food products is required during transition to plant-based food practices. Knowledge is concerned with

being aware of plant-based products that can be used in material scripts. Knowledgeability is concerned with how to use these plant-based products can be included material scripts. In other words, competences are needed to change material scripts. Without competences, new materials cannot be incorporated in plant-based food practices.

Thirdly, this research provided data on how actors become more knowledgeable during transition. One way to describe knowledgeability of plant-based food practices is as cooking skills. Strikingly, no distinction is made by interviewees between cooking skills regarding plant-based food practices and cooking skills used in animal-based food practices. During practice change animal-based cooking skills are not replaced by plant-based cooking skills. Rather, cooking skills are repurposed to different ingredients. In other words, the competences present during transition are re-applied to new plant-based ingredients. However, competences need to be present for re-appliance to be possible. The following section will go into the sub-question on how change in food practices differ among Dutch youth with different education backgrounds. This section will also go into how competence is linked to the elements of meaning and material.

Educational background

I paid specific attention to educational background as a stratification principle in this research. However, little repetitive differences between groups with different educational backgrounds could be distinguished. There was only one difference that could be noticed. Empirical data shows that mbo-students and hbo-students express doubts about being able to perform plant-based food practices. Wo-students do not express these concerns. This indicates a difference between students of different educational backgrounds that can be traced back to the element of competence. However, it is not certain how doubt of confidence plays a role in practice change since all interviewees did transition to more plant-based food practices. Still, it provides some indication about why plant-based food practices tend to appeal to a selective group of theoretically educated people. Additionally, this finding provides some insight into how competences are linked to the elements of meaning and material. Because when competences are not present or perceived as insufficiently present, they cannot be re-applied to plant-based food practices. Consequently, when questioning of food practices is present, but competences to include plant-based materials in material scripts are not present, alignment of values and practice is more difficult.

Continuance

In this last section I address shifts in elements of practice that describe how food practices change during continuance of plant-based food practices. Firstly, empirical data on the element of meaning during continuance show that shifts in meaning resume, but they are more concerned with what a plant-based food practice looks like. For example, should eggs be excluded from a diet? Should cheese? In other words, plant-based food practices are the norm during continuation. This is different in transition when this norm is still being established. While interviewees are aware that their plant-based food norm is different from many others, no situation is mentioned in which they willingly deviate from their more plant-based diet. The links between other elements of practice are not different during transition and continuance. During continuance shifts in meaning continue to influence the material included or excluded in material scripts of food practices. To be able to include new materials, competences are needed.

Secondly, empirical data on the element of material show that during continuance new materials are less frequently applied in food practices than during transition. How often new products are included in material scripts can differ from person to person and from meal to meal. Additionally, new shifts in meaning on what plant-based food practices should encompass can encourage the inclusion or exclusion of new materials in food practices. Again, no change in infrastructure or issues about availability of materials are raised by interviewees regarding continuation.

Lastly, empirical data on the element of competence during continuance shows how interviewees gain knowledge and become more knowledgeable. Knowledge and knowledgeableability of plant-based food practices is shared through interaction with other carriers of plant-based food practices. Additionally, interviewees also repeatedly mention becoming more knowledgeable through ‘doing’, putting knowledge into practice via a trial-and-error approach. The difference between competence during transition and competence during continuance is that during transition re-appliance is central. While re-appliance still takes place during continuance, competences of plant-based food practices are more often applied to other plant-based food practices, rather than originating from animal-based food practices.

Conclusively, the element of competences has shown to be an integral part of practice change that cannot be overlooked. While practice change may be initiated by material change of scripts and supported by shifts in meaning, practice change is difficult when knowledge and knowledgeableability to change material scripts or adopt new material scripts with plant-based products is not present or restricted. Furthermore, data on continuance addressed how new material is incorporated less than during transition and plant-based food values are endorsed rather than continue to shift. Competences on the other hand continue to develop in daily practice.

Chapter 7: Discussion

As a carrier of plant-based food practices myself, a short reflection on my own positioning during this research seems fitting. During the interviews, I was mostly cooking vegan food at home, I ate vegetarian when I went out and I ate meat and fish when I was with family. The conversations that I had with the research participants have impacted how I look at my own process of food practice change, so I can only imagine that I have had some impact on the continued process of some interviewees as well. My positioning during the interviews translated to interviewees in different ways. To some interviewees I came across as more experienced than them, while others recognised my family dilemma, yet others were uninterested or unbothered by my way of eating. While reactions of interviewees were interesting to observe, I don't think it has significantly impacted the way interviewees shared their experiences as part of this research. Especially since a large part of the conversations were about things they had already experienced. I would even argue that this research was harder for myself because I often eat plant based. This research would likely have been easier if I had not recognised anything, and I would have questioned everything. In the remainder of this section, I will address five other points of discussion as reflection on this research.

Firstly, what distinguishes this research from other studies that used Social Practice Theory by Shove et al. (2012) is that this research did not study a single practice, rather is studied a changing practice. I believe that studying a changing practice with Social Practice Theory provided new perspectives on practice change. At the same time the study of elements of practice proved to be challenging. Reckwitz (2002) remarks how the presence of things seems to be rarely questioned. Knowing that the presence of material is rarely questioned by scholars, it makes sense that interviewees also rarely question the presence of material. Due to circumstances, it was not possible to observe interviewees perform plant-based food practices. Instead, this research is built on the statements of interviewees about their food practices. While interviews gave some insight into the use of ingredients in plant-based food practices, questions remain about the use of materials and their role in practice change, specifically because interviewees had a hard time recalling the influence of different materials on their food practice change. Therefore, I would advise any other scholars that seek to study changing practices and apply this Social Practice Theory by Shove et al. (2002) to use additional methods such as participant observation. That way it is easier for a researcher to question what research participants may take for granted.

Secondly, the findings of this research were different from what I thought they would be. I have been in contact with many organisations that in one way or another are working on sustainability themes, and a lot of members tend to be university students or theoretically educated. Because of these experiences I had assumed that during this research multiple differences between Dutch youth with different educational differences would emerge. However, a multitude of differences did not emerge at all. What I can conclude from the findings in this research is that how food practice change to plant-based food practices among Dutch youth occurs in similar ways. That is not to say that no differences between Dutch youth from different educational backgrounds (other than the one that emerged from this research) influence practice change. Questions remain about equity in practice change, such as when is practice change withheld or unsuccessful? This research has provided some insight on equity in practice change, many more directions for research on the interlinkage of equity and practice change are possible.

Thirdly, the data in this research concerns past experiences of interviewees. That means that this data can be sensitive to recall bias. Many interviewees follow their diet for several years now. For them, some experiences may not be recalled or that experiences happened differently from how

they are remembered. Additionally, for some interviewees it might be hard to recall that they once used to eat meat, because now they no longer see animals as appropriate for consumption. This moral judgement can also have an impact on the stories they have told me. The extent to which recall bias and moral judgement of personal experiences have had an effect on this research is difficult to measure or reflect on but should be taken into consideration.

Fourthly, this research specifically looked at youth, which raises the question which outcomes of this research apply to youth explicitly and which outcomes can be generalised more. I find this as difficult question, since I my age doesn't differ much from the age of the oldest few research participants. However, some reflection did lead to an interesting point for discussion. The influence of a change in living situation on practice change has not been widely addressed during this research, simply because for most of the interviewees it was not applicable. These interviewees were still living at home. Additionally, most of the interviewees that had already moved out of their parents' house started eating more plant-based when they lived on their own, so their living situation had not changed much since they were eating more plant-based. Some interviewees did mention effects of a change in living situations on the way they ate, but after analysis this data did not provide significant insights to practice change. However, changes in living situations such as living together with a partner or providing for a family could have a larger influence on practice change for people whose age disqualified them for participation in this research. In short, people older than the youth that were part of this research have experiences, such as change in a living situation, that could have an influence on practice change. Further research would be needed to provide insights on the influence of changes throughout the lifetime of a person.

Fifthly, Shove (2010) sets out how models of behavioural change use a language of barriers and motivators, but that this language makes models of behavioural change blurry. Social Practice Theory was used in this research as alternative theory to Behavioural Theory, partly due to the suggestion by Shove (2010). Therefore, I will reflect on how Social Practice Theory can surpass a language of barriers and behaviours. In this research, analysis of data via the three elements of practice showed influences that did not fall within the scope of these elements. Aspects such as gender and profession were thus marked as 'influential', which sounds strikingly like 'barrier' or 'motivator'. Consequently, I would argue that the Social Practice Theory is susceptible to develop a language of barriers and motivators of its own. In my opinion, at the core of this limitation is the fact that understanding practice change is suggested to be concerned with understanding horizontal circulation of elements of practice (Shove and Walker, 2010). Shove and Walker (2010) describe horizontal circulation as the way elements of practice travel between practices. While this may seem logical for a theory that focusses on practices and the elements it constitutes, this theory seems to overlook the influence of context in which a practice is embedded. In other words, I suspect that the focus on practices and the disregard of circumstances provides potential for a list of influential factors in Social Practice Theory that is similar to the language of barriers and motivators in behavioural theory. To overcome this 'trap', I believe Social Practice Theory should address how time and space are an integrated component of practices and practice change. With regard to this research, time has received some attention, but the concept of space has been unsatisfactorily addressed.

Lastly, Social Practice Theory provides an alternative to dominant behavioural theories (Shove, 2010). Behavioural theories strongly focus on the opinion and choice by individuals, influenced by other factors and others. This process mainly takes place in the mind, approaching practice change as a socio-psychological process. The dominance of behavioural theories is also evident in the field of diet change. Research on plant-based food diets tend to be concerned with health aspects of diets and with how to motivate people to change their diets. With this research I broaden the perspective on dietary change to plant-based food practices by looking beyond behavioural theories

to better understand practice change to plant-based food practices. While Social Practice Theory also includes processes of the mind, this is not the main focus. In comparing theories, one could even say that Social Practice Theories look at how cognitive processes are influenced, changed, interact with other aspects of a practice and study multiple cognitive processes of individuals interact. Therefore, I would not dismiss socio-psychological theories. Rather I would approach these theories as partial studies of practice change. Social Practice Theories could provide a more holistic approach. In other words, with a behavioural approach this study would have looked at how a practice such as plant-based eating can appeal to people. The use of Social Practice Theory has provided a framework to study how people can be encouraged to 'do' plant-based eating.

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Appendix

Interview guide (Dutch)

Manier van eten

- Wat is plantaardig eten voor jou?
- Kan jij vertellen waarom je plantaardiger bent gaan eten?
 - o Was er een kantelpunt waarna je jouw manier van eten hebt aangepast?
 - Hoe belangrijk is het milieu/klimaat in jouw keuze voor plantaardig eten?
 - Hoe belangrijk is dierwelzijn in jouw keuze voor plantaardig eten?
- Wanneer kwam het moment dat je jezelf vegetariër/veganist bent gaan noemen?

Anders eten

- Wat vind jij de grootste uitdaging om plantaardig te eten?
 - o Hoe verschillen de uitdagingen voor plantaardig eten met ontbijt, lunch en avondeten?
- Wanneer is voor jou een maaltijd gezond?
 - o Hoe bouw jij je maaltijd op? Waar let je op?
 - o Wat is voor jou ongezond?
 - o Hoe is gezond eten veranderd toen je plantaardiger bent gaan eten?
- In hoeverre mis je de smaak van vlees/vis/zuivel?
- Wat is betaalbaarheid voor jou en wat voor rol speelt dat in jouw manier van eten?
 - o Hoe belangrijk vind jij biologisch eten?
 - o Hoe kijk je naar het gebruik van vleesvervangers?

Interactie

- Wat vindt jouw familie van plantaardig eten?
 - o Wat vindt jouw familie van plantaardig eten?
 - o Wat voor gesprekken hebben jullie in de familie over plantaardig eten?
 - o Wat eet je als je bij je familie bent?
 - o Is er iets veranderd in de houding van je familie tegenover plantaardig eten?
- Hoe is de rolverdeling bij jullie thuis? (Thuiswonend)
 - o Wie kookt er bij jullie thuis?
 - o Wie doet de boodschappen?
 - o Wat is jouw rol rondom het eten thuis?
- Hoe kijken jouw huisgenoten naar plantaardig eten? (Uitwonend)
 - o Hebben jij en jouw huisgenoten een vergelijkbare manier van eten? Hoe wel of niet?
 - o Hoe bepalen jullie wat jullie gaan eten als er samen wordt gegeten?
 - o Hoe wordt er rekening gehouden met jouw dieet voorkeuren?
 - o Wat vind je ervan als huisgenoten wel vlees/zuivel eten?
- Wat vinden je vrienden van plantaardig eten?
 - o Hoe is het om met vrienden samen plantaardig te eten?
 - Hoe bepalen jullie wat je gaat eten?
 - o Met welke vrienden eet je wel en met welke vrienden eet je liever niet samen?
 - o Hoe belangrijk is de houding van vrienden naar vegetarisch/veganistisch voor een vriendschap?

- Hoe kijkt je partner naar plantaardig eten? Hoe is dat voor jou?
- Hoe houd je rekening met jouw dieet voorkeuren als je buiten de deur eet?
 - o Wat zijn jouw opties als je buiten de deur wilt eten?
 - o Hoe is het om maaltijden af te halen in COVID-tijd?
- Hoe ga jij om tijdsdruk rondom eten, als je snel iets te eten moet halen bijvoorbeeld?
- Hoe wordt er op school/studie gepraat over eten en plantaardig eten?
 - o Ken je mede studenten die plantaardig eten of willen eten?
 - o Hoe zijn de plantaardige opties op school?
 - o Hoe zie jij de rol van je studie op de manier waarop je eet?
- In welke situaties is het lastiger om vega(n) te eten?

Koken

- Hoe heb je leren koken?
 - o Van wie leer jij of heb je leren koken?
 - o Hoe goed kunnen familieleden koken?
 - o Hoe leer je nu nieuwe dingen rondom koken?
- Merk je verschillen in de manier waarop vrienden/familie koken?
- Hoe bepaal je wat je gaat eten?
 - o Waar let je op bij het zoeken naar recepten?
 - o Wat voor gerechten eet je regelmatig?
 - Waarom komen juist deze recepten regelmatig terug?
 - Wat is je favoriete gerecht? Waarom?
- Waar haal jij (nieuwe) recepten/gerechten vandaan?
 - o Hoe kijk jij naar de rol van internet op jouw manier van eten?
 - o Zijn er bepaalde kanalen die je volgt?
- Wat zou je ideale eetpatroon/manier van eten zijn?
 - o Wat weerhoud je daarvan op dit moment?

Reflectie

- Wanneer was de laatste keer dat je vlees of vis at?
 - o Hoe kijk je nu naar vlees en vis eten?
- Kan je het je nog voorstellen hoe het was om vlees of vis te eten?
- Hoe kijk jij naar mensen die wel nog vlees/zuivel eten?
- Hoe kijk jij naar je vleesetende zelf van voordat je plantaardig(er) at?
- Hoe kijk jij als vegetariër naar veganistisch eten?

Boodschappen

- Hoe doe jij boodschappen?
 - o Hoe was het om boodschappen te doen toen je net plantaardiger was gaan eten?
 - o Hoe is jouw manier boodschappen doen veranderd sinds je plantaardiger bent gaan eten?
 - o Wat is de grootste verandering geweest in jouw manier van boodschappen doen?
- Waar let je op bij het kopen van producten?
 - o Is dit veranderd sinds je plantaardig eet?

Afsluiting

- Laatste vraag: Wat voor tips heb jij voor anderen die meer vegetarisch of veganistisch willen gaan eten?
- Zou je zelf nog iets willen delen of toevoegen aan het gesprek?
- Heb je nog andere vragen voor mij?