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Signed: Eliška Janská

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ABSTRACT

Veganism has become more popular in the past fifteen years, especially among Generation Z, driven by factors such as environmental awareness, animal rights, and health concerns. This dietary shift challenges traditional family food practices, often leading to misunderstandings between young vegans and their omnivorous relatives. Therefore, this study aims to discover how young vegans understand their identity as members of a non-vegan family, and what coping mechanisms they use to avoid negative distinctions. It also examines the influence of social media in shaping how these young people understand their vegan identity within the family context. The research adopts a social constructionist approach using qualitative methods. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with five men and two women aged 18–25, conducted both in person and online. Participants were recruited via Instagram using a snowball sampling approach. Supplementary insights were gathered through autoethnographic reflection, drawing on my own experiences of navigating a predominantly vegan diet within a non-vegan Czech family. The findings suggest that while some participants faced challenges, others experienced strengthened relationships and greater understanding, particularly through shared meals, open communication, and digital support networks. Social media played a crucial role in identity formation, which raised the critical view of the risks of algorithmic echo chambers. By addressing these dynamics, the study aims to encourage a better understanding of veganism within non-vegan families and support the integration of plant-based practices.

Keywords: Vegan, Food, Identity, Family, Youth, Stigma

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Veganism has grown significantly in popularity in recent years, as evidenced by both academic research (Sirieix et al., 2023; Robinson, 2023; Markowski and Roxburgh, 2019) and market trend analyses (Research and Markets, 2024; Allied Market Research, 2024). Younger generations in particular are increasingly drawn to veganism for reasons ranging from environmental and health concerns to ethical and political motivations. In this context, food becomes more than sustenance, it functions as a marker of identity, a form of activism, and a deeply personal expression of values. What we eat, in other words, often communicates as much about who we are as what we believe.

The primary motivation behind this dissertation stems from my strong interest in dietary practices, especially from social and political perspectives. Living with lactose intolerance has led me to adopt a predominantly vegan diet, through which I have experienced various forms of stigma and challenges in navigating family life and food-based interactions at home. While my initial dietary restrictions were health-related, focused solely on avoiding dairy, my deepening engagement with veganism revealed its broader cultural and ideological implications. I realised that food choices were not only personal but also socially and politically significant.

Therefore, this research aims to understand how young vegans navigate family life while adhering to a vegan diet, focusing on their identity formation, experiences, and feelings. While existing literature examined the role of vegan men in relation to their peers (Aavik, 2023), explored how vegans navigate their identity in omnivorous environments (Buttny and Kinefuchi, 2020), and studied vegan family units as a whole (Chwialkowska, 2018), research focused on young vegans navigating non-vegan family settings has been limited.

To address this gap, this study also investigates how identity formation among young vegans is shaped by digital influences, particularly social media, which now play an increasingly

central role in youth culture and self-perception (Tsaliki, 2023). Combining these perspectives and drawing on personal experience through autoethnography, the research is guided by the following research question:

1. How do young vegans perceive themselves as members of non-vegan families?
2. In what ways have social media contributed to their identity within this position?
3. What coping mechanisms do they use?

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of family communication and dynamics from the perspective of dietary differences. Since young people spend significant amounts of time online (Rothwell, 2023), a trend that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kemp, 2020; Perifanou, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020), it becomes increasingly important to understand how digital environments intersect with food-based identity, and how these identities are performed and negotiated at home. The findings have implications not only for the well-being of young vegans but also for broader conversations about food-related allergies, dietary accommodations, and the integration of more plant-based options into shared family meals.

The research adopts a mixed-methods qualitative design, combining autoethnographic reflection with in-depth interviews. Seven young vegans were interviewed, and the resulting data were thematically analysed to explore shared experiences, identity formation, and the socio-digital factors that influence both.

CHAPTER ONE:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review examines the dynamics of vegan identities within non-vegan families, focusing on the disruption of traditional family food practices. Food is a significant element in social settings, symbolising family bonds and reinforcing norms (Stone, 1988) that veganism often challenges. When a person following a plant-based diet enters an omnivorous family, they very likely disrupt these norms (Markowski, K. L. and Roxburgh, S., 2019), raising questions about identity, family dynamics, and coping strategies. The review thus explores the understanding of young vegan identities in non-vegan families, using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, practice, and field to analyse family settings (Bourdieu, 1996; Power, 1999). Moreover, the work will also focus on identity formation in youth (Erikson, 1994) and how becoming a vegan requires an identity shift. Additionally, it highlights the role of media in shaping vegan identities and cultivating a sense of belonging (Sirieix et al., 2023). The last point will be dedicated to coping strategies used by vegans to maintain positive relationships in non-vegan environments, sometimes requiring identity adaptation (Greenebaum, 2012; Paxman, 2021). While previous research has explored vegan identity and family dynamics, there is a gap in the literature on how young vegans navigate their identity within omnivorous family settings.

1.1 Family dynamics and the role of food

It is argued that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is one of the key principles to understanding human behaviour within social structures (Power, 1999). That can include gender, class, ethnicity, and family. Bourdieu describes habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' and 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (1977, p. 72). This means that habitus is created of long-lasting behaviours and ways of

thinking, which can change depending on the context, and that habitus is formed by the social world around us, but it also influences the way we act and how society works.

However, to make habitus function, Bourdieu introduces another concept, called “practice” (Power, 1999, p. 50). Practice is understood as the result of the interaction and “interrelationship” between habitus, capital, and field (Swartz, 1997, pp. 141-142), which is the social environment an individual’s habitus operates within (Akram, 2023, p. 59). ‘Fields are structured spaces organized around particular types of capital,’ such as a family of an individual, which acts as one of the “key fields” (Bourdieu, 1996), where social capital is built through structures of relationships (Power, 1999, pp. 50-51). Therefore, the family is an institution that plays a significant role in shaping people’s perceptions and understanding of reality and ensures that the actions of an individual align with group behaviours (Elliott, 2009, p. 12).

Developing the argument, Stone claims that the food that we consume is a symbol of inclusion, position in society, and spiritual significance. A fundamental sign of belonging is represented by sharing the same food with others (1988, p. 71). Caplan supports this discussion as he suggests that the selection of foods and the ways they are consumed play a role in establishing social order and boundaries within families (1997). Therefore, a family meal plays a crucial role in establishing family relationships. In contrast, Murcott (in Caplan, 1997) claims that over the past 40 years, food norms have changed and eating at the same table does not carry such a social value as before. ‘Family meals, it is said, are on the wane, rapidly and worryingly becoming a thing of the past’ (pp.32-33). Wills et al. (2008) attribute this happening to the class-based distinctions as working-class families and middle-class families have different approaches to food practices and meal structures, based on their capital and time possibilities.

Nevertheless, views on vegan and vegetarian diets usually carry a negative subtext as their differences from conventional eating habits challenge traditional societal norms

(Markowski, K. L. and Roxburgh, S., 2019). One reason why alternative diets are perceived this way is that vegetarianism and veganism have only recently gained popularity, particularly among younger generations. According to a report by Asian Trader (Shrivastava, 2024), more than half of Generation Z either avoid meat entirely or intend to do so in 2024. Additionally, over a quarter of Generation Z currently abstains from meat, with 9% identifying as vegans. Therefore, as food practices originate within an individual's family (Dietz, 2001; Caplan, 1997; Power, 1999), which often results in generational differences, positioning a vegan in a typical non-vegan Western family, where meat consumption is an ordinary matter (Fiddes, 1991), breaks those norms and family boundaries as they consume different kinds of foods, excluding foods the rest of the family eats on daily basis. '[B]eing vegan crosses the line from partially following food norms to completely eschewing them - from moderately acceptable to totally unacceptable' (Markowski, K. L. and Roxburgh, S., 2019, p. 5). Moreover, research suggests that family food is responsible for creating family identity (Valentine, 1999), however, tensions such as children refusing food offered by their parents contribute to the identity formation of an individual as they make active choices about what they want to consume (Wills et al., 2008).

1.2 Identity formation and the role of veganism

Erikson claims that during adolescence, when young people start to handle their 'genital maturation' alongside the confusion of adulthood, life begins their 'initial identity formation' (1994, p. 128). He argues that this is because, before this stage, a child develops human operations such as a 'sense of basic trust' during infancy, a 'sense of initiative' in childhood, or a 'sense of industry' when they first attend a nursery school (pp. 96-123). Hence, adolescence is a period when individuals develop their identity by looking for independence and defining values that differ from those of their family. Similarly, Chwialkowska discusses the concept of internalisation and its effect on consumption values in adulthood (2018, pp. 14-15). She uses a framework (Figure 1) that explains the switch from external motives, such as the family, to the development of autonomy, which usually happens once their children move out from the family, usually to go to college (p. 14).

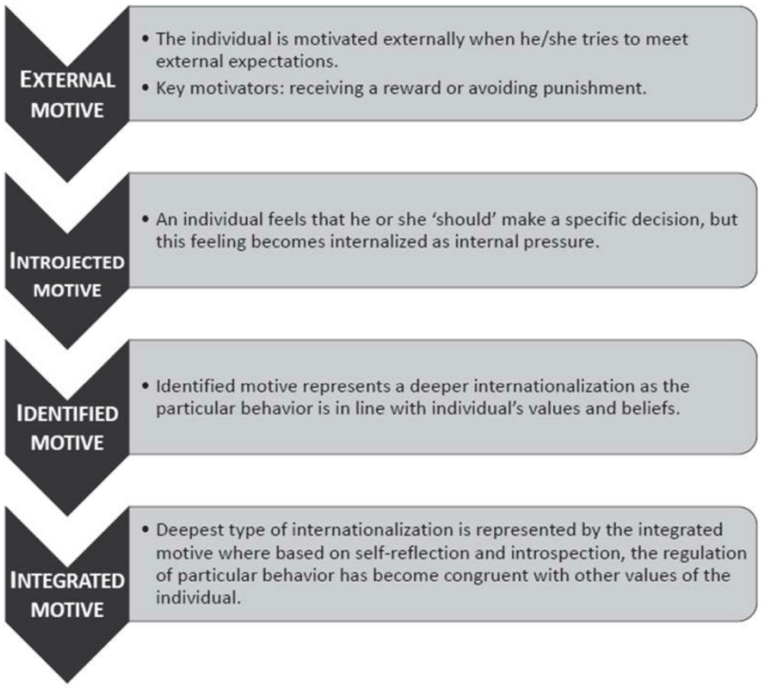

Figure 1: Four stages of internalisation explaining how values and behaviours change based on different motives.

Building upon, Chuck et al. (2016) find that becoming a vegan is not only about a dietary change but also about an identity shift and embodiment. They identify that their participants follow a vegan lifestyle for three main reasons: 'Ethics, Personal Wellbeing and Food Industry Distrust' (p. 428). Moreover, Sirieix et al. (2023, p. 1) divide vegans into two categories; vegans, who exclude all animal products from their dietary choices (Ruby, 2012; Rosenfeld and Burrow, 2017), and strict vegans, who completely avoid consuming or using any animal-derived products or materials produced through animal involvement, such as honey and leather (Nezlek and Forestell, 2020). Therefore, being veg*an requires time, effort (Wendler & Halkier, 2023) and dedication to a certain belief, which takes part in the construction of a vegan identity. A 25-year-old vegan reported in Aavik's (2023) "I think it was like important part in becoming who I thought I want to be in a way" (p. 47). Additionally, in Chuck et al. (2016), "[…] Being vegan touches me on a very personal level. It identifies me with who I am" (p. 430). Thus, the formation of a vegan identity during adolescence represents a complex process of changing personal values with lifestyle

choices, although it includes the rejection of the dominant ideology of speciesism (McDonald, 2000, p. 3) and family structure (Aavik, 2023, p. 121).

However, as a consequence of social media consumption, particularly of the younger generations, the vegan diet has become more popular in the past 15 years (Heiss et al., 2017, p. 130). 'With the growth of social media as a platform to share information, veganism is becoming more visible' (Rogerson, 2017, p. 1). Asano and Biermann support that claim as their research results display that vegan recipe shares increased from 1.2% to 13.5% (2019, p. 622). Therefore, the fact there has been growth in public interest in veganism (Ruby et al., 2023), and Generation Z is fully immersed in the digital world (Kagan and Lissitsa, 2023), social media have become significant in shaping vegan identity by providing acceptance and community (Sirieix et al. 2023). They argue that online communities are usually the most crucial at the start of people's vegan formation when they are getting information on the internet, followed by joining Facebook groups (2023). The process of learning usually includes "catalytic experiences" as the awareness of animal cruelty results in realisation (McDonald, 2000). Cherry (2015) states that vegan networks are key settings to maintain specific vegan practices and thus shape vegan identities. "I would consider myself vegan, but I would still eat honey, and occasionally, maybe very occasionally, have something that has some dairy product in it […]" (p. 67). Although this self-identification does not align with the statement that vegans do not consume anything derived from animals (The Vegan Society, 2018), it is so as the participant shares values with the rest of the community (Cherry, 2015, p. 68). On top of that, communities allow individuals to step out from the food norms and cope with negative responses as communities provide support and reinforce their beliefs (Sirieix et al. 2023, p. 6).

1.3 Coping strategies in a non-vegan environment

It is claimed that individuals who follow a plant-based diet usually participate in vegan stigma (Markowski, K. L. and Roxburgh, S., 2019, Cole and Morgan, 2011; Gregson et al., 2024, p. 1), which can be presented by 'looking down on [vegans]' (Markowski, K. L. and

Roxburgh, S., 2019, p. 4), comments on their food choices, such as jokes (Aavik, 2023, p. 157), as well as arguing with their close ones about their values behind the decision (McDonald, 2000, p. 12). Greenebaum (2012) states that her interactions with omnivores change according to who she is speaking to, such as a family member, a friend, or an activist, and thus shapes her identity in response to her audience (p. 310) to overcome a potentially negative reaction. Paxman's (2021) research demonstrates that vegans adopt two strategies to manage their identity, challenging negative stereotypes and building a positive self-image: 'Facilitating Smooth Interactions and Eating and Sharing Vegan Food' (p. 758). That involves tactics such as talking about their identity only when someone asks, not taking their identity too seriously in front of others, sharing vegan food, and planning ahead to ensure they have access to certain food in specific situations, or potentially eating before a food event (pp. 758-761).

Moreover, Greenebaum claims that veganism is mostly accepted when it is portrayed as a dietary choice without a moral agenda (2012, p. 310). Role modelling and non-confrontational communication, such as offering vegan food or watching vegan films, appear to be vegan strategies to engage with non-vegan family members (Aavik, 2023, p. 169). This aligns with earlier research, which suggests that vegans use these strategies not necessarily as an expression of their personal beliefs, but as a deliberate method to achieve specific objectives in social interactions (Turner, 2019, pp. 55-56). More research indicates that vegan men face greater challenges in gaining acceptance from peers compared to women, as societal norms link meat consumption with masculinity (Aavik, 2023; Brookes & Chałupnik, 2022; Shrivastava, 2024). Greenebaum claims that having a community that thinks the same way makes the transition much easier, however, it requires finding a new social circle (2012, p. 316). Jonathan, a vegan participant in her research, notes, "when you become vegetarian or vegan, you kind of alienate yourself and I don't know if people can deal with being alone.'' This alienation comes partly from differing worldviews, as vegans often place higher value on nature and spirituality compared to omnivores (McDonald, 2000, pp. 15-17).

Conclusion

This literature review analyses some of the discussions around the dynamics of veganism within the family structure by using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, practice and field, connecting it to food norms, alongside the role of media and its contribution to veganism. It also explores the challenges and coping strategies vegans employ to maintain their values and relationships. The study is significant because the results will assist with understanding and supporting young people with dietary preferences or requirements, whether driven by health concerns, such as allergies, environmental awareness, or ethical motivations. It will also help with understanding how these dynamics impact young vegans' mental health and contribute to shifting family attitudes toward plant-based practices, thus encouraging the integration of plant-based meals in non-vegan households, consequently supporting plant-based production.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter critically explores the methodological approaches used to address the research questions guiding this study. To investigate the identity formation and lived experiences of young vegans within non-vegan family environments, a qualitative approach was employed, combining in-depth interviews with autoethnography. These methods enabled a careful exploration of the emotional, social, and ideological complexities of being a young vegan in a family setting.

Epistemological Position

As the questions of this research concern new knowledge about social happenings and explore socially constructed meanings and lived experiences, a constructivist approach is therefore the most suitable epistemological approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 30). Constructionism is understood as 'social phenomena in a constant state of change,' as it is grounded in the interpretation of meaning through ongoing social interactions (Walliman, 2006, p. 21). Becker claims that 'people create culture continuously' (1982, p. 521), which supports this study's focus on identity construction through social processes.

Both selected methods, interviews and autoethnography, are grounded in the understanding that knowledge is constructed through social interaction. Interviews uncover how individuals interpret and express their realities through conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 55), while autoethnography allows for an "epistemology of insiderness," offering a unique view through which to access deeply personal insights (Adams et al., 2014, p. 40). Both methods are qualitative, therefore, they provide a detailed interpretation of the complexities of human interaction (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 55),

and thus, these methods support an interpretivist approach to explore how vegan identity is formed, expressed, and negotiated within family life.

Sampling Strategy and Access

A purposive sampling strategy was selected to detect participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research questions (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 167). To reach suitable participants, vegans aged 18–25 currently residing in the UK, a snowball sampling method was used because of the usage of networks (Kumar, 2005, p. 179). Participants were recruited through direct outreach on Instagram, personal contacts, and connections within the North East Animal Rights (NEAR) community. This particular age group was chosen due to the popularity of veganism in Generation Z (Yule, 2024) and their high use of social media (Bennett et al., 2011, p. 410), as well as because my position fits within this age group.

While an open callout on Instagram received limited engagement, initial outreach through known contacts proved to be more effective, and the participant network expanded through referrals. Although the study aimed for gender balance, the final sample included two women and five men, as my resources were limited (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p. 162). Given the association of veganism with femininity in public discourse (Wright, 2015, p. 114), this gender distribution offered an interesting lens, though it does limit the study's generalisability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 140).

The autoethnographic part centred on my interactions with my family in the Czech Republic during the Christmas holidays, a period deeply associated with family tradition and food. All family members involved were made aware of the research and its aims. In addition to documenting this period, I reflected on important events throughout my life that shaped my identity in ways that resonated with the narratives shared by my participants. However, it is important to acknowledge a limitation, and thus that my own cultural background differs

from that of the UK-based participants, therefore, the findings drawn from my autoethnography may not be directly comparable to theirs.

Research Strategy

A mixed method approach was employed, combining in-depth interviews with autoethnography, to seek 'richer, deeper, [and] better understanding of important facets of our infinitely complex social world' (Greene, 2007, p. 20), particularly to explore both individual narratives and personal lived experience, allowing for triangulation and depth in interpreting how young vegans navigate identity within non-vegan family setting.

The initial plan was to conduct a focus group, however, due to a small number of vegans in my network, that was not manageable. Participants were instead recruited on a rolling basis, and individual interviews were conducted. This change proved to be beneficial for this type of study, as Silverman notes that combining interviews with methods is not only valuable for the depth of the research but also provides 'a more sensitive approach' (2021, p. 362). This aligns with the aims of this study, as the combination of in-depth interviews and autoethnography allowed me to feel and understand the same emotions and experiences my participants shared, and thus enriched me with invaluable data, which is unlikely to access or replicate by the external researchers (Adams et al., 2014, p. 40).

The interviews aimed to explore recurring patterns in participants' everyday lives, particularly how they understood and expressed their vegan identities in relation to family life (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 27). A semi-structured format was chosen to allow space for participants to speak in their own terms about how they understand 'the social world' (May, 2022, p. 146), while maintaining thematic focus. Most of the questions were open-ended, encouraging detailed and original responses (Bryman, 2016, p. 244). Where responses required further depth or clarification, follow-up questions were used.

The interview sheet covered themes such as participants' background, pathways into veganism, family meal dynamics, and the role of social media in their lives (Appendix 1). While the core guide was used across all interviews for consistency, small adaptations were made during each interview to accommodate participant experiences and conversational flow.

To create a relaxed and open environment, as this method was time-consuming for both me and my interviewees, which is also a disadvantage of open-ended questions (Bryman, 2016, p. 244), vegan refreshments were provided during most of the interviews. Eating during the interview has been shown to create a more comfortable atmosphere for participants and foster natural conversation (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017, p. 152).

Five interviews were conducted in person in university-provided rooms, which enabled rapport-building and nonverbal communication due to the face-to-face interaction (Shuy, 2003, p. 8). The remaining two were conducted via Microsoft Teams due to participants' distance. Although the boundaries between an online video call and face-to-face conversation seem to be becoming very similar (Mason, 2017, p. 128), it was still important to be aware of potential glitches and internet disconnection, which could have interrupted the interview (p. 129). Another limitation of the online conduct was the inability to identify whether my participants were heard or watched by others (p. 130), and it was not in my power to prevent any interruptions on their side, leading to the loss of focus on the interview. All interviews were recorded on multiple devices to have a backup copy and later transcribed for analysis.

Contrarily, an autoethnographic approach was used to reflect on my own experiences of living with a predominantly vegan diet in a non-vegan family. This method allowed me to consider how identity, tension, and negotiation unfold within my personal context. The autoethnography used in this study followed an evocative style, focusing on feelings and connection to explore broader sociocultural themes (Ellis, 2004, pp. 167-169). However, it

also incorporated analytical elements, including observation and self-reflection, allowing for both narrative evocation and critical interpretation (Adams et al., 2014, p. 90).

During Christmas, a culturally significant period centred around food and tradition, I initiated conversations with family members, proposed hypothetical scenarios of being fully vegan, prepared vegan meals, and documented their reactions. Although my family did not agree to a full vegan shift during the holiday due to a short notice and health concerns, their resistance, discussions, and adjustments were considered as key data points. Notes, direct quotes, and reflections were recorded during the process (Appendix 2).

Together, these methods provided both an external and internal point of view on the research topic. The interviews revealed shared and varying patterns in participant experiences, while the autoethnography grounded the study in a lived, emotional context that was both personally revealing and thematically resonant.

Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was applied to the interview and autoethnographic data, aiming to identify key patterns and themes, explore the further meaning of the experiences and claims (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 373). After transcribing the interviews, notable quotations were highlighted and participant responses organised into tables (Appendix 3). From this, themes were identified using techniques such as noting '*repetitions; indigenous typologies; metaphors; and similarities and differences*' (Bryman, 2016, p. 586).

Two overarching themes emerged: social media influence and family bonds. Autoethnographic notes were used to cross-reference findings and enrich the contextual analysis. The dual perspective of participant and researcher enabled a greater understanding of the identity-building processes in focus.

Validity and Reliability

Between-method triangulation was employed by combining in-depth interviews with personal autoethnographic reflection to develop insights gained from each qualitative data collection (Flick, 2018, p. 869). That ensured the 'truth, the correctness, and the strength' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 282) of the data presented, as well as the representation of multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, offering richer insight into the lived experiences and identity formation.

Reflexivity was central throughout the research as autoethnography can challenge assumptions of objectivity (Jupp, 2006, p. 33). My dual position of not identifying as vegan but following a predominantly vegan lifestyle offered a unique standpoint from which to reflect on the data. This perspective enabled me to resonate with participants while also questioning and contextualising their narratives with a critical distance. This dual position enriched the research by enabling empathetic understanding alongside objective analysis. I continuously reflected on my assumptions and positionality throughout data collection and analysis.

In terms of reliability, 'consistency and trustworthiness' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 281) were maintained by using the same interview format and questions across all participants. Audio recordings and full transcriptions supported accurate representation. While thematic analysis is interpretive by nature, efforts were made to ensure transparency in coding, theme selection, and cross-comparison with field notes.

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the university before data collection. All participants were required to read the participant information sheet (Appendix 4) and complete a written consent form (Appendix 5) before the start of the interview. That ensured that they were acknowledged of the topics that would be discussed and the purpose of the study itself. Participants were informed of their right to skip uncomfortable questions or withdraw from the study at any point up to one month after their interview without specifying any reasons. They were also informed that their identity would remain anonymous, and all collected data would stay confidential and thus stored securely. Lastly, a debriefing form (Appendix 6) was provided after the interview, repeating participants' rights and summarising the research objectives.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and justified the methodological choices made to develop a strong and reliable research design, effectively address my research questions, and produce findings that are both valid and reliable. Through a mixed-method qualitative approach, employing both in-depth interviews and autoethnography, this study provides a detailed, empathetic, and reflexive account of how young vegans navigate identity within the family setting. The next chapter will present the findings, beginning with an exploration of the role of social media in shaping vegan identity.

CHAPTER THREE:

VEGANISM IN THE FEED: SOCIAL MEDIA, ALGORITHMS, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Introduction

Vegan identity is a complex matter, influenced by numerous factors from early life onwards, including education, social context, and personal values. This chapter breaks down how participants' identities as vegans have developed, with a particular focus on the influence of social media.

Discovering veganism: independence, political values, and platform Influence

Moving away for college (and university in this sense) enables young people to reshape their identities, as life out of home provides them with independence, progressing towards adulthood (Yang and Brown, 2016, p. 403), therefore college is a place for individual development and self-discovery (Arnett, 2024, p. 160). My findings show that five vegans made their dietary changes after moving to university, which also resonates with my autoethnographic observation. ‘I was never vegan until starting to eat independently and cooking for myself’ (Vegan 4, Appendix 7).

In contrast, Vegan 2 had considered veganism for a long time, but it was not until university, and the independence it offered, that he felt able to make the change: ‘I was, very discouraged from doing it for a very long time and then once I came to uni[versity], […] everything that I had was mine so, the obvious choice was just, yeah, I'm going to buy oat milk because it's the uni[versity] lifestyle I guess’ (Appendix 7).

However, social media nowadays play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours related to food, as they become increasingly embedded in consumers' everyday lives (Rini et al., 2024, p. 9). Kadel et al. discover that social media influence not only how individuals view others and their actions, but also how they perceive themselves, which ultimately impacts their own behaviours (2024, p. 7), contributing to one's self-identity. That parallels with my findings, as all seven participants admitted their exposure to social media, specifically Instagram, with the biggest representation. 'I probably wouldn't have gone vegan if I hadn't seen all the posts, […] because when I was 15, and I went on social media, I started seeing a couple of celebrities posting things about animal rights and the environment' (Vegan 6, Appendix 7). Vegan 4 also confirmed that statement: 'I feel like that's [social media] been a big part of keeping me vegan in the sense that I'm seeing now through social media and through these accounts what happens to animals' (Appendix 7).

Arnett (2024) explains how an individual's identity initially drives their preference for certain types of media content over others (Figure 2, pp. 196-197). Emerging adults then evaluate media content, and their response to it mirrors their personal qualities and values, and thus those experiences are integrated back into the development of their identities (pp. 197-198).

This may help explain the dietary choices of my interviewees, as most were politically motivated, and four explicitly identified as left-wing and expressed that this aspect of their identity was closely intertwined with their decision to adopt a vegan lifestyle. 'I think veganism is also part of a political, like my political ideological identity thing. It's very interlinked and then obviously that was formed through years and years of sitting and watching political YouTube videos' (Vegan 2, Appendix 7). Vegan 4 also mentioned: 'Instagram, I mainly use for liking the political side of things, like following Animal Rising, Greenpeace, PETA, organisations like that' (Appendix 7).

Building upon, people's political beliefs influence the kinds of values they prioritise when choosing food, and these values can vary significantly across the political spectrum (Tiganis et al., 2023, p. 7). In addition, activist Michael Pollan highlights how everyday food choices can serve as acts of political expression, suggesting that individuals engage in political participation simply through what they choose to eat: "The wonderful thing about food is that you get three votes a day. Every one of them has the potential to change the world" (Nourish, 2020). Moreover, previous research has examined the interlink between veganism and left-wing politics (Grünhage and Reuter, 2021), as well as right-wing ideologies and negative attitudes towards plant-based diet (Judge and Wilson, 2019, p. 175), as 'ideology is a strong predictor of attitudes toward vegans' (Vestergren and Uysal, 2022, p. 5).

Nevertheless, especially in the West, the internet plays a significant role in shaping the political identities of middle-class youth and overlooking the impact of digital media on today's political landscape results in a disconnect from the ways young people develop their political identities (Howard, 2011, pp. 895-896). However, one participant who initially adopted a vegan diet for health reasons also acknowledged that social media helped reinforce her beliefs: 'It's probably impacted, like, it kind of solidifies why I do it. […] A lot of them [videos] draw me into being vegan more and just make my views quite solid on it' (Vegan 1, Appendix 7).

The world of algorithms

By October 2020, the number of active internet users globally had surpassed 4.5 billion, with more than 4 billion people actively using social media platforms (Perifanou et al., 2020, p. 1), and the number is still on the rise. Especially during the pandemic time when COVID-19 emerged and people had to stay isolated in quarantine, the use of digital media has increased significantly (Kemp, 2020).

Three of my participants reported that they found an interest in veganism during the COVID lockdown period, some of them attributing the shift to the increased time spent online and exposure to relevant content on social media. ‘It was very much a COVID lockdown sort of domino effect of like the world's putting the world to rights and then like over time they've become more health conscious, I suppose’ (Vegan 2, Appendix 7). Vegan 7 also noted: ‘It started more during COVID. I got more into sort of spirituality side of things. Then I started looking into plant-based [eating] and came across all the sort of animal rights documentaries and stuff. […] I think it was like a YouTube rabbit hole of watching stuff and ended up on it and then found it interesting. […] But yeah, I only really started to look into them more through COVID lockdown, and I guess having more time on my hands to sit and do that’ (Appendix 7).

During the COVID lockdown, I also became curious about nutrition and dietary practices. Initially, this was evidenced not in adopting veganism, but in simply reducing meat consumption and incorporating more vegetables into my meals. All of that resonates with Park and Kim’s findings as some members of the vegan community viewed the COVID-19 pandemic as a chance to transform their own lifestyles or influence others to do the same (2022, p. 4).

Nevertheless, Instagram, in particular, serves as an effective platform for influencing audiences, and with its large user base, messages can be quickly and widely disseminated to viewers (Evelina and Sari, 2023, p. 5). To support this, ‘[o]n Instagram alone there are over 125 million posts containing the hashtag #vegan’ (Kadel et al., 2024, p. 1). As Vegan 6 reflected: ‘Instagram is probably the one I use the most and plays a pretty significant role in things, like politics and the environment, and veganism come up very often on my feed’ (Appendix 7).

However, what comes up on an individual’s feed is something to be questioned, because although we may not always be aware of it, the algorithms behind modern media are

constantly operating to provide us with content that appears to match our preferences (Bucher, 2018, p. 150). That is a key reason why opinions online often become more extreme, as people are mostly shown posts that match their existing views and thus contribute to the polarisation effects seen on social media platforms (Bessi et al., 2016, p. 7). Moreover, Bessi et al. (2016) also find that when people encounter opposing opinions online, especially related to science or conspiracy, they tend to group with others who share their own views, forming like-minded echo chambers (p. 7). YouTube algorithms, particularly, have faced criticism for reinforcing filter bubbles and echo chambers (Tufekci, 2018), which is reflected in one of my interviewees' experiences. 'It's all very left-wing and then like Lockdown happens and it becomes even more left-wing, and then it's all just very leftist YouTube media sort of stuff' (Vegan 2, Appendix 7).

In contrast, it can also flip to the other side when one finds a lot of misrepresentative content about veganism. Vosoughi et al. (2018) discovered that on Twitter, false news tended to be more original or surprising than true news, making people more inclined to share it (p. 1146). Interestingly, although all my interviewees admitted the exposure towards social media, which reinforced their beliefs, they all claimed that there are a lot of negative and misrepresentative portrayals, which also kept them engaged. 'You'll get terrible arguments against veganism that are just really dumb. I remember seeing this person compare the amount of protein in a steak to the amount of protein in broccoli, which no one needs broccoli for protein' (Vegan 5, Appendix 7). Vegan 4 shared a similar experience: 'There are meat eaters who deliberately misrepresent veganism for whatever reason. Sometimes it's out of right-wing politics. I think broadly, right-wing is quite hostile to vegans' (Appendix 7).

There seems to be an increasing societal discomfort or bias towards vegans marked by a form of "vegaphobia" as 74.3 per cent of examined UK newspapers' articles from 2007 were identified as holding negative views (Cole and Morgan, 2011, p. 138). Moreover, social media has created a space where individuals who oppose veganism can connect and find solidarity with like-minded others (Gregson et al., 2022, p. 2). Bucher emphasises how

digital media are immersed in a typical day, such as ‘checking Facebook, reading online news, searching Google for information, writing emails, tweeting a link,’ doing online shopping or watching Netflix (2018, p. 149). The point is that although these actions might seem ordinary, they reflect how deeply embedded media, especially algorithm-driven media, have become in our everyday lives (p. 149). Hence, as Cinelli et al. claim, feed algorithms can shape policymaking and affect how public discussions develop, particularly on divisive or controversial issues (2021, p. 5). This demonstrates how algorithms not only reflect user preferences, but actively shape digital pathways of belief, especially on politicised or lifestyle problems like veganism.

Community, isolation, and the limits of digital connection

Previous research suggests that engaging with online communities can reinforce group identity, and once this social identity is established, members may become more vulnerable to group influence, as well as more likely to stereotype and judge against those outside the group (Postmes et al., 1998, cited in Gregson et al., 2022, p. 3). Moreover, social media can serve as an entry point into activism (Davis et al., 2019, p. 269). ‘I've started being less accommodating of meat and dairy. I probably wouldn't buy someone cheese, or if I'm in a restaurant and I'm paying, I would ask the other person to order something vegan. So, I've definitely become a lot more ideological about it’ (Vegan 4, Appendix 7).

In contrast, Vegan 7 reflected on the complexities of upholding his values without harming his relationships: ‘I think gifting […] is a weird one. I don't want to be seen as […] almost like putting my views in front of the wants of others. So, I'd still buy my sister a pack of dairy chocolates or get someone a gift voucher to a restaurant that doesn't serve any vegan food’ (Appendix 7).

Nevertheless, the strength and consistency of vegan practices are influenced by their surrounding social environment (Cherry, 2015, p. 67; Williams et al., 2023, p. 5), which

nowadays is largely facilitated by social media that help foster a shared sense of identity among users (Davis et al., 2019, p. 269). ‘I think having social media and being able to connect with other people with similar beliefs has helped with not feeling like the only vegan in the village, sort of thing. […] I think the sense of community and stuff played a massive part just to feel more comfortable in social settings and public to be openly vegan. […] So, I think having an online platform with other people who you can talk to definitely builds confidence in and acceptance, I guess’ (Vegan 7, Appendix 7). Vegan 6 resonated with a similar experience: ‘I think in my social circle, not many people are vegan, […] pretty much everyone eats meat. Whereas on social media, it feels like my world's a bit bigger, it feels like there's a lot more people sort of with a similar mindset’ (Appendix 7). However, when participants were asked about their online engagement, the answers seemed like passive consumption rather than active participation. ‘I don't think people online, at least largely, are looking for an actual debate. I think a lot of people are just looking for a reaction’ (Vegan 7, Appendix 7).

Although Mosseri (2023) argues that Meta (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) algorithms are intended to strengthen connections with friends and family while fostering a feeling of community in the online space, previous research (Lee et al., 2022, p. 2) finds that many participants described feeling positively toward others on the platform despite having minimal or no direct interaction. This suggests that people perceive social media algorithms as recognising, affirming, and reinforcing key aspects of their identity (Taylor and Choi, 2024, p. 3) without necessarily directly interacting with other users. ‘I have just been doing it [navigating vegan challenges] solo’ (Vegan 2, Appendix 7). Vegan 5 also admitted: ‘I'm more of like a behind-the-scenes person or a solo warrior, I guess. […] I don't think I actually really knew any vegans until I turned my flatmate into a vegan’ (Appendix 7).

Furthermore, previous research has questioned so-called “lonely algorithms” (Taylor and Choi, 2024, p. 1254), addressing the doubt about whether they actually succeed in connecting people. Their findings (2024, p. 1273) demonstrate that people who already feel lonely might find that the content chosen for them by social media algorithms does not

really meet their needs or reflect who they are. However, Twenge et al. illustrate a possible interlink between a noticeable rise in feelings of loneliness and iGen (internet generation) adolescents' engagement in less face-to-face socialising with peers during their free time, compared to previous generations, spending that time online instead (2019, p. 1909). Therefore, feeling lonely might impact the development of social skills, as well as have negative consequences for both physical and mental health (p. 1908). To support this, Arnett (2024) claims that there is an ongoing concern that the constant presence of digital media may be reshaping our social relationships across all age groups. Since our attention is repeatedly drawn to messages from people who are not physically present, it raises a question of whether we are ever truly present with those who are (p. 200).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the central role of social media in shaping vegan identity, particularly through political alignment, algorithmic reinforcement, and perceived community. Participants' narratives revealed a tension between feeling supported by online platforms and feeling isolated offline. While not claiming that interviewees were manipulated by algorithms, the findings highlight how deeply embedded social media is in constructing beliefs and behaviours. My own autoethnographic experience with a feed saturated in vegan content, particularly recipes, reinforces this idea, highlighting the subtle yet powerful influence of digital environments on our sense of self.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DOES VEGANISM WEAKEN FOOD-BASED FAMILY BONDS?

Introduction

To understand whether young vegans feel excluded in their families due to differing diets, and how shifting food dynamics affect their relationships, this section explores findings from my research alongside existing literature on vegan identity and family practices. This approach offers deeper insight into how changes in food-related routines shape family relationships for young vegans.

Interrupting the norm: when veganism disrupts family meal traditions

During adolescence, juveniles usually start gaining autonomy in eating decisions, which does not necessarily align with the family's choices (Ziegler et al., 2021). Moreover, considering the new generation's environmental consciousness, alternative diets and trends related to veganism, such as "Veganuary", have become popularised as consumers reduce their meat consumption in a more flexible and less restrictive manner (Yule, 2024).

However, Roth (2005) argues that adopting vegetarianism, similar to other significant life changes (where we could argue for veganism), may be perceived as unconventional and even disruptive, potentially challenging or betraying the family's collective identity, particularly concerning its deeply emotional food traditions (p. 197). That disruption highlights how food choices and beliefs contribute to shaping power dynamics, inclusion, and exclusion within social structures (p. 197). Jabs et al. support this argument since their research demonstrates that traditional holiday foods, such as turkey and lamb, often become points of contention between vegetarians and their non-vegetarian relatives (1998a, p. 186). As a result, some non-vegetarian family members reduced their social engagement with family vegetarians (p. 186).

When vegan participants were asked about their background and family context, the most mentioned topic was a family gathering at Christmas dinner. That was the time when all immediate families shared a meal together, whether family meals were a common habit or not. In Vegan 2's narrative, he remembers his first vegan Christmas dinner: 'It was kind of last minute. […] I was the only one who was not eating the turkey or whatever, I got my own little mushroom pastry thing. […] The boring stuff was okay for me to eat' (Appendix 7).

This experience aligns with previous research (MacInnis and Hodson, 2017; Buttny and Kinefuchi, 2020; Paxman, 2021; Markowski and Roxburgh, 2019), which emphasises persistent negative perceptions of veganism. One could also argue that having a different meal can significantly affect family relationships, as meal sharing can be considered a fundamental aspect of belonging to a household (Morgan, 1996, p. 157).

Vegan 3 also shared an isolating experience when it came to cooking Christmas dinner, as she had to cook her vegan option herself alongside her siblings with different dietary requirements: 'Me and a brother and a sister made roasted vegetables the night before, so then we could heat them up on the Christmas day. And then a vegan meat replacement thing that I put in the air fryer with the vegetables to heat them up' (Appendix 7).

This experience echoed my own during Christmas with my family in the Czech Republic. My parents told me that if I wanted a vegan option, I would have to cook it myself. In Czech tradition, it is traditional to get a whole fish and portion it among the family. When I suggested a vegan alternative, my father expressed annoyance. Not only because of the extra effort required, but because accommodating me would mean buying a smaller fish for the rest of the family, which he felt would be less enjoyable. In contrast, my aunt responded with flexibility. Although she did not seem happy, she said that if I had let her know earlier, she would have prepared a vegan option.

However, in the other five families, the parents' approach was very different. The word "lucky" appeared in the interviews multiple times, as the vegans' assumption was that in most families, other young vegans were experiencing hostility towards their diet. 'I consider myself very lucky that not only my parents don't make an issue, and I don't get judgment from them. They also have adopted it themselves somewhat, and their diet now, I think, is so much better, like, than it was. They are eating less meat, and it is better for animals, the environment, and everything' (Vegan 6, Appendix 7).

Existing research displays that in order to maintain harmony and unity within the family, which is likely desired, shifts toward more sustainable eating practices in the household are made (Hesselberg et al., 2024, p. 8) as a result of the children's driven approach. Their findings show that the types of dishes prepared, mealtimes, and how tasks are divided were frequently adjusted to align with children's tastes and routines (p. 6). Moreover, when calling for more sustainable family meals, Mata et al. (2025) argue that children who followed a vegan or vegetarian diet had greater influence over family meal choices than those who ate an omnivorous diet (p. 5). Therefore, eating together as a family gives adolescents a chance to influence change and help guide their families toward healthier and more sustainable eating habits (p. 8), rather than in a family where members cook and eat individually. In Vegan 2's case, members of the household were eating separately, usually defrosting single portions of food that were cooked beforehand, and the only proper family meal was at Christmas. That might explain the potential disconnection between family members, as joined meals are lacking, and vegan 2 usually 'take[s] food up to [his] room and eat[s] it there' (Appendix 7), and thus his family might not see it reasonable enough to adapt vegan meals.

In contrast, Vegan 3's family eats dinner together on a daily basis, however, the structure is slightly atypical since she is from nine children, with six still currently living in the household. She claims that '[i]t can be a little bit isolating, because obviously with the whole dynamic of me having to cook separately to everyone else means I do not necessarily end up eating at the exact same time as everyone else' (Appendix 7). However, further research on family-

meal dynamics concerning a higher number of children is required as this study area has not yet been fully explored.

Avoidance, silence, and strategic peacekeeping

Previous research has showcased that vegans use certain strategies to avoid conflict with omnivores, such as remaining silent about being vegan unless directly questioned (Buttny and Kinefuchi, 2020, p. 577; Greenebaum, 2012, p. 318; Paxman, 2021, pp. 758-759), rather than imposing their views on others, which has been seen as a typical vegan bias perceived by omnivores (Markowski and Roxburgh, 2019, p. 5). All seven interviewees reflected that discussions about veganism, especially when initiated by vegans, were often perceived as moralising. Therefore, they avoid raising the topic to prevent potential tension at the dinner table. 'I don't tend to elaborate much because it sort of feels preachy, even though it isn't, because they're the ones asking. And then it opens them up to sort of that they feel like they've been attacked, and they might retaliate with something, and it might ruin an otherwise pleasant family get-together' (Vegan 6, Appendix 7).

However, this tension was most experienced during extended family gatherings, which typically 'include the grandparents, aunts, and uncles […] and the nuclear family' (Loeffler, 2021, p. 2839). In five of the interviews, grandmothers or uncles were identified as the most challenging family members in terms of accepting and understanding the participant's veganism. 'I don't think my grandmother has really grasped the idea yet, so when she does the Christmas buffet on the evening for everyone, there's very rarely anything vegan there, other than maybe a pickled onion. So, I just make sure I'm full beforehand and just don't touch it. Again, to sort of maintain family relations, I don't make a big deal about it' (Vegan 7, Appendix 7).

Vegan 2 shared a similar Christmas-related experience, which also resonates with my autoethnographic findings, as I was not permitted to mention my "veganism" to my

grandmother due to our complicated relationship and her anticipated negative reaction. ‘We didn't want to let her [grandma] know that I was vegan because obviously, she's gonna be so up in arms about that. So, it's just better for her to not know about it, so she was serving us this little fish dish that she'd made […]. And so, what I had to do was pretend to eat the food, because she's always in and out of the room going back in the kitchen back and forth every so often, my mum would put her plate forward and I'd just kind of scramble it onto her plate and then eat some bread that was with the fish’ (Vegan 2, Appendix 7).

Aavik’s research on male vegans and their family relations demonstrates that whether their immediate family respected their different diet and beliefs, it was unavoidable that older relatives, like grandparents, struggled to understand someone’s decision to be vegan (2023, p. 165). A stronger relationship between parents and grandparents tends to support a closer bond between grandparents and their grandchildren (Tanskanen and Danielsbacka, 2018, p. 80), however, in this case, the relationship between parents and grandparents was not necessarily researched and thus cannot be claimed a deciding factor. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the literature review, veganism has been on the rise for the past 15 years, especially among Generation Z, because of their social media consumption (Heiss et al., 2017, p. 130), and thus, that might explain the lack of understanding from the grandparents’ side. ‘I don't think she [grandma] would really understand it because she grew up during the war, so she barely knows what [veganism is]’ (Vegan 4, Appendix 7).

Uncles, on the other hand, were aware of what veganism is but often took a critical or sarcastic stance toward their niece’s or nephew’s plant-based choices. ‘My uncle on my dad's side is a butcher and […] we don't see them that often, but whenever we have had get-togethers and I've seen them, and it's never me that brings it up, contrary to the stereotype that you always know who the vegan is. But because people know that I'm vegan, […] it tends to be like middle-aged male family members [who] will make it a point to bring up and ask me sort of antagonistic questions’ (Vegan 6, Appendix 7).

This quote also reflects the distant relationship between the vegan participant and their uncle's family. In contemporary developed societies, kinship networks have lost significance, coinciding with the growing influence of modernisation (Saxena et al., 2021, p. 4411). Tanskanen and Danielsbacka claim that the quality of relationships between aunts and uncles and their nieces and nephews is linked to how well the child's parents get along with their own siblings (2018, p. 136). Moreover, this example highlights the persistent stereotype linking meat consumption to masculinity. Previous research finds that prejudice against vegans is most distinct among demographics with high meat consumption, particularly cisgender men (Vandermoere et al., 2019), as well as individuals with right-wing political beliefs (Dhont & Hodson, 2014).

Building upon this, four participants described their fathers as indifferent to their dietary choices. Interestingly, Aavik (2023) finds that 'fathers and other men in the family' carry the most refusal approach towards their vegan sons/other vegan men in the family (p. 167). This, again, features how eating animals is a gendered practice, commonly linked to expressions of masculinity (Ruby and Heine, 2011). However, in my research, both female and male participants reported no direct opposition or interference from their fathers regarding their veganism. 'My dad definitely [did] not [cut down his meat intake], he is a meat-eater at heart. […] He [my dad] wasn't really too bothered [when I became vegan] to be honest because he's never really had an impact on what I eat' (Vegan 1, Appendix 7).

Fielding-Singh claims that fathers typically engage minimally in food-related tasks and are often perceived as careless of both their own and their family's nutritional well-being (2017, p. 98). The research reinforces gender-rooted ideologies, as none of the immediate family members considered cooking or promoting a healthy diet as part of a father's responsibilities (p. 106). Although the unequal division of food work was acknowledged, it did not affect fathers' perceptions of themselves in their roles as poorer husbands or fathers (p. 106).

New recipes for connection: veganism as a bridge

Family food choices are ultimately shaped through interactions and negotiations among its members (Gram, 2014), including more sustainable diets (Hesselberg et al., 2024). In the way vegan participants interrupted established family food norms, they also managed to reinforce relationships with certain family members as a result of effective communication. Effective communication within families may contribute to stronger relationship quality, reflected in how often individuals experience feelings of love, support, respect, and understanding in their current family dynamics (McKinley and Lilly, 2021, p. 112). Brubaker supports that argument as he states that being able to communicate positively, such as showing empathy, listening attentively, and offering supportive feedback, helps couples and families openly discuss and adapt to one another's shifting needs and preferences (1993, p. 25).

Vegan 4 reported how relationships within his family got better thanks to introducing veganism itself: 'Things have been getting better over the last five years, and I think me being vegan has become a very small part of that, just because it's something to talk about and it's something that my [parents] are quite supportive of and they're curious, inquisitive, they're positive about it. […] I talk about what I eat; I give recipes' (Appendix 7).

Furthermore, three participants emphasised a distinctively better relationship with their mothers through discussions around food choices. This pattern also emerged in Aavik's (2023, p. 161) research and may be linked to the gendered division of food work (Fielding-Singh, 2017), as well as the gendered perception of meat consumption (Ruby and Heine, 2011). 'I remember once I made the decision to be vegan, I was talking to my mum about it, and she was, "mmm, okay" and then she let me know about her previous experience of when she was around my age and not wanting to eat meat. And then it's just like, oh, you learned some more, like, lore about your parents that you haven't heard about, and they never mentioned' (Vegan 2, Appendix 7).

Another recurring theme was the participation of parents in Veganuary. Previous research notes the influence of food trends and market shifts on consumer behaviour, including among non-vegans who begin to purchase and consume vegan products (Martinelli and De Canio, 2022, pp. 23-24). One participant said: 'My dad did Veganuary and stuck vegan for six months as well after that' (Vegan 7, Appendix 7), which aligns with Tapper's (2024) findings that participating in Veganuary is associated with a stronger aversion to meat.

In some cases, veganism helped foster stronger sibling connections, even in families where it was not fully accepted by parents. 'A lot of my siblings like it and support me a lot and want to go vegan themselves or want to go veggie' (Vegan 3, Appendix 7).

Finally, participants spoke about veganism as a reflection of their values. Despite disagreements, this clarity made it easier for their close ones to picture them in a certain way and 'understand where [their] values lie a bit better' (Vegan 7, Appendix 7). Quotes such as 'it gives them a way of thinking about me' (Vegan 2, Appendix 7) and 'they're more conscious of me as a person' (Vegan 1, Appendix 7) suggest that dietary changes can open new pathways to familial bonding; ones not necessarily grounded in traditional food practices, but in evolving understandings of care, values, and identity.

Conclusion

The findings from this chapter illustrate that negative perceptions of veganism remain prevalent. However, as society becomes increasingly open to sustainable diets, veganism may emerge as a new form of family connection through shared plant-based food experiences. Young vegans often articulate their identities through food choices, and when families respond with adjustment and acceptance, it can reinforce a child's sense of being understood. Elements of each participant's story resonated with my own autoethnographic experience and shaped my overall narrative, even if not all of them were included in the

formal analysis. For example, my parents initially opposed my decision to go vegan due to health concerns (Vegan 3), financial anxieties (Vegan 1, Vegan 6), and the disruption it caused to our family routines. However, when I prepared a vegan meal for them that they enjoyed, it created a new opportunity for connection, through food, shared experience, and conversation. While we do not regularly eat together as a family, open communication about one another's challenges and needs remains a valued part of our relationship.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore how young vegans construct and negotiate their identities within non-vegan family environments. By using in-depth interviews and autoethnographic reflection, the findings demonstrate that veganism, for these individuals, is far more than a dietary preference. It is a political, ethical, and social identity negotiated within often complex family dynamics.

One of the central findings of this study is the prominent role of social media in shaping and sustaining vegan identity. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube offered participants validation, exposure to like-minded communities (Sirieix, 2023), and a sense of belonging that was often lacking in their immediate offline environments. For several interviewees, including myself, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a tool for both increased online engagement and a deeper connection to vegan values (Kemp, 2020; Perifanou, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020). However, the study also highlights the need for critical awareness of algorithm-driven content, as such systems can lead to the formation of echo chambers and shape beliefs in ways that may not always be conscious or reflective (Botte et al., 2022).

The data further illustrate the emotional and relational tensions faced by young vegans within their family settings. These challenges included moments of isolation, conflict, and negotiation, as participants balanced their ethical commitments with a desire to maintain familial harmony. While some felt the need to downplay or conceal their beliefs, others found ways to assert them respectfully. Importantly, these struggles often led to moments of mutual understanding and appreciation, even when values were not fully aligned. In several cases, participants reported that their families, though not necessarily accepting of veganism, became more open to dialogue and compromise, suggesting a form of family bonding rooted in communication, empathy, and mutual respect.

The use of between-method triangulation proved the complexity of this lived experience. While interviews revealed a rich diversity of personal narratives, autoethnography offered a more personal, introspective and reflexive view through which to consider broader patterns of conflict and adaptation. Together, these approaches offered a multidimensional understanding of how veganism interacts with personal identity, family meal values, and evolving communication practices.

Nevertheless, the research contains a great limitation, and thus that the interviews were conducted exclusively with young vegans residing in the UK, while the autoethnographic component was based on personal experiences within a Czech cultural context. As someone familiar with both countries, there are noticeable differences in how veganism is accommodated. The UK market is considerably more open to veganism, with greater product availability and affordability, whereas in the Czech Republic, vegan alternatives are less accessible and often more expensive. These economic and cultural factors make it more difficult for families in Czechia to adapt to vegan dietary needs in the same way families might in the UK. Such differences may have shaped the nature of my autoethnographic reflections and, as a result, limit the direct comparability of findings. Rather than seeing this solely as a limitation, it also points to the value of cross-cultural exploration. Therefore, future research should examine how different social and cultural contexts shape the lived realities of young vegans. In addition, further studies could incorporate a broader participant base, including non-vegan family members. Lastly, adopting different methods, such as ethnographic observations or digital discourse analysis, would provide a more comprehensive view of the matter.

In sum, this study contributes to growing scholarship on food-based identity, family communication, and the sociopolitical dimensions of dietary practice. It highlights how food practices, when seen through the lens of generational and digital shifts, can both divide and unite families, and that understanding these processes is essential to support meaningful change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: In-depth interview question sheet.

Vegan in-depth interview questions
Participant Information
* Full Name (Title):
* Age:
* Location (General area, no exact address needed):
* Occupation/Field of Study:

Background & Family Context
1. Where did you grow up, and what was your family's food culture like?
2. How long have you been vegan?
3. What motivated your decision to go vegan? (Was it a gradual transition or a sudden change?)
4. How did your family initially react when you became vegan? Has their stance changed over time?
5. Do you currently live with your family, or do you visit often? How do your eating habits fit into the household routine?
6. Have there been any specific moments of tension or acceptance regarding your veganism within your family?

Identity & Self-Perception
1. How do you personally define your vegan identity?
2. How does being vegan shape how you see yourself in your family? (Do you feel like an outsider, or do you feel accepted?)
3. Have your relationships with your family members changed since you became vegan? If so, in what ways?
4. Do you feel like your veganism is a core part of who you are, or do you see it more as a lifestyle choice? Explain.
5. Have you ever felt pressured to compromise your veganism for social or family reasons?
6. How does your vegan identity influence other aspects of your life, such as your choice of friends, partner, or future family plans?

The Role of Social Media & External Influences
1. What role does social media play in your daily life? Which platforms do you use most?
2. Do you consume vegan-related content on social media? If so, what kind (e.g., influencers, documentaries, activism, recipes)?
3. How has social media influenced your perception of veganism or reinforced your beliefs?
4. Have online vegan communities helped you navigate family challenges? If so, in what ways?
5. Have you ever felt that social media misrepresents or idealises veganism in a way that differs from your lived experience?
6. Have you engaged in online discussions or debates about veganism? If so, how have those experiences shaped your perspective?

Coping Mechanisms & Social Strategies
1. Are you a member of any vegan communities, online or in person?
2. If yes, how have these communities helped you navigate challenges in your non-vegan family?
3. How do you handle social gatherings or family meals where non-vegan food is served?
4. Have you developed specific strategies to avoid conflict when discussing veganism with family members?
5. Have you ever tried to educate or encourage your family to try plant-based meals? How did they respond?
6. When faced with criticism or misunderstanding, how do you emotionally and mentally cope?
7. Do you feel that your coping mechanisms have changed over time?

Closing & Reflection
1. If you could change one thing about how your family interacts with your veganism, what would it be?
2. What advice would you give to other young vegans navigating a non-vegan family environment?
3. Do you see yourself remaining vegan long-term? Why or why not?

Appendix 2: Example of some of my autoethnographic notes.

Vegan findings in Prague

My mum and I went shopping just straight on the way from the airport.
- I asked her how she would react if I turned vegan and wanted something plant-based for dinner
- "Don't you dare try anything on me here. They are such wimps those vegans (meaning physically, they have no muscles), I have no idea what I would cook."

We opened a debate after dinner when my dad came as well.
- [mum] "I can't eat half of the things" or what did you say?"
- [me] "I just said the fish and cheese are wrong [in the meal]. Like if I told you I want to eat only plant-based..." [mum's interruption] "I would say no, there's no way, I am not dealing with some vegans now on top of everything, dude." What would I put in the basket? Bugger all, dude (hovno).
- [me] "I am saying, you would just put away the cheese and salmon, the rest was alright. And in Lidl, they do vegan cheese."
- [mum] "Okay then, but what are you gonna eat? Like, what would our dinner contain? We bought bananas, oranges... [me interrupting] "Well, we could have just bought tofu and used it instead of the salmon, and we could have fried the tofu as well."
- [mum] "Nagh, I wanted that salmon tho, I craved it so much, and it was bio anyway."

Dad
- If I had actually turned vegan, he would have respected me and tried to help me. I am not saying support me as he would have been, especially at the beginning, trying to convince me to start eating animal products again, as he disagrees with this type of diet/philosophy.
- As he knew it was for research, he did not want to respect it as it would have complicated his life.
- He said he doesn't mind eating vegan food if it's well-cooked and if I make it.
- He said he's not gonna make vegan food just for my research.
- When I said I am considering having a vegan version of Christmas dinner, he said if I don't want to start the research after Christmas, as it would have been complicated and I would have had to make it myself.
- I found a vegan version of it on the internet, but didn't try it because of limited time and energy.

Visiting my aunt
- We had a duck with potatoes and brussel sprouts with bacon. I asked her what she would do if I turned vegan and wanted a vegan version of our Christmas lunch. She was thinking for a bit, she was gonna say no, but then she was thinking of an example of her daughter (my cousin, 12yo), and in the end, she said if Fredy turned vegan, she would respect it and cook something else for her, thus she would probably do it for me as well, but she would have to know quite a while in advance.

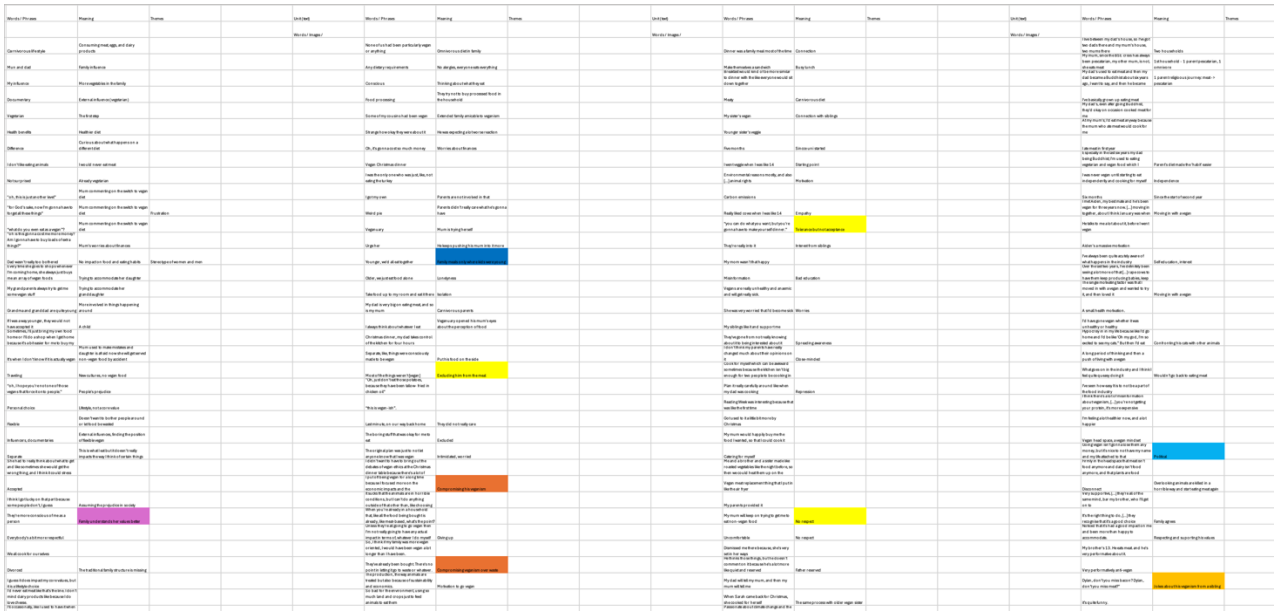
Visiting my grandma (Christmas lunch)
- I gave up on that one because the relationships between my grandma and my family are a little bit difficult, so I didn't want to risk anything. She doesn't know what veganism is and has never tried anything else but Czech cuisine. She lives in the countryside and doesn't even know what the internet is, so it would have been pointless. My mum didn't want me to talk to her about it as she would have been angry at my mum for the next six months that I didn't want to eat her food. She also doesn't know what lactose intolerance is, and my parents asked me not to tell her about it.

Eating out with family
- My family and my boyfriend's family went out for lunch in the Prague city centre. We wanted them to try the Czech cuisine, so we went to the only restaurant out of 10, maybe I called for a table booking as it was the 31st December. It was traditional Czech cuisine, but still modern, so there was quite a big choice on the menu. However, only 3 vegan meals were provided, 1 starter, 1 cheese, which also was not even a proper meal (something you have with wine) and then vegan steak that was quite expensive. There were quite a lot of vegetarian options, but only 3 vegan ones. The vegan steak was 510,- which is quite a lot of money in Czechia, so I had salad for 295,-.

Shopping
- Every time I went shopping, I was looking for some vegan products. I have to say that the Czech Republic is very limited, especially the shops around us (3 types of chains). They are better every year, but everything is very expensive (1 yoghurt 400g for £2, 1 block of cheese for ___). My family probably couldn't afford to live vegan when it comes to already processed products. Cooking might actually be cheaper, but my mum is a gym rat, and she would need a lot more vegan supplements and protein shakes to get enough protein into her body.
- Lidl, a few kilometres from us (the closest Lidl), stopped selling vegan yoghurts I used to buy there (the cheapest ones) and vegan cheeses I used to buy there as well. The staff told me they were selling them out, probably because it wasn't profitable.

Gut probiotics
I have had problems with my digestive system. I went to my doctor (alergology) to discuss any other potential allergies (I am lactose intolerant). Gluten was negative. When I told

Appendix 3: Thematic analysis tables.



Appendix 4: Participant information sheet received before the interview.

The exploration of young vegans in non-vegan families: In-depth interview

Participant information sheet

Who are the researchers and what is the research about?

Thank you for your interest in this research on the experiences of young vegans in non-vegan families. My name is Eliska Janska, and I am a third-year Journalism, Media, and Culture student at Newcastle University. I am conducting this research as part of my final-year dissertation, exploring vegan identities and family dynamics.

This study aims to examine how young vegans understand their identity within a non-vegan family and the coping mechanisms they use to navigate potential challenges. Additionally, it will explore the role of social media in shaping their vegan identity.

What kind of research is being done?

This research involves an in-depth, semi-structured interview, where I will ask open-ended questions about your experiences, identity, family relationships, and emotions related to being vegan in a non-vegan household.

The interview is designed as a conversation where your thoughts, perspectives, and lived experiences matter most - there are no right or wrong answers.

Who can participate?

To take part in this study, you must:

- Be vegan (follow a fully plant-based diet).
- Have a non-vegan family (live with or be closely connected to non-vegan relatives).
- Be between the ages of 18-25.
- Have been born and currently reside in the UK.

What will be involved with the interview?

- The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes and will be conducted in person or online via video call (Zoom, Teams, etc.).
- The discussion will cover your vegan identity, your experiences within your family, and how social media influences your perception of veganism.
- You are welcome to skip any question or pause/stop the interview at any time without needing to provide a reason.

How will the data be used?

- The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed (converted into written text).
- Your data will be fully anonymised, meaning any personal details that could identify you will be removed.
- Only I (the researcher) will have access to the raw recordings to ensure confidentiality.
- Selected excerpts from the interview may be included in my dissertation or academic publications, but your identity will never be disclosed.
- Any personal information will be stored securely and separately from the interview data.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will get the opportunity to participate in a research project on an important social issue. The information you provide will contribute to important research on veganism, identity, and family relationships. They will also help promote better understanding of plant-based lifestyles within family settings. Finally, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your own experiences and share your perspective in a meaningful way.

How do I withdraw from the research?

Participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the research at any time. I will provide information about the study and give an opportunity for questions at the beginning of the interview, and I will check that the participant is okay to continue. Likewise, you can exit from the interview at any time with no explanation, or you can ask me to temporarily stop the interview if you wish to stop participating. If you retrospectively decide you want to withdraw from the research please contact me via email <E.Janska2@newcastle.ac.uk> Please note that there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from the research – for instance, once I have published the results of the research. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to contact me within a month of participation if you wish to withdraw your data.

Are there any risks involved?

The 'risks' of participating in an in-depth interview on any topic centre on the potential to become upset by a particular question or topic (e.g., if a question reminds you of a distressing personal experience).
If you feel distressed as a result of participating in the interview, you can pause or stop the interview at any time and skip any question that you do not wish to answer.
Additionally, you can get in touch with one of the local support services:

- Newcastle University Student Wellbeing Service
  - Call: +44 (0)191 208 3333
  - Email: wellbeing@ncl.ac.uk
- Talking Helps Newcastle (NHS Talking Therapies Service)
  - Call: 0191 282 6600
- Samaritans Newcastle (24/7 support)
  - Call: 116 123 (free from any phone)

- Email: jo@samaritans.org

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me as the researcher:
Eliska Janska
Email: E.Janska2@newcastle.ac.uk

This research project has been approved by the School of Arts and Cultures Research Ethics Committee, Newcastle University.

Appendix 5: Participant consent form received before the interview. Participants signed two copies, one for them and one for me.

The exploration of young vegans in non-vegan families: In-depth interview

Participant consent form

I agree to participate in this in-depth interview being carried out by Newcastle University.

I can confirm that (please initial each box):

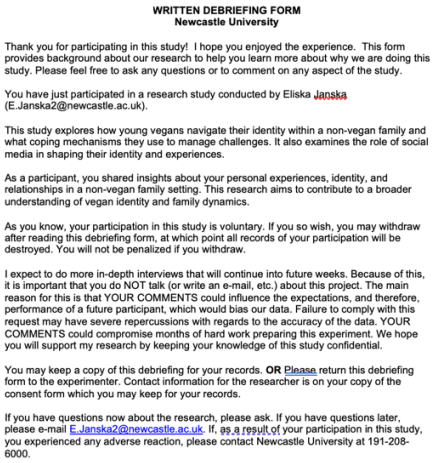
- I have read and understood the information sheet about taking part. ☐
- I understand I can ask questions at any point during the interview about any aspect of the research. ☐
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. ☐
- I understand that the audio will only be listened by the researcher on this project. ☐
- I understand that the audio will be transcribed (typed up) and all potentially identifying information will be removed. ☐
- I understand that the data collected for this study will be securely stored on the researcher's personal Newcastle University OneDrive account, provided by the School of Arts and Cultures, with a backup copy kept on encrypted personal hardware for security purposes. ☐
- I understand that the information collected for this study will be used only for research purposes. ☐
- I understand that my name will not be used on any documents or in any presentations about the research. ☐
- I understand that I can leave the study at any time without needing to say why. ☐

Signature of participant.....

Name (in capitals) ..... Date.....

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the researcher:
Eliska Janska
Email: E.Janska2@newcastle.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Debriefing form received after the interview.



WRITTEN DEBRIEFING FORM
Newcastle University

Thank you for participating in this study! I hope you enjoyed the experience. This form provides background about our research to help you learn more about why we are doing this study. Please feel free to ask any questions or to comment on any aspect of the study.

You have just participated in a research study conducted by Eliska Janska (E.Janska2@newcastle.ac.uk).

This study explores how young vegans navigate their identity within a non-vegan family and what coping mechanisms they use to manage challenges. It also examines the role of social media in shaping their identity and experiences.

As a participant, you shared insights about your personal experiences, identity, and relationships in a non-vegan family setting. This research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of vegan identity and family dynamics.

As you know, your participation in this study is voluntary. If you so wish, you may withdraw after reading this debriefing form, at which point all records of your participation will be destroyed. You will not be penalized if you withdraw.

I expect to do more in-depth interviews that will continue into future weeks. Because of this, it is important that you do NOT talk (or write an e-mail, etc.) about this project. The main reason for this is that YOUR COMMENTS could influence the expectations, and therefore, performance of a future participant, which would bias our data. Failure to comply with this request may have severe repercussions with regards to the accuracy of the data. YOUR COMMENTS could compromise months of hard work preparing this experiment. We hope you will support my research by keeping your knowledge of this study confidential.

You may keep a copy of this debriefing for your records. **OR** Please return this debriefing form to the experimenter. Contact information for the researcher is on your copy of the consent form which you may keep for your records.

If you have questions now about the research, please ask. If you have questions later, please e-mail E.Janska2@newcastle.ac.uk. If, as a result of your participation in this study, you experienced any adverse reaction, please contact Newcastle University at 191-208-6000.

Appendix 7: Selected transcriptions of all interviews (Vegan 1, Vegan 2, Vegan 3, Vegan 4, Vegan 5, Vegan 6, Vegan 7).

Vegan 1:

- So, how has social media influence your perception of veganism or reinforced your beliefs?
- It's probably impacted like a, it kind of solidifies why I do it.
- So, like a lot of the content, it's like the people make good food from it so like it kind of pushes me into to wanting just to keep being vegan.
- Like there's never any videos that are, like repel me from it at all like a lot of them are like, draw me in to being vegan more and just like, make my views quite solid on it. So yeah.

- Has it changed when you became vegan?
- Um, no. I tried a few times.
- I've tried to get my mum's done Veganuary a few times, so in January when it comes around, my mum's done that.
- She's cut down like her meat intake, so she has more vegetarian meals.
- My dad, definitely not, he is a meat eater at heart.
- He is like, he's a very like chicken and rice sort of man, like he'll have a stick and that sort of foods and same with my sister.

- What did your dad say?
- He was just like, he wasn't really too bothered to be honest um because he's never really had an impact on like what I eat and stuff, so I didn't, he had no input.
- I guess she's kind of accepted it and supported you about...
- Yeah, my mom is very much like at first, she was a bit like "oh is this gonna cost me more money? Am I gonna have to buy loads of extra things?"
- So, have your relationship with your family and members changed since you became vegan? And if so in what ways?
- Uh, not particularly.

[redacted]

- More like they're more conscious of me as a person, I guess.
- They're more conscious of like what I eat, and they like, I think they just everybody's a bit more respectful now.

Vegan 2:

- So, do you think it was a sort of gradual transition or just a sudden change?
- Like, after watching the documentary?
- Um I mean, I distinctly remember, like not wanting to do it as much but then it was just, like, it was, like um I wasn't really aware of any, like, options to do anything, it was more so just, I don't know and then I was, very discouraged from doing it for a very long time and then once I came to uni and then it was just, "oh."
- There was still the thing about, like, my housemates still buying and consuming animal products and stuff but it was more so, like everything that I had was mine so, like, the obvious choice was just to, "yeah, I'm just gonna not do that like, I'm gonna buy oat milk because it's, like, the uni lifestyle I guess."
- How has social media influenced your perception of veganism or reinforced your beliefs?
- In terms of my actual impact, I don't think much has like let the consolidation of like, I think veganism is also part of a political, like my political Ideological identity thing.
- ..
- So, I suppose there is something there when it comes to like that influencing me, but it's very much like a downstream domino effect thing.
- So, do you think their stance have changed over time?
- Yeah I think, especially, it was like a very much like a covid lockdown sort of domino effect of like blah blah blah the world's putting the world to rights and then like over time they've become like more health conscious I suppose.
- But not even really because they don't actually have like a balanced diet it's more so just about cutting out rapeseed oil because it's evil or something,
- But it's just like, I don't know, they're very weird about things.
- But over time definitely I think that they, cause yeah.
- Before I think there would've been a lot weirder about it.
- It's like when I was like a tiny child with an iPad and just watching YouTube.
- I think it was like some like video about guns in Australia or something and then like, you kind of get that for a little bit, there's a bit of a bump and then like it goes back to being normal again by watching, I don't remember who I used to watch politically.
- But it's like it's all very like left- wing and then like Lockdown happens and then it becomes even more left- wing and then it's all just like, it's very leftist YouTube media sort of stuff.

- I don't know, like do you talk to the people about it, I mean, are they supporting you in the community? So, you're like "okay, I'm not an outsider of the family, doesn't matter, I've got my community here?" Some sort of that.
- Not necessarily, I mean, I was just kind of been doing it solo.
- Most of the stuff, like, this time was different, because there was, like a separate, like, things were consciously made to be vegan.
- But, like, most of the things weren't.
- It was, like, "oh, just don't eat those potatoes, because they have been tallow-fried in chicken oil", or It's, like...
- But yeah.
- The actual main thing, though, it wasn't made. They just went to the shop, and it was just, like, "this is vegan-ish"
- Because it was, like kind of last minute.
- Being, like, oh, we're making vegan Christmas dinner.
- I don't know.
- You didn't plan it beforehand?
- Well, no. It was just kind of, like, "oh, I'm not gonna eat anything that's meat-based."
- So then, or, like, have any animal products in it.
- And so, like, he wanted to do all the fancy things with his tallow- frying, which has become, like, his, like, weird thing.
- Like, he's always cooked chips in lamb oil and just makes the house smell of lamb, and it just smells greasy and disgusting.
- So, basically, there was just, like the boring stuff that was okay for me to eat.
- Did you always have, like, family meals in your family?
- I mean, when we were younger, it was definitely, like, oh, we'd all eat together or something.
- But then, as we got older, it's more, kind of, just, like, oh, we just eat food alone.
- Like, I'll just take food up to my room and eat it there.
- And there wasn't really much of a, like, social context to eating anyway.
- So, it's just, like, I don't know.
- Usually just sustained myself off of crisps most of the time when I was at home.
- Just going up to my room and just snacking away on that.
- Yeah, I was going to ask about of your grandparents, how do they look at it?
- Well, okay I've got two grandmas now pretty much.
- One of them is like a very old um slightly going a bit loony, um Polish woman who lives in Longton which is basically in Stoke.
- When we went to visit her and had a meal there, it was actually kind of like a cartoon scenario because we didn't want to let her know that I was vegan because obviously that would be like, she's gonna be so up in arms about that.
- So, it's just better for her to not know about it so she was serving us this little fish dish that she'd made, and she was like "oh this is the best thing I've ever made in my life you have to you have to try it you have to."
- And so what I had to do was pretend to eat the food by, when, because she's always in and out of the room going back in the kitchen back and forth every so often, I'd just like my mum would put her plate forward and I'd just kind of like scramble it onto her plate and then like eat some some bread that was like with the fish.

- And I remember once I made the decision to just be vegan, I was talking to my mum about it and she was, "mmm, okay" and then she let me know about her previous experience of, like when she was around my age and not wanting to eat meat and then it's just, like, oh, you learned some more, like, lore about your parents that you haven't heard about and they never mentioned.
- And then it's, like "oh, so you had this whole thing" and then she was, like, "yeah, but I don't know where you get all of the all the things you need for your diet from" and it's, like yeah, but you can just there are ways to do it.
- Do you think you might be more accepted over time?
- Probably yeah, they'll probably get more used to it and it's just like thingy.
- I think it's just because it's like a thing that they can categorize now, it's just like "oh, they're a vegan."
- And I think it's just it gives them a way of thinking about me again.
- It's like an aspect that they can like look at me.
- It's like me being like sorted in a different colour.
- I don't know how else to put that.

Vegan 3:

- So how did your Christmas dinner look like?
- So me and a brother and a sister made like roasted vegetables like the night before, so then we could heat them up on the Christmas day.
- And then I just kind of like vegan meat replacement thing that I put in like the air fryer with like the vegetables to heat them up.
- How does being vegan shape how you see yourself in your family?
- It can kind of be a little bit isolating, I think.
- Because obviously with the whole dynamic of me having to cook separately to everyone else means I don't necessarily end up eating at the exact same time as everyone else.
- So, it's another dynamic there.
- What about the rest of the family?
- Yeah, I think a lot of my siblings like it and like support me a lot and like want to go vegan themselves or like want to go veggie.
- But yeah, none of my siblings kind of react badly to it.

Vegan 4:

made it easier for me.

- But I was never vegan until starting to eat independently and cooking for myself.
- And that's that can be really hard to watch sometimes because you know there's no two ways about it.
- It is disgusting and horrible and immoral.
- But I feel like that's been a big part of keeping me vegan in the sense that I'm seeing now through these through social media and through these accounts what happens to animals.
- And there's no there's no secrets really in veganism, so people share recipes a lot and that's the majority of what I consume on TikTok.
- And then Instagram is for me anyway, don't get me wrong.
- I think any, like, vegan food you can find on TikTok, you can also find on Instagram.
- But Instagram, I mainly use for liking the political side of things, like following Animal Rising, Greenpeace, PETA, organisations like that.
- Have you ever felt that social media misrepresents or idealises veganism in a way that differs from your lived experience?
- Yeah, definitely, definitely, definitely, definitely.
- Well, I mean, for a start, on one side, there's meat eaters who deliberately misrepresent veganism for whatever reason.
- Sometimes it's out of right-wing politics, I think broadly, right-wing as a quite hostile to vegans.
- I don't know why, I guess it's just become a thing in the cultural war maybe.
- And they say, "oh yeah, you're not getting any protein, it's really expensive, it's gonna make you weak."
- There was a whole scare a couple years ago which I remember.

- And I think now it's definitely a part of who I am, it's a part of my political philosophy.
- I've started being less accommodating of meat and dairy.
- So, I remember in fresher's week of second year.
- So, my other flatmate [redacted] eats meat.
- Not very often but he does eat meat.
- And he was he was doing something, I can't remember what he was doing but he had some food on the stove, and he asked people to like "do you mind watching this and stirring this while I'm just busy" and it had meat in it, and I said yeah, and I was a vegan at that time.
- But I still stirred his pan which had meat in it and I definitely wouldn't do that now.
- So, you know I've become less and like I won't I probably wouldn't buy someone cheese or like if they say, "[redacted] will you nip down to the shops for me and get me some meat?"
- No, I won't.
- Or like, if I'm in a restaurant and I'm paying, I would ask the other person to order something vegan.
- So, I've definitely become a lot more, I've become more ideological about it, so I think that.

- For Christmas, I went down to see my grandma and she's 90, and she can barely walk so we do all the cooking, basically.
- And this is another thing why I think it would have been difficult for me to go vegan five, six years ago, ten years ago.
- Just because like when my nan could cook and could, and she used to do a roast dinner.
- I don't think I'd last; I don't think she'd really understand it.
- Because like, she grew up during the war, so she barely knows what.
- And then my other nan who's just as old, she keeps saying 'is bread vegan?' and 'is this vegan?' and 'is this vegan?', and it's kind of like obvious stuff.
- That's okay you don't have to talk about it, it's alright that's part of the consent form.
- Yeah, sorry.
- So, things have been things have been getting better over the last five years and I think me being vegan has become a very small part of that just because it's something to talk about and it's something that my mums are quite supportive of and they're curious they're curious, they're Inquisitive, they're positive about it.
- So, we talk about it a lot.
- I talk about what I eat; I give recipes.

Vegan 5:

- Have you ever felt that social media misrepresents or idealises veganism in a way that differs from your lived experience?
- Yeah definitely you'll get like terrible arguments against veganism that are just really dumb, like I remember seeing this person compare the amount of protein in a steak to the amount of protein in broccoli, which no one needs broccoli for protein.
- Why are you, it's really dumbed and they're like, 'this is veganism is bad because
- Do you know if they like activism stuff anything like that?
- Not really.
- I get a bit nervous just in general with direct action; I'm more of like a behind-the-scenes person or a solo warrior, I guess.

Vegan 6:

- But equally I probably wouldn't have gone vegan if I hadn't seen all the posts about, I think definitely credit social media as well, because when I was 15, and I went on social media, I started seeing a couple of like celebrities posting things about animal rights and the environment.
- And then I started making that link, and I saw more posts about it.
- So, what role does social media play in your daily life and which platforms do you use most?
- Instagram is probably the one I use the most and plays a pretty significant role in things like politics and the environment and veganism come up very often on my feed.
- I'd say probably half of the stuff that's on my feed on my view page or on my sender feed is related to one of those, and so we'll see a lot of stuff about veganism as well.
- How has social media influenced your perception of veganism or reinforced your beliefs?
- It's definitely reinforced my beliefs because I think, ignoring social media in my social circle, not many people are vegan, my sister's pescatarian, so two of my best friends they're vegetarian and then there's the other one who's sort of flexitarian but otherwise pretty much everyone, everyone eats meat.
- Whereas on social media, it feels like my world's a bit bigger, it feels like there's a lot more people sort of with a similar mindset.
- And I think when I compare myself to him, I consider myself very lucky that not only my parents don't make an issue, and I don't get judgment from them; they also have adopted it themselves somewhat, and their diet now, I think, is so much better, like, than it was; they're eating less meat, and it's better for animals, the environment, and everything.
- So, I think I have a massive amount of respect for them for that.
- I tend to like really sort of brief answers like 'oh, you know, animal rights and the environment'.
- I don't tend to elaborate much because it a sort of feels preachy even though it isn't, because they're the one asking, but it feels a bit preachy.
- And then it opens them up to sort of that they feel like they've been attacked, and they might retaliate with something, and it kind of might ruin an otherwise pleasant family get-together.
- So, I yeah, I suppose a bit of an avoidance thing in which I will just give succinct answers where I'm like "oh well I'm vegan for animal rights and stuff," and you usually get like a head nod of appreciation or whatever and then that tends to be it.
- Have there been any specific moments of tension or acceptance regarding your uh veganism within your family.?
- Not in my immediate family.
- I've got extended family, so my uncle on my dad's side is a butcher and we've got a family friend that's a butcher as well.
- And we don't see them that often, but whenever we have had get-togethers and I've seen them, and it's never me that brings it up, contrary to the stereotype that the vegan is always, you always know who the vegan is, but because like people

[redacted]

know that I'm vegan, I think especially those and it tends to be like middle-aged male family members will make it a point to bring up and ask me sort of antagonistic questions.
- That it's not really a point of contention but you can tell they're trying to get an argument which I don't really respond to terribly well.

Vegan 7:

- So, what motivated your decision to go vegan?
- It started more, during COVID.
- I got more into sort of spirituality side of things.
- Then I started looking into plant-based and then came across all the sort of animal rights documentaries and stuff.
- And then it came very heavily animal rights and health and everything.
- It was sort of a combination of sort of the big three health, animal rights and spirituality as well.
- I'd say the big, the big ones.
- These days it's very much animal rights.
- Did you say spirituality?
- Yes.
- Can you elaborate on that, please?
- Yeah. I started exploring sort of more Eastern philosophy and stuff.
- So I got quite into Hinduism, Buddhism, and sort of spiritual practice and stuff.
- And then, I think it's sort of; I don't know how it was exactly said, but the sort of idea of living while eating dead things sort of came into perspective.
- So, yeah, yeah.
- So, it prompted the ideas and, and so it's sort of been a relatively common theme up until this point as well.
- How did you get into that?

[redacted]

- To be honest, I think it was just like a YouTube rabbit hole of just watching stuff and ended up on it and then sort of found it interesting.
- I think through sort of primary and secondary school; we touched on sort of Buddhism and stuff but not really in depth.
- So, the, sort of topics became quite familiar.
- But yeah, I only really started to look into them more through COVID lockdown and I guess having more time on my hands to sit and do that.

- When you're opening this up, for example chocolate, would you be able to buy this chocolate for someone who is not vegan or would you direct it to only vegan products and give people only vegan products, like when it comes to...
- I think that's an area of difficulty.
- I'd personally like to only buy vegan stuff, but I think, mainly due to how I'd be sort of in my image to family members, if I only purchase vegan things or only purchase that, I think that might have impact on the relationships.
- So I personally do buy, like, vegan chocolates or something for a family member on an event or a gift card, which might not align with my values exactly, but yeah it's a weird one.
- I think gifting, although I'd like to only buy vegan stuff, I think it's a weird one.
- I don't want to be seen as, I don't think selfish is the word but almost like putting my views in front of the wants of others.

[redacted]

- So yeah, I'd still buy my sister a pack of dairy chocolates or something for a birthday or get someone a gift voucher to a restaurant that doesn't serve any vegan food for an event or something.
- So yeah, it's gifting is a bit of a grey area where I'd like to do one thing but yeah.

- So, in my area there's not a not very large or at least not a very outspoken large vegan population.
- So I think having social media and being able to connect with other people with similar beliefs has sort of helped and sort of not feeling like the only vegan in the village sort of thing.
- I think it it's it definitely helps in terms of not feeling like you're the only one out there, and sort of seeing you know the movement grow and seeing people make

[redacted]

certain arguments for it and against it even to sort of reconsider what you previously thought to be your reasons and stuff.
- But yeah, I think I think the sort of sense of community and stuff played a massive part just to feel sort of more comfortable in social settings and public to be, I don't know the phrase it, but like openly vegan because yeah, it's obviously a very, in some social situations obviously, it's I think everyone knows the reasons that someone is a vegan or a vegetarian and it's, don't talk about this because it'll upset people or something.
- So, I think having an online platform with other people who you can talk to definitely, I guess builds confidence in and acceptance, I guess.

- Have you engaged in online discussions or debates about veganism and if so, how do those experiences share your perspective?
- I've seen online debates and stuff; I tend to not engage in them.
- But I think it tends to be the, I don't think people online are really, at least largely are looking for an actual debate.
- I think a lot of people are just looking for a reaction, so with North East Animal Rights, we obviously get a lot of sort of troll posts on things we post, and it's the usual 'I love a bacon sandwich' or like that sort of thing, which they're not looking to be convinced.

- How do you handle social gatherings or family meals where non-vegan food is served?
- I'm quite relaxed on that sense; I just won't touch it.
- So, I don't think my grandmother hasn't really grasped the idea yet, so when she does the Christmas buffet on the evening for everyone, there's very rarely anything vegan there, other than maybe a pickled onion.
- So, I just make sure I'm full beforehand or just not touch it.
- Again, to sort of maintain family relations, I don't make a big deal about it.
- I just don't partake or, I might find that there are, something that's accidentally vegan on there, and I'll have some.
- But yeah, I tend to just sort of let it happen without making too much of a fuss.

- I mean, both your parents, not just your mum, your dad as well, and so was your sister?
- They had meals with me, yes, yeah.
- At one point in, I think it must have been early 2021, my dad did Veganuary and stuck vegan for six months as well after that.
- So it was more supportive than I guess some people would first.

- So, do you think your relationships with your family members have changed since you became vegan?
- I think they might have, if anything, got slightly better.
- It says, I think everyone, despite not being vegan themselves, understands the reasons that I am and respect that, and I guess sort of understand where my values lie a bit better.