

Vegan Young People in England: An exploratory study on their identity, relationships and educational experiences

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Abstract

This thesis contains three parts: 1) a literature review relating to the subject area, 2) an empirical paper, and 3) a bridging and reflective chapter. First, the literature review provides an overview of the literature in relation to: veganism; the legislative context for schools in relation to protected characteristics which includes veganism; inclusive education and school belonging; improving relationships between groups, and; theories of identity, including adolescent identity development and the role schools play in adolescent identity development. Then, the empirical paper comprises a qualitative study on the educational experiences of 12 vegan young people aged 11-18 in England. Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is at the forefront of many people's minds, and schools have a legal duty under The Equality Act (2010) to prevent students from discrimination. Since 2021, veganism is considered a protected characteristic under The Equality Act (2010) as a philosophical belief. The literature on adult vegans suggests that vegans can experience discrimination, social rejection and stigma. Little is currently known, however, about the experiences of young vegans. Given the amount of time vegans spend in school and the social aspect of it, it is pertinent to gain an understanding of what the educational experiences of vegan young people are. A combined thematic analysis and polytextual thematic analysis was used to analyse in-depth interviews and images created by the young people. The findings highlighted four key themes, including: Balancing and Raising Awareness; Intergroup Relationships and Interactions; The School System and Protective Factors. The findings are discussed in depth, with recommendations for future research provided. Lastly, the bridging and reflective account details the personal research journey of the author, from identifying a research area through how the research contributes to Educational Psychology.

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List of Abbreviations

BMI Body Mass Index. 15

BPS British Psychological Society. 111, 114

CD Coeliac Disease. 42, 43

COVID-19 Coronavirus. 10, 55

CYP Children and Young People. 108, 115, 116

EDI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. 10, 97

EPs Educational Psychologists. 97, 113

ERIC Education Resources Information Center. 12

GFD Gluten Free Diet. 42

HCPC The Health and Care Professionals Council. 111, 114

IIQ Identity Illness Questionnaire. 43

IPA Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. 110

LGBTQ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. 10, 11, 23, 24

PSED Public Sector Equality Duty. 20

SEMH Social, Emotional and Mental Health. 96, 97, 113

SEN Special Educational Needs. 97

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. 40

TEP Trainee Educational Psychologist. 111, 114

UEA University of East Anglia. 12

UNESCO The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization. 23, 28

VIE Vegan Inclusive Education. 17

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Chapter 1

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is at the forefront of many people's minds. It is particularly relevant at the time of writing as in the last two years the world has seen a resurgence of voices protesting a wide range of inequalities and social justice movements, including: racial injustice (The Black Lives Matter Movement); the inequalities observed through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; sexual harassment and violence, particularly towards women; Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) inequality and discrimination; and climate change, to name just a few. Education is without a doubt an environment in which equality, diversity and inclusion should be promoted to enable all children and young people to feel valued and respected for who they are.

A movement which is less talked about in the context of education is that of veganism. Veganism is a "way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose" (The Vegan Society, n.d.). The popularity of and adherence to veganism has grown incredibly fast over the last decade, increasing by an estimated 350% between 2006 and 2016, amounting to approximately half a million individuals (The Vegan Society, n.d.). The data suggests that the movement is largely driven by young people, with 42% of UK vegans aged between 15-34, suggesting that there may be some significant changes in attitudes and behaviours between generations, which has likely resulted in shifts in consumer relations of supply and demand (The Vegan Society, 2016). In line with this, the demand for vegan products from a consumer perspective has also increased significantly, with major supermarkets, including but not limited to,

Sainsbury, Tesco and Morrisons, all offering a larger and more diverse selection of vegan options (Bowman, 2016; Powell, 2016). Further, high street chains including Zizzi, J.D. Wetherspoons and Pret A Manger also offer a variety of vegan options (Love, 2016; Martin, 2016; Washtell, 2016). The profile of veganism is also seeing an increase in the growing number of individuals ‘trying out’ a vegan diet through campaigns, such as that of ‘Veganuary’ (Dilworth & McGregor, 2015).

In January 2022, where people sign up to complete a month of eating vegan food, the campaign saw a record high number of registrants with 629,000 people signed up from 228 countries and territories (Veganuary, n.d.). Based on all the above, one could argue that the awareness and popularity of veganism is at an all-time high. That said, the prominence and popularity of veganism has been met with much resistance and hostility (Griffin, 2017) in numerous forms, including mainstream media sources (Cole & Morgan, 2011), physical violence (e.g., Keay, 2017), direct and indirect discrimination (e.g., Horta, 2018) and, in some countries, proposals of legislation that criminalises veganism (Hunt, 2016).

The literature on the topic of veganism is still relatively small, and therefore the limited understanding academics have is mostly based on studies with vegan adults. Thus, despite the vegan movement argued to be mostly driven by young people, little is known about the experiences of vegan young people. From the limited literature, veganism is believed to be a way of life that forms a large part of adult’s sense of self and identity, which can be associated with difficulties in day-to-day life, for example discrimination in the workplace (Horta, 2018), stigma and social rejection (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). Young people spend much of their time in education, where they spend time among peers and are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act (2010). Little is known about whether young people view veganism as part of their identity and if at all being vegan influences their educational experiences. Other minority groups and individuals with marginalised identities – for example ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those who are LGBTQ - have reported challenges in education, such as harassment and social rejection (e.g., Carlile, 2019). With the growing vegan population, the literature on vegan adults and other minority groups suggesting difficulties in their day-to-day lives, it is timely to explore the educational experiences of vegan young people.

A thematic literature review was employed as it was deemed the most appropriate for the study, instead of alternative options such as a systematic literature review or a chronological literature review. A systematic literature review clearly identifies, selects, and critically appraises a large body of research to answer a clearly formulated research question (Dewey & Drahot, 2016). A chronological literature review groups research findings and details them in chronological order. Given the limited research available on veganism, education, and the experiences of vegan young people, it was not deemed appropriate to use another type of review, such as those mentioned above. Instead, a thematic literature review groups literature sources by different topics and theoretical concepts and orders them by relevance and importance to the overall research project being carried out. Each group of literature is critically analysed, and the literature review leads to the proposed area of research.

Extensive literature searches were carried out between September 2019 and March 2022. Several academic databases were used to search for relevant literature through the University of East Anglia (UEA) library, including PsycINFO, Science Direct, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Taylor & Francis. In addition to this, searches were carried out on Google Scholar to check for any additional papers that had not been found elsewhere. Various search terms were used with an initial focus on veganism and children and young people. For example, “vegan children”, “vegan adolescents”, “veganism in education” and “vegans in school”. Little was obtained by using these search terms in all the databases mentioned above, except for medical articles that explore the health and nutritional aspects of plant-based diets which, while interesting and important, are not relevant for this study. Thus, the search terms were adapted to terms such as: “experiences of vegans”, “vegans in the United Kingdom”, and “vegan identity”. These terms showed more articles in a range of academic disciplines, although they mostly consisted of studies with adults. Given the scarce literature on veganism and children and young people, this literature review draws on the adult literature in relation to veganism. While there may be differences between the experiences of adult and child vegans, drawing on the adult literature is a useful starting point. It is hoped that this study will be valuable in building an evidence-based for veganism and children and young people from an education and psychological perspective. In addition to searching for articles relating to veganism, other areas of literature

were explored, including: identity in education, identity development in adolescents, and school belonging and stigma in minority groups. These areas were chosen as it was believed they would be useful to consider in relation to veganism and children and young people. Due to the limited number of academic articles related to children and veganism, some areas included in this review were drawn from non-academic sources but are still deemed to be relevant and important to consider in this study, for example an education initiative set up to support vegan inclusive education and a book written by Jordi Casamitjana, who secured ethical veganism as a protected characteristic under The Equality Act (2010).

This literature review is separated into individual sections that covers topics related to the research questions in the empirical paper. The review begins by introducing veganism and what is known about vegan children so far, followed by a review of the legislative context for veganism. School inclusion and belonging is then reviewed in light of the legislative context which prevents discrimination, which is followed by a review of the literature on improving relations between groups. Theories of identity are then reviewed - including an emerging body of literature on food identity -, detailing identity development in adolescence and the role of schools in adolescent identity development. These areas were chosen to cover literature in relation to the research questions asked in the present study, which are related to identity, educational experiences of a minority group, and relationships.

1.1.1 What is Veganism?

“Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”

The Vegan Society (n.d.)

What is known as veganism today can be dated back to as early as 500BCE, before the societies for vegetarianism and veganism had been established (The Vegan Society, n.d.). Some argue that philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, adhered to what is described today as a vegetarian or plant-based diet, and he promoted benevolence to all species (Leitzmann, 2014). Aich (2013) also writes that the Buddha - that is, Siddhartha Gautama - also followed a vegetarian diet and discussed it in depth with his followers, attempting to help

others consider the suffering of all beings beyond just human suffering. Vegetarianism was later used to describe those who avoid the consumption of meat, and some people who avoided dairy were termed non-dairy vegetarians. Donald Watson, an English animal rights advocate, wished for a new word to describe those who avoid all animal products. Him and a group of five others decided to use the first three and the last two letters of the word vegetarian, creating the word 'vegan' (Rodger, 2002). Watson later founded The Vegan Society in 1944 to promote a vegan way of life (The Vegan Society, n.d.).

According to the Vegan Society, a vegan is an individual who tries, as much as is possible and practical, to avoid animal products and exclude any involvement with the exploitation of animals (The Vegan Society, n.d.). This therefore extends beyond what a person consumes and includes avoiding clothing made with animal products, such as wool, leather and silk, as well as buying and using products that directly contain or have been tested on animals, such as cleaning products and make-up. Further, vegans avoid visiting places that exploit animals for human entertainment, such as zoos, safaris, and animal circuses. While

this definition may appear simplistic and straightforward, it does not account for the complexity of the social, political, and cultural dynamics in which veganism is put into practice (Griffin, 2017). Each individual who is a vegan will be living a vegan lifestyle within their own unique personal, social, political and cultural contexts. Each will have their own ethical and moral practices, as well as core beliefs, all of which are built upon their basic moral baseline.

Veganism is known as a form of animal advocacy, rejecting the scale and power of a system that, globally, exploits and kills animals on an enormous scale (Joy, 2008). For context, in Britain alone, more than 1 billion animals are killed yearly, equivalent to approximately 22 million deaths every single day, 15,000 every single minute, or 255 every second (Viva!, 2013). The scale of exploitation of animals is widely accepted within our society, deemed as 'normal' and 'necessary', given the view that animals are inferior to humans in the natural order. Meanwhile, society does not view animals as inanimate objects; they are seen as sentient 'subjects-of-a-life' (Best & Nocella, 2004; Nocella et al. 2014). It is widely acknowledged that animals do feel pain, they do suffer, and they do experience other traits and emotions seen in humans, such as happiness, empathy, and fear (Bartal et al., 2011; Irvine, 2008; Singer, 1975). In British law, the 2006 Animal Welfare Act acknowledges the sentience

of animals (Nurse & Ryland, 2014). Yet animals continue to be exploited and viewed as inferior to humans, a practice and belief that vegans not only reject but also challenge, many passionately.

There are often debates about whether a vegan diet is healthy or nutritionally sufficient for human health. Many scientific studies have shown a meat-free and plant-based diet to have considerable health benefits (Appleby & Key 2016; Le & Sabate, 2014; Orlich & Fraser 2014; Katz & Meller 2014). The NHS also clearly states that ‘with good planning and an understanding of what makes up a healthy, balanced vegan diet, you can get all the nutrients your body needs’, as well as stating that it is a safe diet for both pregnant and breastfeeding women (2018). However, negative consequences of following a plant-based diet are quickly reported by the media, such as a recent example of an online article titled: ‘Vegan Diets Tied To Higher Bone Fracture Risk’ (Mozes, 2020). The research that the article cites was conducted by Tong et al. (2020) at the University of Oxford, and in said study individuals following a pescatarian, vegetarian and vegan diet were all found to have a higher risk of bone fractures. However, as vegans were reported as having the highest risk, this has been the main focus of media reporting since, with little to no mention of other diets that also have an increased risk of resulting in bone fractures.

This study has since received criticism from the online vegan community for making large conclusions when the study had a number of limitations. For example, the participants were asked to complete self-report dietary intake during 1993 and 2001 and again in 2010. It is unclear whether further records were obtained between 2010 and the analysis in 2020, making it difficult to know what diet was followed in the 10-year gap. It is also possible that participants made errors during the self-reporting process. Interestingly, the study did not report the causes of the fractures, so it is unknown whether fractures were from trauma, accidents, or fragile bones. Finally, the study found that vegans with a low Body Mass Index (BMI) had a higher risk of fractured bones, however there were far fewer meat-eating individuals in the study with a low BMI to make meaningful comparisons. Thus, there may be risk factors to following a plant-based diet and research is important in understanding what these may be, a vegan diet is often the target of negative social media reporting which often ignore the studies showing the many benefits of such a diet.

According to Cole and Morgan, vegans are vastly stereotyped as faddists, sentimentalists and hostile extremists by the media, a derogatory portrayal of vegans and veganism that they describe as ‘vegaphobia’ (2011). There are other

accounts of mainstream media that discredit veganism and ridicule and misrepresent vegans themselves (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Cole & Morgan, 2011). An example of such is that of accounts of infants and young children suffering from severe malnutrition, sometimes resulting in death, that were reported to be fed a vegan diet by their parents (Philipson, 2015; Thomsson, 2011; Willshire, 2011). In one case, a prosecutor stated that the child in question died because he was not fed, not due to the vegan diet, yet the vegan diet continued to be the most stressed part of media reporting. Meanwhile, non-vegan infants and children die each year across the globe, yet they do not receive the same level of media attention, or where they do the diet of the parents is rarely highlighted (Griffin, 2017). Reported cases of children suffering malnutrition or death who were fed a vegan diet led to a Member of Italian Parliament, Elvira Savino, to propose a new legislation which would criminalise parents who raise their children on a vegan diet, with a sentence of up to 6 years in prison (Hunt, 2016). This view of veganism as dangerous and therefore an idealogy that should be punished was subsequently disputed by The Italian Society of Food Science on a scientific basis, claiming that children raised on a sugary and fatty diet should be of a greater concern than those raised on a vegan diet (Hunt, 2016).

1.1.2 What do we know about vegan children and young people so far?

When searching for literature on vegan children and young people on academic databases, much of the research examines the effects of children following a plant-based diet. Little is known about the psychology or experiences of vegan children and young people, and less is known about what they experience in school..

There is no definitive data available on how many children and young people identify as vegan in the UK. In January 2021, a new initiative was set up called Vegan Inclusive Education (VIE) which can be found on the web site <https://vieducation.co.uk/>. VIE provides some insight into the minimum number of vegan children and young people in the UK. This programme was set up with the intention of supporting schools to be 'vegan inclusive'. The website provides a detailed overview of what schools can do to support their vegan pupils and ensure that vegan pupils are not being discriminated against. Parents can access the website and insert their child's school into a map of the UK. Once the school is registered, the vegan inclusive resource is sent directly to the school.

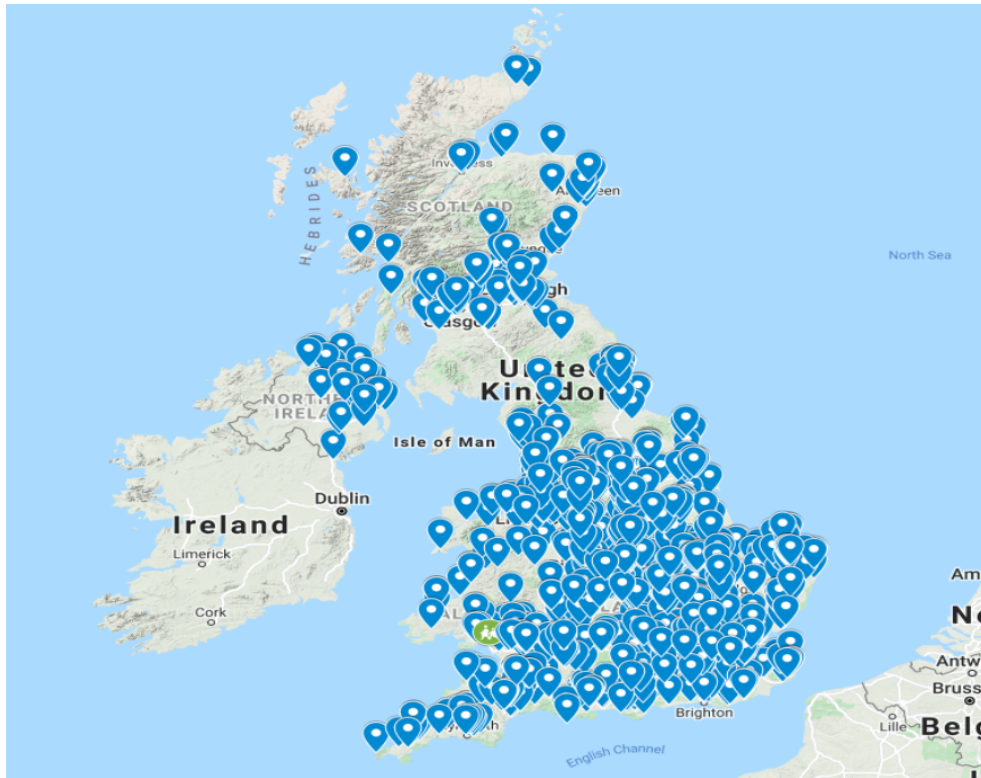


Figure 1.1: Vegan Inclusive Education Map - <https://vieducation.co.uk/>

As of December 2021, over 1300 schools have been registered on the map. This indicates that there are at least 1300 vegan children and young people in the UK. The map does not capture how many vegan students are in each school and it certainly does not capture all the vegan children and young people in the UK. What the map does show is that there are vegan children and young people across the UK, and educational settings can still be added to the map. Vegan Inclusive Education wanted to gain an understanding of what vegan pupils experience in their schools. A survey was completed by 252 pupils (Jenkins, 2021). Below is an overview of the key findings:

- 73 percent of pupils reported being teased for being vegan. 72 percent were teased by other pupils, 16 percent were teased by teachers and 12 percent were teased by other school staff.
- 42 percent reported being bullied. 76 percent of these were bullied by

other pupils, 13 percent by teachers and 12 percent by other school staff.

- Of those who reported bullying or teasing, only 25 percent reported their schools responding swiftly and helpfully.
- 54 percent of pupils reported no vegan school meal options at school. 60 percent reported narrow or repetitive options. 36 percent reported poor nutritional value in the meals offered.
- 58 percent of vegans reported being asked to complete schoolwork that was incompatible with their vegan beliefs and values.
- 85 percent reported feeling discriminated against because of their vegan beliefs. The most common emotions elicited for this include feeling misunderstood, frustration, sadness, heightened sense of difference, anger, anxiety, feeling belittled, embarrassment, social isolation, undervalued, impaired sense of belonging, powerless and humiliation.

It is important to note the limitations of the survey. The survey, although published in *Primary First* (Jenkins, 2021), is not in a peer-reviewed journal. It is not clear who the participants of the survey were, what the questions consisted of nor how the results were interpreted. It may also be possible that if the survey was completed anonymously online, some parents may have responded on behalf of their children if they were too young to answer themselves. It is also possible that only the pupils who had negative experiences took part in the survey. Given the lack of available information on the survey, the findings must be interpreted with caution. While there is no current academic literature supporting these findings, there is a news article which details the story of a 12-year-old vegan boy who died by suicide following bullying for being vegan and meat being thrown at him at school. This suggests that for some vegan young people, school challenges can occur and can have significant negative effects on their well-being.

1.1.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Schools - The Legislative Context

The Equality Act (2010) was introduced in the United Kingdom to replace nine major Acts of Parliament and almost one hundred sets of regulations which

deal with equality and discrimination. The Act is a single source of discrimination law that covers all unlawful discrimination. When googling the word ‘discrimination’, the following definition comes up in the google dictionary:

“Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, sex or disability.”

According to The Equality Act (2010) there are different types of discrimination: direct discrimination – treating somebody less favorably than somebody else because of a protected characteristic; indirect discrimination – a rule or policy which has a worse impact on somebody with a protected characteristic than it does on somebody without a protected characteristic; failing to make reasonable adjustments for those with disabilities; harassment – treating somebody with a protected characteristic in a way that violates dignity or created a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; victimisation – treating somebody unfairly if they are taking action under the Equality Act or are supporting somebody else who is doing so.

The Act protects those with protected characteristics which include:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Act makes it unlawful for schools to discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil in relation to admissions, the education provided to pupils, the access to benefits, facilities or services and excluding or subjecting students to detriments. The Act makes it clear that the content of the school curriculum is excluded from law. The delivery of the curriculum is, however, included.

In the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) was introduced and applies to all public bodies, including maintained schools and Academies. The PSED has three main elements that public bodies are required to have due regard to:

- Eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations across all characteristics – between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

Having ‘due regard’ means giving relevant and proportionate consideration of the duty whenever significant decisions are being made or policies are being delivered. In schools, this means that:

- Decision makers in schools must be aware of the duty to have “due regard” when making a decision or taking an action and must assess whether it may have particular implications for people with particular protected characteristics.
- Schools should consider equality implications before and at the time that they develop policy and take decisions, not as an afterthought, and they need to keep them under review on a continuing basis.
- The PSED must be integrated into the carrying out of the school’s functions, and the analysis necessary to comply with the duty has to be carried out seriously, rigorously and with an open mind – it is not just a question of ticking boxes or following a particular process.
- Schools can’t delegate responsibility for carrying out the duty to anyone else

The PSED was introduced to ensure that public bodies go beyond just refraining from discrimination but also have due regard to eliminate discrimination and advance equal opportunity.

There are 2 ‘specific duties’ in the Act to assist schools to meet their general duties. These include:

- To publish information to show how they are complying with the Equality Duty. This must be updated at least annually.

- To prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years.

The Act includes religion or belief (any religious or philosophical belief) as a protected characteristic, which also includes a lack of religion or a lack of belief. As the definitions of religion and belief are vague, they must be construed in accordance with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and with existing case law. ‘Religion’ includes all major faith groups and ‘belief’ includes all non-religious worldviews, such as humanism. Ultimately, a religion or belief must:

- Have a clear structure and belief system;
- It must not be an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available;
- It must be a belief in respect of a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour;
- Have a certain level of cogency, seriousness and cohesion;
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, be compatible with human dignity and it must not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

Is veganism a protected characteristic under The Equality Act 2010?

Veganism has only relatively recently been recognised as a protected characteristic under The Equality Act 2010. A key turning point was the case of Mr Jordi Casamitjana. As detailed in his book, *Ethical Vegan: A Personal and Political Journey to Change the World*, Mr Jordi Casamitjana is an ethical vegan who fought for ethical veganism to be secured as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. He previously worked for League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) as a zoologist. It came to his attention that his employer’s pension funds were being invested in pharmaceutical and tobacco companies which used animal testing, which goes against veganism. After bringing this to the attention of his managers and his colleagues, he was dismissed. Mr Casamitjana believed that he was dismissed for his vegan beliefs. Mr Casamatijana took LACS to court on the basis of being unfairly dismissed. On 3rd January 2020, Judge Robin Postle ruled that he was ‘overwhelmingly’ satisfied that ethical veganism amounts

to a protected characteristic as a philosophical belief under the Equality act 2010. Ethical veganism, therefore, can be considered a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 when sufficient evidence is provided that one is an ethical vegan.

There are different types of vegans who hold different values and beliefs, particularly around the reasons for adhering to a plant-based diet. In his book, Jordi details the different types of vegans, including (Casamitjana, 2020):

- Ethical Vegans, under which fall animal-rights vegans, ecovegans, religious vegans, intersectional vegans, ethical fruitarians, and straight edge vegans
- Dietary Vegans, under which fall health vegan incorporating raw vegans, whole food vegans, high carb, low fat vegans, macrobiotic vegans, and then junk food vegans

It is important to note that some vegans will identify as many of the above, for example being an ethical, animal-rights vegan who is also a junk food vegan.

When considering the Equality Act 2010, only the vegans that fall into any category on the ‘Ethical Vegans’ side would be considered as having a protected characteristic. As Jordi described, as veganism becomes more mainstream the ‘types’ of vegans is ever increasing and changing. No vegan is the same and every vegan will have their own set of beliefs, values, and views on how to be a vegan. For example, some vegans might be expressive advocates and therefore engage in activism, whereas those known as ‘apologist vegans’ tend to remain quiet about veganism and tolerate the non-vegan world much more. There are challenges with an increase in the diverse views about a philosophical belief, such as vegans fighting among themselves.

Inclusion and Belonging in Education

Upon reviewing the literature, it became apparent that inclusive education is defined in many ways. According to Schuelka (2018), the most authoritative definition is from United Nations agencies and treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Incheon Declaration. As per the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Incheon Declaration, inclusive education means: a fundamental right to education; a

principle that values students' wellbeing, dignity, autonomy and contribution to society; and, a continuing process to eliminate barriers to educate and promote reform in the culture, policy and practice in schools to include all students. While inclusive education was previously referred to in the context of children with disabilities, the concept 'inclusive education' now extends to all children (Sakiz et al., 2020). Schuelka (2018) summarises the five main components of successful inclusive education implementation from the The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2017 conceptualisation of inclusive education, which includes: inclusive policies that promote high outcomes for all students; flexible and accommodative curriculum; strong and supportive school leadership; equitable distribution of resources; and teachers who are trained in inclusive pedagogy and view it as their role to teach all learners in a diverse classroom.

For inclusive education to be successful, it is argued that implementation of inclusive strategies should occur at the classroom and wider school level (Schuelka, 2018). This includes reviewing the school structure and culture, ensuring teacher commitment and collaboration, and school leaders demonstrating positive values that align with inclusive education. Thus, inclusive education involves a systems thinking approach that looks beyond individual barriers to education (e.g., Carrington et al., 2017 as cited in Schuelka, 2018). The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education offers evidence on the positive effect of inclusive education for children with and without disabilities, for example increased social and academic opportunities (Schuelka 2018).

Other research has examined inclusive education from the perspective of students without disabilities. For example, Sakiz et al. (2020) explored the experiences of education of students and parents belonging to the ancient Syriac community in Turkey. Their findings suggest that the school inclusion policies were not sufficient to reach all students and provide adequate support for the diverse student population. Further, the schools were described as requiring more communities with inclusion underpinning their values.

Studies in the UK have examined the inclusion of minority groups such as those who are LGBTQ. For example, Carlile (2019) examined the experiences of teachers delivering an LGBTQ-inclusive education programme in faith schools. The findings suggest that teachers felt supported by the legislative

and policy frameworks to draw on to support their inclusive education, such as the Equality Act (2010), and that teachers embedded LGBTQ-inclusive content across the curriculum. This study does not, however, explore the experiences of the LGBTQ students in relation to how included they feel. Bower-Brown et al. (2020) explored the school experiences of 74 gender-diverse adolescents in the UK. The findings suggest that the adolescents experience discrimination in school in relation to the curriculum, space, peers and teachers, for which several strategies are used to manage the school environment, such as disclosure negotiation, cognitive restructuring and proactive protection. This study concludes by suggesting that the British school system is currently unsuitable for non-binary and gender-questioning identities. In other research, children who identify as LGBTQ+ have reported school environments as spaces where they are institutionally ignored, silenced and have frequently been targets of harassment (Macgillivray, 2000).

The literature suggests that students from other minority groups experience challenges too. For example, students with learning disabilities have reported feeling ashamed and humiliated, actively attempting to conceal their disability among peers and teaching staff to avoid association with stereotypes (Miller & Kaiser, 2001), for example socially devalued traits such as laziness, carelessness, and stupidity (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 1996; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Young people who are either immigrants or from ethnic minorities have also reported being stigmatised in multiple studies, each type of stigma different dependent on the context (e.g., Lay & Safdar, 2003; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). There are therefore differences between school's perspectives on inclusive education and the young people's experiences, with children from minority groups and with minority and/or marginalised identities reporting difficulties and discrimination.

Interestingly, findings from research with children who have learning difficulties and/or difficulties highlights those interventions aimed at increasing social networks and supporting attendance is insufficient for the reduction of stigma, suggesting that 'acceptance' is not the ultimate end goal (Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020), which may be achieved through inclusive values. Instead, belonging has been suggested as crucial for community acceptance, participation, and overall well-being (e.g., Bigby et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2017).

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in the attention paid to the importance of fulfilling the need to have a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1954) in educational contexts.

There are many definitions of belongingness and several concepts that are often used interchangeably with school belonging, including school relatedness, school connectedness, school membership and identification, although the literature suggests that there are only minor differences in the operationalisation of each one (Christenson et al., 2012). All these concepts have a theoretical basis in the belongingness hypothesis, which states that humans “have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary 1995,). According to this theory, belongingness is an innate human quality that has an evolutionary basis providing survival and reproductive benefits. (Maslow, 1954). In educational contexts ‘school belonging’ has a widely accepted definition of “the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow, 1993).

Maslow (1954) proposed that the need to belong is a major source of human motivation and is one of 5 human basic needs. Organised in a hierarchy, Maslow (1954) proposed these basic needs must be satisfied in order before another basic need can be met.



Figure 1.2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: <https://www.thoughtco.com/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4582571>

The first basic need is that of physiological, such as the requirement of air, food, water, sleep and clothing. The second need is that of safety, such as health, personal security, and resources. Only when these needs are met can the following need, that of love and belonging, be satisfied. Love and belonging needs can be satisfied with a sense of connection and intimacy with family and friends. After love and belonging comes esteem, which involves feeling good about oneself as well as feeling valued and respected by others. When a child's

esteem needs are met, they are more likely to feel confident, whereas when these needs are not met, they may feel inferior. Finally, is self-actualisation, which refers to feeling fulfilled in that one has reached their full potential. Each person's self-actualisation will be different, as people's goals and sense of satisfaction differ.

The hierarchy of needs has been faced with criticism, mostly due to its simplistic nature (Cianci & Gambrell, 2003) and the rigid order of needs that is supposedly accurate for all individuals (King-Hill, 2015). Hofstede (1984) asserted that the hierarchy of needs is based upon Western ideologies, and does not account for cultural differences and the unique social needs of different groups. For example, Hofstede (1984) argues that individualistic societies have a greater need for actualisation and self-fulfilment than collectivist societies, where the greater need is based on acceptance, belonging and community. Thus, while the hierarchy of needs is a useful framework to consider people's needs, it must be used with caution and considered in light of individual circumstances.

Despite the criticisms of the hierarchy of needs, over the years research has shown that belonging is an important factor that contributes positively to an individual's psychological development and has been found to be correlated with student school motivation (e.g. Gonida et al., 2009; Walker & Greene 2009), student socio-emotional functioning such as their self-esteem (e.g. Dotterer & Wehrspann 2016), their academic outcomes (e.g. Anderman, 2003; Niemiec & Ryan 2009; Pittman et al., 2007) and their behaviour at school (e.g. Kiefer et al., 2015). According to McNeely et al. (2002), adolescents are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age if they feel cared for by adults in school and feel that they are part of the school.

It is less clear how young people can perceive that they belong, or what factors enable a sense of school belonging. A review conducted by Osterman (2000) highlights several dimensions that are argued to be key to enhancing a young person's sense of belonging, including: the quality of relationships with teachers; peer relationships; and instructional and organisational strategies that promote positive interactions with peers and other people in the school community. Others have found similar findings, such as those by Sancho and Cline (2012) indicating that positive interactions with peers and teachers as well as positive emotions, positive behaviour and the wider school context were all associated with a sense of belonging.

1.2 Improving relationships between groups

In Allport's contact theory (1954), it was theorised that contact and information are important components to reduce prejudice between an ingroup (the social group with which somebody identifies) and an outgroup (a social group somebody does not identify with). To better understand prejudice and how to reduce it, Allport hypothesised that positive interpersonal contact could reduce prejudice as long as certain conditions are met: the contact should allow for true acquaintance and opportunities to exchange knowledge, therefore not only consisting of casual or superficial contact. The latter can achieve the opposite of reduced prejudice and instead reinforce negative stereotypes (Allport, 1954; Aberson, 2015). This happens because with limited acquaintance, people are more likely to see traits and perceive signs that further confirm one's already existing negative attitudes towards others, known as confirmation bias (Rademaker et al., 2020). The other conditions include common goals, intergroup cooperation and support or authorities.

Allport's theory has been widely applied in empirical research and direct contact between groups have been found to be effective in reducing prejudice and improving attitudes between groups (e.g., Pettigrew & Trop, 2006). The theory has also been widely applied to schools to attempt to improve attitudes between groups and to reduce prejudice, particularly towards marginalised groups such as those with disabilities, mental illness, or ethnic minorities. For example, a systematic review by Rademaker et al. (2020) examined the effect of applying contact theory in relation to the social participation of students with disabilities. The findings show that interventions combining contact and information are associated with more positive attitudes towards disabled students and increased social participation for disabled students. However, the application of contact theory in interventions did not show to be effective in relation to social acceptance, friendships, and social self-perceptions of students with disabilities (Rademaker et al., 2020). Furthermore, the long-term effects of such interventions are not often investigated; the 20 per cent of studies in the review that examined long-term effects found that the effects last up to 2 months, whereas the majority of the studies found that the positive impact was not sustained in relation to peer attitudes and social participation of students with disabilities (Rademaker et al., 2020).

The authors of the review argue that human interaction and the reduction of

prejudice is much more complex than the contact theory model proposes, and further theoretical models have been developed in an attempt to capture the complexity of behaviour change. For example, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, a framework to predict and explain behaviour, argues that one's subjective norms and perceived behavioural control plays a crucial role in predicting one's behavioural intentions as well as one's actual behaviours (Ajzen et al., 2019 as cited in Rademaker et al., 2020). Modifications were also made to the Contact Theory to acknowledge the role of underlying cognitive and affective factors following criticism of the initial theory (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), and background factors have been found to play a role in attitude development, including but not limited to gender, personality, culture, knowledge, and experiences of contact (Rademaker et al., 2020).

The contact theory (Allport, 1954) and other lines of research aiming to combat bias among conflicting groups are often based on the assumption that groups are widely disliked or viewed with scepticism, therefore having prejudice as a requirement or included in measures of tolerance (e.g., van Dooorn as cited in Hjern et al., 2020). Contact theory aims to promote tolerance and acceptance between groups, which is believed to ultimately reduce prejudice. Tolerance is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO, 1995) is: "Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. . . Tolerance is harmony in difference." It is widely believed that tolerance is something that communities and countries should aspire for to have functioning democracies and stable world orders (Hjern et al., 2018).

Hjern et al. (2018) highlight two broad conceptualisations of tolerance: 1) tolerance is deemed to be a permissive attitude towards a disliked out-group, therefore beginning with the notion that tolerance only happens after prejudice. For example, a tolerant person might dislike another person who does something in particular, but refrains by intervening despite being able to, and 2) tolerance is defined as a positive response to diversity, which is analytically distinct from the definition of prejudice, yet the measures included in empirical studies using this conceptualisation include prejudice of a measure.

Unhappy with the theoretical underpinnings to these approaches that rely on prejudice as a prerequisite for tolerance, Hjern et al. (2018) propose a new approach to understanding tolerance; they argue that tolerance is analytically distinct from prejudice and that prejudice is not a prerequisite. The new

approach to tolerance sees tolerance defined as a value orientation towards difference. They argue that it is more important to consider how one responds to the existence of diversity rather than considering how much one puts up with something they dislike. The focus is therefore on the subjective reactions one shows towards difference and does not require dislike beforehand.

In accordance with Forst (2017), the authors believe there are multiple possible expressions of tolerance and that there are four understandings of tolerance present in society at the same time. The first and second understand tolerance as a permissive relationship between different groups of people, sometimes with equal power and sometimes without. The key is that the groups do not interfere with each other or the group practices but do accept that they exist. The authors propose that this be called an acceptance of difference, which is the most basic expression of tolerance. The third understanding of tolerance is where people show respect for diversity by viewing other groups as morally and politically equal, despite their different beliefs, practices, and lifestyles. The fourth understanding of tolerance is an appreciation of diversity, which is more than simply showing respect for but instead views others' beliefs, practices, and lifestyles as valuable and worthy of ethical esteem. Hjern et al. (2018) call this expression of tolerance respect for difference and appreciation of difference. Thus, in this theoretical approach to tolerance, tolerance is a value orientation towards difference with three expressions: acceptance of, respect for, and appreciation of diversity. From an empirical study where their newly developed theory was examined, they found it to be a valid measure of tolerance across five countries – including the United Kingdom – and they found that only an appreciation of diversity has the potential to reduce prejudice. The authors do not argue, however, that all people and societies should aim to appreciate all forms of difference, and they do not claim that tolerance is always positive or good for society.

A meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of anti-biased interventions conducted in schools and evaluating their impact on outgroup attitudes had similar findings to the systematic review above (Ulger et al., 2018). Overall, the findings suggest that anti-bias intervention, often based on social contact theory, enhance children and young people's outgroup attitudes. However, the effects of the interventions varied between the groups involved. Generally, the effects were higher for majority groups and small or non-existent for minority groups. One possible explanation for this was the ratio of group members from majority and minority groups, with

there being a significantly smaller number of minority members in the intervention groups. It is therefore difficult to know whether the factors that reduce bias among majority groups applies to minority group members.

The meta-analysis also found that the effects varies according to the target outgroup of the intervention. The anti-bias interventions were found to be more effective at improving ethnic outgroup attitudes than at improving attitudes towards students with disabilities. One explanation provided for this finding is that schools are increasingly more ethnically diverse, which enables students to have more natural opportunities for intergroup contact which could positively increase the intervention effects. Finally, the analysis found that interventions led by teachers produced nonsignificant intervention effects; only interventions led by researched produced significant effects. Further, single intervention sessions were found to be ineffective at changing attitudes towards outgroups, meaning that schools should deliver longer interventions with well-trained staff or external support.

1.3 Theories of Identity

There is no universally agreed definition of identity. It is however widely accepted as referring to a label that attempts to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Identities can therefore be differentiated according to a wide variety of sociocultural categories, including but not limited to, gender, occupation, ethnicity, age, socio- economic status and nationality (Bamberg, 2011). How one becomes to develop their identity, known as identity formation, has been widely studied across disciplines and there are several theories for how identity formation happens; the majority have been found to be based on sociocultural perspectives, with the remaining based on psychosocial perspectives, social psychosocial perspectives, sociological perspectives, or a combination of (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

1.3.1 Sociocultural perspectives

Those that see identity through a sociocultural perspective understand identity as a multidimensional phenomenon as opposed to a single entity (see for example Gee, 2001; Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave., 2001). It is argued that people develop a range of ‘self-understandings’ and that these self-understandings are integrated into a learner identity, a student identity and a social identity, all of which integrate into a personal identity. Thus, those that view identity through a sociocultural perspective believe that identity is developed through people’s participation in various sociocultural activities in multiple contexts, including home, school, work and their wider communities (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave. 2001; Wenger 1998). The contexts in which people participate and develop their identities are social due to the number of different social roles available. These contexts are also cultural in that they are characterised by norms and values that guide people’s actions and goals, as well as ideas about the most appropriate ways to reach said goals (Holland et al., 1998).

1.3.2 Psychosocial perspectives

A psychosocial perspective of identity is one where the main focus is on the internal psychological processes of the development of one’s identity rather than focusing on specific identity dimensions (Verhoeven et al., 2019). As a result, large-scale quantitative studies examining identity development is more common through this perspective.

Erikson’s (1968) theories are widely known as psychosocial perspectives. Erikson (1950; 1968) viewed the development of a sense of identity fidelity as crucial to one’s psychological health and psychosocial development. Erikson (1950; 1968) theorised that there are three levels of identity: 1) ego identity - how an individual is able to bring together the most important and private beliefs they hold about themselves from which they create a sense of personal sameness; 2) personal identity, that is how an individual defines their beliefs and life goals, which are represented in culturally and socially relevant roles and positions; and 3) social identity, that is the connection people have to wider groups, such as gender, birth country and ethnicity. Social identity suggests that people defined by their personal aspects of self as well as by the larger groups they associate with. Erikson theorised that the three levels described are developmental and happen throughout one’s lifespan until the achievement

of identity synthesis. Identity synthesis is when one holds a valid and current self-representation (1968). Erikson's theory was subjected to much criticism, much of it based on his view that successfully passing through different stages by adolescence generates an 'identity platform' for life as an adult. In contrast to Erikson, Mead viewed identity as a flexible construct and emphasised the life-long influence of other people on the development and control of one's identity (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Mead argues that identity is a complex interplay between the 'me' – referring to learnt and internalised social role expectations – and the 'I' – the impulsive and creative components of the personality. From Mead's perspective, people must see others not just as individuals but also as generalised others which reflect general societal norms and values (Mead, 1967, p. 158). Therefore, one must continuously attempt to create a balance between the social expectations of the 'me' and the 'I'.

1.3.3 Socio psychological perspective

Within the literature there are others who have viewed identity through a social psychological perspective believe that a person's identity consists of two parts: a social and a personal part (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The work of Tajfel and Turner has been particularly influential in this area. The social part of one's identity – known also as social identity theory - is concerned with an individual's knowledge of his membership of a social group(s) together with the emotional significance and value that one places to that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to social identity theory (SIT), individuals tend to put themselves as well as others into social categories, such as age cohorts, gender groups, religious affiliations and organisational memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Each individual is likely to be part of numerous social categories, and the social categories are often defined by the prototypical characteristics observed by the members (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Three mental processes are proposed in evaluating 'us' and 'them' (Tajfel & Turner, 1985): 1) categorisation, putting people into categories based on what is known about them (e.g. Muslim, black, elderly); 2) social identification, that is adopting the identity of a group individuals assign themselves to, for example by conforming to the group social norms; and 3) social comparison, that is constant comparison with other social groups to maintain group self-esteem, for example by perceiving other social groups negatively. Then, social identity theory is useful not only in understanding one's social identity but also the potential problems observed between different social groups, including prejudice and discrimination.

The personal part of one's identity is constructed through the extent that one identifies with and feels about the social group(s) memberships, particularly if the social groups are deemed as being inferior, equal or superior to other social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

1.3.4 Sociological Perspectives

Similarly, to those employing a social psychological perspective, those who adopt a sociological perspective are interested in one's group membership and the evaluation of said memberships. However, sociological perspectives are also interested in how group memberships will include some people while excluding others as a way of acquiring status. Thus, this perspective has a focus on attempting to understand how people move in societal power structures, create 'groups' and try to utilise their individual agency to represent themselves however they wish to (Cote, 2002; Foucault, 1980).

Within this perspective falls Goffman's view of identity; Goffman (Goffman, 1963) argues that one's identity is a construct that needs to be maintained dramaturgically, as it is constantly in danger of being questioned, unmasked, or destroyed by others. Thus, people are often creating and maintaining a certain impression, as if actors. Goffman also argued that identity can be strongly shaped by the attributions of others, which can be extremely harmful when a person displays as having a characteristic deviating from the 'norm', known as stigma; stigma can, according to Goffman, restrict people's freedom of action and therefore cause significant damage to one's identity.

Bamberg (2011) proposes that identity is the result of the self-navigating three 'dilemmatic spaces': 1) 'diachronic' identity, that is the resolution of stability versus change over time; 2) individuality versus belonging, that is that identity is not only about individuals being unique but also belonging to social groups at the same time, and; 3) balancing a sense of agency, autonomy versus heteronomy.

1.3.5 Identity Development during Adolescence

One of the argued central tasks for adolescents as they progress throughout their youth towards adulthood is to establish a stable identity (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1969) theorised that adolescents explore various roles and ideals which ultimately results in them committing to an identity in multiple domains, including but not limited to religion, gender role, ideology and occupation. The benefit from achieving a stable identity is feeling confident and secure and improved psychological well-being (Kroger, 2003).

Erikson's theory was extended upon by Marcia (1980) who further elaborated on how adolescents develop their stable identity. Marcia proposed that, unlike Erikson's view that identity developed happens in a linear process, identity development occurs through four non-linear statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium and achieves. During the diffuse status, young people are deemed to not have thought about their identity and have not shown an interest in committing to an identity domain. Those in the foreclosed status are committed to an identity domain although this is usually due to parental or societal values and beliefs, and therefore the young person conforming to the identity without exploration or other identities. The moratorium status is when young people actively evaluate their options and they experiment with who they want to be and become, but they do not fully commit to any particular identity as they have not decided who they want to be. Then, when decided, young people are deemed to have an achieved identity, which is associated with psychological well-being (Kroger, 2003).

There are many factors that are associated with identity development during adolescence. There is growing consensus in theoretical and empirical literature that identity is context dependent and also multidimensional (Ajrouch et al., 2015). The Bioecological Model, previously known as the ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989) provides a useful framework to consider the contexts and structures in which adolescents develop a sense of who they are and who they wish to become.

Bronfenbrenner (1974) criticised early theories of child development that were developed following studies of children in unfamiliar laboratory environments as being ecologically invalid, for example the Strange Situation test (Ainsworth, 1970). Bronfenbrenner claimed that those early studies did not take into account the possibly influence from a third party. He suggested that the environments in which children develop are made up of structures, each of which

with the potential to have an impact on a child, which he termed the Bioecological model. The structures are termed: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. The structures are interrelated and therefore the impact a system has on a child will depend on the other structures as well.

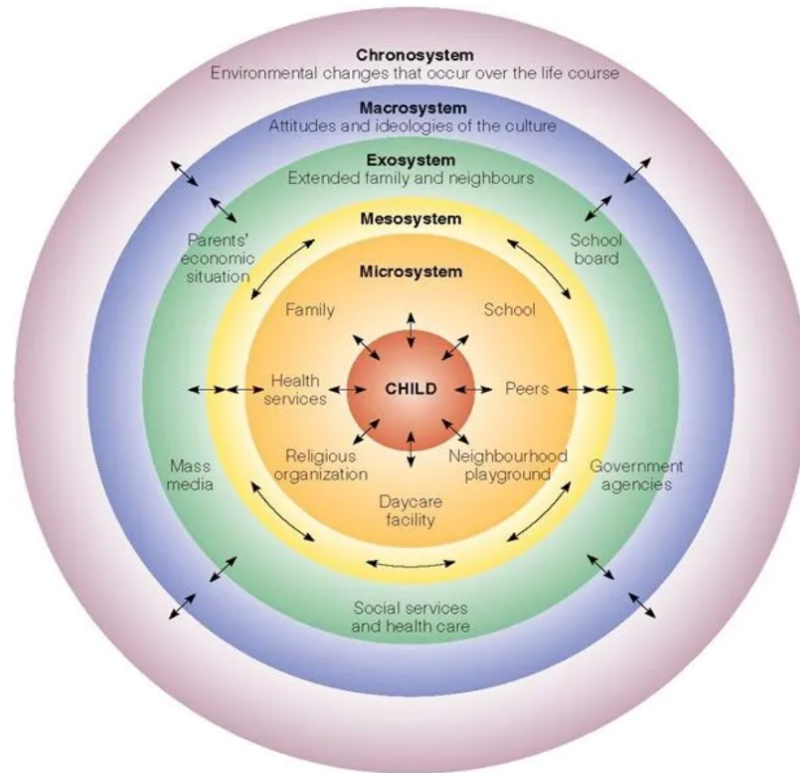


Figure 1.3: Bioecological Model, Simply Psychology, N.D

The Microsystem is the first level and refers to things that have direct contact with children in their immediate environment. Examples include their parents or carers, other family members such as peers, their teachers and school peers.

The Mesosystem encompasses the interactions between children and young people's microsystems; this will be unique for each child but might include the interactions between the child's parents and school/teachers, or the child's parents interactions between themselves. The Exosystem includes distal environments that can indirectly influence development, such as one's neighbourhood and local community, the parental workplace and parental friendships. Macrosystem covers the larger, sociocultural contexts, such as public policies, laws, political beliefs, customs, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and mass media (Ajrouch et al., 2016). A fifth level was added to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, known as the chronosystem; this consists of the environmental changes that occur over one's lifetime, for example major life transitions (e.g., starting school and parental separation).

This model is useful when considering adolescent identity development. A paper written by Ajrouch et al. (2016) applied the model when considering the identity of Arab Americans, applying each section minus the chronosystem. They argue that the family context is the first point of socialisation for children, which forms part of the child's microsystem, and that identities can be highlighted influenced by the parent-child relationship, which is well reported in Arab culture (Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014 as cited in Ajrouch et al., 2016). Within the family context regardless of where they come from, children begin to learn about gender identity, ethnic identities and other cultural identities relevant to the families cultural beliefs, values and traditions. Once children start school, their interactions within the school with peers and staff is another microsystem that influences their identity.

During school, particularly secondary school age, young people begin to be exposed to a wide range of curriculum material which encourages them to think critically about who they are and who they wish to become. Alongside this, dating activities become more prominent which enables young people to explore their sexuality and their romantic desires. During this stage of young people's educational, groups are at increased risk of becoming separated, for example on ethnic bases. The community is an aspect of young people's exosystems that can influence their identity development. The community in which children are raised and spend their adolescent years can expose them to traditions, societal norms and expectations, language and culture, among others. Young people begin to consider how they are perceived by others within their own communities too, as well as within the broader societies in which they are based or are associated with. Within the community, youth can receive social support from many, including their family, peers, associates, neighbours and broader community, which can provide psychological benefits. This together helps young people develop a sense of who they are and who they want to become. The media is an example of a macrosystem that can have a significant influence on young people's identity development. For example, media portrayals of a particular group that a young person may identify with, for example an ethnic or cultural identity, can result in positive and negative life experiences, as well as an impact on relationships with others and one's sense of self. Media portrayals of Arab Americans is underrepresented yet widely negative when present (Shaheen, 2009); young Arab Americans have reported racism in school settings due to frequent negative media portrayals (e.g., Kumar et al., 2014). When young people are frequently exposed to negative portrayals of a group they belong to, they, too, can begin to perceive their group negatively. Thus, while the bioecological model considers childhood development more widely, it is particularly useful

when considering the influence of different contexts on young people's identity development. The present study explores the identity of vegan young people in educational settings specifically, thus further exploration of the role of schools in adolescent identity development is provided below.

1.4 The Role of Schools in Adolescent Identity Development

Schools are places where adolescents spend a large amount of their adolescent time and are introduced to new ideas and activities. Schools are an inevitable context in which adolescents develop their identity aspects of their identity based on their experiences. In the literature, three groups of literature have been found to be linked to the role of schools in adolescent identity development (Verhoeven et al., 2019): 1) how schools, teachers and peers unintentionally impact identity development, 2) how schools intentionally support identity development, and 3) the preconditions required to intentionally support adolescents' identity development in schools. Each is discussed in turn below.

1.4.1 How schools, teachers and peers unintentionally impact identity development

Selection practices and differentiation

The review found that when young people are allocated to a high-status group they perceive themselves as having something worthy of contributing to their class. These students are more likely to be engaged in class than adolescents who are not allocated to a high-status group.

Teaching Strategies

The review found that different teaching strategies inform opportunities for engagement in lessons and with the subject matter as constrained by norms, values and tools, as well as consideration to how teaching strategies can make different identity positions available within the classroom environment. For example, one study found that students in one school where they completed maths work independently reached a point where they cannot continue (Horn, 2008). This can result in adolescents believing that they are not a 'maths person' when the content becomes difficult. In another school, students worked in multiple-ability groups and students and teachers collaboratively developed activities. In this school, students believe that everybody has different abilities, talents and enjoyed the collaborative working opportunities (Horn, 2008). A

different study identified the importance of space for self-expression in art classes to prevent discouraging students from understanding themselves as artists and engaging in visual arts (Charland, 2010 as cited in Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Teacher Expectations

This review highlights mixed findings on the role of teacher expectations on identity development within the school context. One key finding is that teachers' expectations of certain groups of adolescents that are distinguished by ethnicity, perceived academic ability and/or gender can influence adolescent identity development. While identity development is arguably an individual process, research has shown that students that share certain characteristics may be faced with norms and identity positions that are different to other adolescents that do not share the same characteristics. For example, one study found Asian-American students felt supported by their science teachers and administrators, whereas African American and Latino students felt that they had lower expectations of them. It is therefore argued that some students may have their identity development fostered or hindered based on teacher expectations (Aschbacher et al., 2010 as cited in Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Peer Norms

The review highlights how peer norms can unintentionally affect adolescent development when adolescents feel restricted in taking up certain identity positions due to stigmatisation by peers. Students have reported hiding their identity position in order to protect their reputation and to not experience social consequences of being identified as having an identity position perceived as 'negative'. For example, in one study adolescents with reading difficulties reported not engaging in class so that they could hide their reading difficulties, which was found to jeopardize the students' opportunities to further develop their self-perception and self-understanding as readers in a more constructive way (Hall, 2010 as cited in Verhoeven et al., 2019).

1.4.2 How schools intentionally support identity development

The review by Verhoeven et al. (2019) identified in-breadth, in-depth and reflective explorative learning experiences as factors that intentionally support identity development.

In-breadth Exploration

The review suggests that schools that provide adolescents with opportunities to engage in learning contents, activities and identity positions that they were previously unaware of or unfamiliar with enables adolescents to decide to what extent they identify with the contents, activities and positions (Verhoeven et al., 2019). For example, Bruin and Ohna as cited in Verhoeven et al. (2019) conducted a study with students who had difficulties accessing their regular curriculum and were able to access alternative educational courses. The findings show that the alternative courses enabled them to discover hidden talents, new interests and new sides of themselves that contributed to self-confidence.

In-depth Exploration

The review suggests that adolescents for students who may already have a sense of who they are or want to be could benefit from learning experiences that further facilitate exploration of contents, activities and positions that are closely related to their present self-understanding. For example, a study carried out by Adams et al., (2014) as cited in Verhoeven et al. (2019) examined a multi-year Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) program out of school for students with an interest in STEM. The program offered hands-on activities, talks, visits and field trips. The findings suggest that the in-depth exploration of STEM subjects which the adolescents already had an interest in enabled them to further explore their STEM identities and decide on whether or not to make an identity commitment.

Reflective Exploration

The review identified learning experiences that enable adolescents to reflect upon their present self-understanding as an important way in which schools support identity development. For example, one study conducted by Sinai et al. (2012) as cited in Verhoeven et al. (2019) found that writing assignments can help adolescents have internal dialogues with certain parts of themselves, for example a younger version of them. This, it was argued, supported the adolescents to develop a sense of who they currently were and who they wanted to become.

1.5 Food Choice Identity

Over the years, an emerging body of literature has begun examining what is known as ‘food-choice identity’ (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017), that is the self-images through which people “think, feel and act with respect to food and eating” (Sobal et al., 2014, p. 8). Bisogni et al. (2002) theorises that the relationship between what one consumes and their identity is bidirectional; identity influences one’s food choices as much as food choices influence one’s identity. Based on this theory, it is believed that food choices are not just personal meanings but they also bring together communities of those who share similar ways of eating. Food choices are therefore linked to personal identity and also social identity (Bisogni et al., 2002).

This theory has been found to be true for vegans, who have reported seeing their lifestyle choice as more intertwined with their identity than other groups of people (Rosenfeld, 2019; Jabs et al., 2000). Rosenfeld (2019) argues that vegans face strong pressures to define themselves by their food choices that greatly deviate from the dietary norm of Western culture. Some studies have also found that vegans identify very strongly with their dietary in-group, more so than vegetarians (e.g., Rothgerber, 2015, 2015).

Vegans are often perceived as a subgroup of vegetarians (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017; Ruby, 2012), yet Newport (2012) found that most vegans perceive themselves as uniquely different from vegetarians. Despite the similarity that neither group consume meat, many vegans will not consider themselves or refer to themselves as vegetarian due to the dietary and philosophical differences; an accumulating body of research also suggests that they also differ in of neurological, attitudinal and behavioural variables (Kessler et al, 2016, Rothgerber, 2015a, 2015b). For example, Filippi et al. (2010) found that vegans demonstrate greater activation of brain regions related to empathy than vegetarians did when viewing depictions of animal suffering. Other studies have found that vegans perceive animals as mentally and emotionally salient beings, like humans, and feel increased guilt when having to feed their pets meat, despite acknowledging that a meat-based diet is the most appropriate for their animal companions (Rothgerber, 2014).

The literature suggests that there are numerous factors that can shape a vegan identity, including but not limited to cultural norms, the mass media, restaurant experiences, and one’s family and friends. In a study by Markowski and

Roxburgh (2018), they found that non-vegans anticipate stigma from family and friends if they were to eat a plant-based diet. It is theorised that the perceived stigma is an important influencer in preventing people from transitioning to a plant-based diet or vegan way of life regardless of how much one may want to. In a bibliographical project on the identity of vegans, Griffin (2017) found that despite veganism referring to a rigid definition of avoiding animal products among other forms of animal exploitation, a vegan identity is much more fluid. This is argued to be associated with the belief that people who have ‘abnormal identities’ – that is, identities that differ from the social norms – often feel the need to hide or manage said identities to avoid conflict, hostility or questioning (Griffin, 2017). This study highlighted how some vegans move between different identities throughout the day, sometimes having the identity of ‘professional’, for example, with veganism not interfering with that identity, and other times showing a strong identity of ‘vegan activist’, where veganism is a core part of their identity. Some individuals face challenging daily decisions, such as that of requiring non-vegan medication to survive, which can result in dilemmas about a vegan identity in questioning whether by taking non-vegan medication one is not vegan enough or should ‘abandon veganism’. Thus, it is argued that a vegan identity is fluid and highly contextual, and subjective to everyone.

1.5.1 Food Identity in Adolescence and Young People

Although little research has been conducted exploring the experiences of vegan young people, studies investigating other food identities in adolescence are useful to consider. Several studies have explored the experiences of adolescents with Coeliac Disease (CD) who adhere to a Gluten Free Diet (GFD). For example, one study conducted focus groups with 47 adolescents with CD (Olsson et al., 2009). Their findings suggest that the young people felt stigma daily. The young people felt that their special dietary requirements were accepted at home whereas they became problematic outside of the home context due to the visibility of their needs and a risk of social devaluation. These findings are in line with earlier research (for examples see Lee & Newman, 2003; Olsson et al., 2008; Rashid et al., 2005; Zarkadas et al., 2006, as cited in Olsson et al., 2009). The young people described the invisibility of their condition and food identity as negative and positive; negative because of other people’s assumptions about their eating habits, yet positive because it made saying no to certain activities or opportunities easy. To manage the stigma they experience, the

adolescents reported a several management strategies, such as using a sense of humour to relieve the embarrassment and social comparison whereby they compare themselves to others who have worse conditions and poorer outcomes. To reduce the stigma they feel, the adolescents reported having an appropriate knowledge base about CD, and having the practical and social support of those around them. Interacting with other young people with CD was particularly helpful to manage stigma and to feel empowered.

Another study, this one quantitative, examined whether the Identity Illness Questionnaire (IIQ) was valid and reliable to use with an adolescent population with coeliac disease (CD) (Meyer & Lamash, 2021). In addition, it examined the IIQ's relationship with the young people's perspectives of how they participate in food-associated activities and what their quality of life is. The study found that the more positive illness identity the young people had – that is higher acceptance and enrichment scores – the more they participated in activities and enjoyed them. Further, as the negative components of the illness identity decreased (rejection and engulfment), young people reported more participation in food-related activities including more involvement in the preparation for the activities and more enjoyment from the engagement.

The most predominant component was acceptance, which the authors reported as encouraging particularly when considering the complexity of adolescence. For the young people, accepting the diagnosis of CD can be support their self-care. Engulfment was the lowest segment among the adolescent's illness identity, which the authors reported as positive give the evidence of its emotional changes and burden. Interestingly, the study found a correlation between the time since diagnosis and the 'engulfment' component, which explores the degree to which the illness or health condition dominates a person's identity. This suggests that the more time that passes since the CD diagnosis, the less negative engulfment feelings the adolescents experience. Finally, the study found that the more positive illness identity the adolescents experience, the more they engage in food-related activities which directly influences their health and quality of life. The social domain that was used in the study was rated with the highest health related quality of life.

While these studies do not explore veganism as an identity, they do examine the impact that other food-related identities can have on adolescents. A key difference is that being diagnosed with CD is not a dietary choice, it is considered an illness. Veganism, on the other hand, is a chosen way of life which includes a plant-based diet. Thus, the research on CD might be useful to consider how

food identity is experiences by adolescents but should be considered carefully based on the difference between choice and illness.

Closer to the study of a vegan food-identity would be vegetarianism, despite the differences between the two groups as already highlighted in this review. One study examined the cognitive and social ideological influences associated with teenage vegetarianism (Worsley & Skrzpiec, 1997). The study consisted of a survey which was completed by two thousand adolescents in Australia. This study found that ‘Full and Semi Vegetarians’ reported greater concerns about their appearance and greater prevalence of extremely weight loss behaviours. The conclusions of the study were that there was a possible developmental link between teenage vegetarianism and eating disorders, which could be explained as being part of female adolescent identity development. Another study published in the same year found that 75 per cent of female adolescents who had reduced meat consumption were more likely to have the goal of being slimmer and had attempted to lose weight more often in comparison to females who did not reduce their meat consumption (Ryan, 1997). Thus, vegetarian female adolescents are deemed to be at higher risk of developing an eating disorder than non-vegetarians. In contrast to this, Costa et al. (2019) found that young women aged between 18 – 25 who transitioned to a vegan diet after restricted eating found that the process led to healing of self and social/animal connectedness. (Costa et al., 2019). The healing effects the young women described were described as having the potential to have significant implications for improve their sense of self, psychosocial well-being and their connections to the social and environmental worlds. Thus, food transitioned from being a source of fear, anxiety, and guilt to becoming a key aspect of identity with deep symbolic meanings.

1.6 Conclusion

This literature review has provided an overview of the concept of veganism and explored what is known about vegan children and young people thus far from a psychological perspective. The review then provided an overview of the legal rights of ethical vegans in the UK and highlighted educational settings’ duties in relation to minimising and preventing discrimination towards those with a protected characteristic, which includes ethical vegans. The review then summarises the literature on inclusive education and school belonging from the perspective of social inclusion – that is, inclusion for all students, not just those

with disabilities – and improving relationships between groups. The review then summarises academic literature on identity, food identity and identity development in adolescence. The role schools play in supporting young people navigate the challenging years where they have a central task of developing a sense of who they are and who they wish to become is explored.

Overall, the literature review indicates that the population of vegans is increasing, arguably a movement led by young people, yet vegans report experiencing challenges such as workplace discrimination, social rejection and stigma because of their eating choices. For adults, veganism can be described as food identity, that is that vegans' eating and lifestyle choices and highly intertwined with how they define themselves and how they share their self-understanding with others. However, the literature provides little evidence on the experiences of vegan children and young people.

Non-academic sources of evidence suggest that vegan children and young people may experience difficulties in school, such as bullying by peers and staff, and discrimination, which can result in feeling a wide range of negative emotions. The literature provides ample evidence of the benefits of all children experiencing inclusive education, with the Equality Act (2010) acting as a legal source to ensure that children and young people do not experience discrimination. The ways in which schools can successfully implement inclusive education is through having a whole school systems approach which looks beyond individual student's needs and instead considers the diverse population of the school and the wider approaches required to support them. While there is a wealth of literature on inclusive education, school belonging and educational experiences for disabled students and students of minority groups, there is currently no evidence on the educational experiences of vegan young people.

The literature has shown the importance of the adolescent years in the development of one's identity and the important role schools plays in supporting adolescent identity development and how adolescents perceive themselves. During this time, adolescents have an important task to begin making sense of who they are and who they wish to become, and their understanding of their current identity (or identities) can influence how they feel about themselves, others, their education, and their life goals. As with inclusive education, the literature on adolescent identity development suggests that having a whole school systems approach based on positive relationships and understanding is crucial to enable adolescents to develop a positive sense of self. The literature

also shows that some minority groups or those with marginalised identities may be at increased risk of school difficulties due to several factors, including discrimination, misunderstandings between groups and in-group favouritism. While there is no research on vegan adolescents, research on adolescents who have other food identities suggests that food identity can impact on one's self-perception as well as one's social experiences and engagements. As vegan young people's voices are missing in the literature and the literature review has shown the challenges associated with having a minority identity, particularly one that may be marginalised, it seems timely to begin to address the gap. My research will therefore explore the educational experiences of vegan young people, which will include an exploration of whether they perceive veganism to be part of their identity and, if so, how their vegan identity is experienced in school and with others.

Chapter 2

Empirical Paper

2.1 Literature Review

Schools have been referred to as societal institutions with a universal mandate for enhancing democratic values, interpersonal relationships, and tolerance among younger generations (Ehman, 1980; Gutmann, 1987; Torney-Purta, 2002; Amna, 2012 as cited in Lundberg, 2018). It is argued that schools offer more than knowledge and skills; they also provide students with environments in which they can socialise and be well prepared for democratic life. While not all students across the globe live in democratic societies, many children and young people, particularly in Western countries, do. Thus, children and young people are raised and encouraged throughout their educational journeys to build positive relationships with others and to respect intercultural relationships (Flanagan et al., 2007). There is evidence that a positive school climate can promote group cohesion, mutual respect and trust (Ghaith, 2003; Cohen et al., 2009, as cited in Lundberg, 2018). One way in which schools do this is through teachers and school staff modelling. Studies have found that having a positive student-teacher relationship is correlated with improved interpersonal relationships, particularly in relation to young people having the ability to understand other people's perspectives, decreasing student antagonism towards one another and increasing care between peers (Lundberg, 2018). Thus, student tolerance and positive relationships are highly influenced by school climates and school staff. For some young people who have a minority identity, their educational experiences can come with challenges. According to Goffman (1963), some people have a stigmatised identity, that is an identity that is social devalued with negative, and often hurtful, stereotypes and beliefs attached to it.

Some stigmatised identities are concealable, that is that they can be kept hidden from others to prevent negative attributes and stereotypes being attached to them, whereas other stigmatised identities are not concealable (e.g., Quinn & Earnshaw 2011). Some studies have examined the experiences of minority groups, such as children of ethnic or racial minorities, in education. Findings suggest that some groups of ethnic or racial minority students are at increased risk of developing negative student-teacher relationships (e.g., Irvine & Fenwick, 2011), with one explanation being that most minority students have majority teachers (Howes & Shivers, 2006), resulting in an incongruent relationship compromised by bias and cultural misunderstanding (Rasheed et al., 2019). Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) can be associated with the risk of a difficult relationship between students and teachers with different backgrounds. SIT posits that people have a natural tendency to favour the social groups that they belong to (their social identity), which could suggest that teachers and students who form part of a wider social group may develop more positive relationships than those with different social identities. Some studies, however, have found that despite students and teachers having different ethnic or racial identities, the student-teacher relationship can be a positive one.

For example, in a study exploring religious congruence, Charki et al. (2021) found that while religious congruence between teachers and students moderately contributes towards the student-teacher relationship, the teacher's attitude towards the student's religious group was of equal importance. Thus, this study is just one example of how high-quality relationships can be had between people from different social groups. Inclusive education provides a framework to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have a positive educational experience. The conceptualisation of inclusive education now extends beyond supporting those with disabilities and looks for inclusion from the perspective of all children and young people, particularly for those who are at increased risk of being marginalised within the education system (Sakiz et al., 2020). The concepts of inclusion are: removing barriers to learning and participation; allocating resources to support learning and participation; and providing support for diversity (Sakiz et al., 2020). Some research into the inclusion of groups of pupils from ethnic minorities suggest that school policies do not reach all students and provide support for diversity, that school cultures need to further build communities based on inclusive values, and that more organisation and resources is required to support the diversity of schools (e.g., Sakiz et al., 2020).

In addition to the concept of inclusive education, schools are obliged by The Equality Act (2010) to not discriminate against pupils with a protected characteristic. A religion or belief is a protected characteristic, and as of 2021, veganism fits the criteria of belief under The Equality Act (2010). The Vegan Society (n.d.) state that: ‘veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.’ Thus, those that self-identify as vegan do not consume any type of animal product including but not limited to red meat, poultry, fish, egg and dairy, as well as other by-products such as honey and gelatin (Ruby, 2012). In addition, vegans avoid using products that are tested on animals (e.g., make up and cleaning products) and visiting attractions that involve animal exploitation (e.g., zoos and aquariums).

In 2019 there were an estimated 600,000 people following a vegan diet in the UK, with that number most likely having increased significantly since (The Vegan Society, n.d.). In 2022, over 629,000 people signed up to an annual campaign called Veganuary, where people follow a plant-based diet for the month of January (Veganuary, n.d.). This is the largest number of sign-ups since the campaign began. It is believed that the vegan movement is mostly led by young people aged between 15 and 34 and that 46% of people aged between 16 and 75 are considering reducing their intake of animal products (The Vegan Society, n.d.). There is currently no definitive data available on how many children and young people identify as vegan in the UK or worldwide. A useful yet unofficial way of gaining some information on the number of vegan pupils in the UK can be found on the Vegan-inclusive Education website (<https://vieducation.co.uk/>). On the website there is a map which shows the schools across the UK that have at least one vegan pupil in attendance. Schools are added by parents, carers and vegan young people so that the school or institution can be sent a vegan-inclusive pack which details practical ways how to be a vegan-inclusive educational establishment. Over 1300 schools are currently registered on the map. This suggests that there are at least 1300 vegan children and young people attending an educational setting, with many more potentially not registered. The population of vegans is therefore growing year by year despite it currently being a minority group.

Young people are arguably driving the vegan movement, yet little is known about veganism and children and young people that is not related to diet or medical studies, for example studying the impact of a plant-based diet on bone health and height (e.g., Appleby & Key 2016; Le & Sabate 2014).

There is growing literature on what is known as ‘food choice identity’ (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017), that is the self-images through which people think, feel and act with respect to food and eating (Sobal et al., 2014). Food choice identity holds the position that eating behaviours are intertwined with one’s identity which can shape how people make sense of who they are as individuals, and how they share that understanding with others. Rosenfeld (2019) found that adult vegans do in fact see their way of living as highlight intertwined with their identity and believes that vegans face pressure to define themselves by their food choices. Some research suggests that vegans can experience social challenges due to their way of life, for example responses from people who consider a vegan diet as extreme, a lack of acceptance, inclusion, and support from the wider community (e.g., Fiestas-Flores & Pyhala, 2017). In line with these findings, Cole and Morgan (2011) found that vegans are at increased risk of being negatively labelled by non-vegans and may experience stigma due to their vegan lifestyle. Griffin (2017) argues that a vegan identity is fluid and context dependent, based on the idea that some vegans may ‘hide’ their vegan identity during their working hours and therefore hold the identity of ‘professional’, whereas in the non-working hours they may engaging in activism, thus holding the identity of ‘vegan activist’. These studies, however, have been conducted with adult vegans and there continues to be little understanding of whether these findings apply to vegan children and young people. Developing a strong and stable sense of oneself is considered to be one of the key tasks during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2008).

It is widely accepted that identity development occurs throughout one’s lifetime although adolescence is when young people begin to think deeply about who they are, who they want to become and how their identity will impact their lives (Steinberg, 2008). Erickson theorised that adolescents are particularly self-conscious about their changing identities, more so than during other periods of one’s life. It is argued that having a clear and stable identity makes individuals more resilient, reflective, and autonomous, and it promotes a sense of competence throughout one’s life (e.g., Kroger et al., 2010). Some adolescents may have a stigmatised identity which can impact the way they see themselves and how they perceive others see them (Goffman, 1963). The literature shows the important role schools play in supporting young people’s understanding of who they are and who they want to become (e.g., Verhoeven et al., 2019). There is currently no academic literature on the educational experiences of vegan children and young people. A small survey was carried

out by Vegan-inclusive education to gain some insight into vegan pupils' experiences in education. The findings of the survey found that many of the pupils had experienced teasing and bullying by staff and peers, that no vegan food options were available at school or the options were limited and not nutritiously equal to the non-vegan options, and that the pupils experienced discrimination which elicits a wide range of negative emotions (Jenkins, 2021). A key consideration of this survey is that it is not published in a peer-reviewed journal and little information is provided on how the survey was created, what the inclusion criteria was, who completed the survey and how the survey was analysed. The findings should therefore be interpreted with caution. However, due to the scarce academic literature on the experiences of vegan young people, this survey provides a useful starting point to consider some of the experiences of vegan children and young people. The findings of the survey show some similarities to the findings of adult-related vegan literature, for example the lack of acceptance, inclusion, and support from the wider community as reported by Fiestas-Flores & Pyhala (2017). Based on the premise that inclusive education is for all children and young people, that veganism is a protected characteristic under The Equality Act (2010) and from the limited understanding of vegan young people's educational experiences from the academic literature, it is timely to begin to address the academic gap in this area.

2.1.1 Aims of the Study

The aim of the current study is to gain an understanding of the educational experiences of young vegans in the United Kingdom by using a qualitative approach. As there is little research on the experiences of young vegans in the literature, this study aims to determine whether veganism is part of young people's identities and, if so, how their vegan identity impacts, if at all, their educational experiences. Another aim of the study is to add to the scarce evidence based on the experiences of vegan children and young people; as a growing 'trend' and a protected characteristic under The Equality Act (2010), veganism is still under-represented in psychological research. In addition, it is hoped that this study will prompt further research in children and young people's vegan identities, which will help to raise awareness and inform policy changes where necessary.

This study therefore aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Do vegan young people view veganism as a core part of their identity?

2. What are the experiences of vegan young people in educational settings?
3. What influence, if any, does identifying as vegan have on young people's relationships?

2.2 Methodology

This research was conducted from a critical realist perspective. Ontologically and epistemologically, critical realism holds the position that stable and enduring features of reality exist independent of human conceptualisation that are directly inaccessible, while also believing that humans have their own individual perceptions and experiences based upon differing belief systems and expectations (e.g., Willig, 2013). Critical realists aim to gain a deep understanding of the topic being studied while examining the range of possible factors at play (Burnett, 2007).

This study employed as multiple method exploratory qualitative design, including semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995 as cited in Smith & Elger, 2014) different identified research approaches used with interviewing in social research, including positivist, naturalistic, post-modern and realist, suggesting it is possible to hold differing epistemological and ontological beliefs when utilising interviews in research. Interviews are widely used in qualitative research and are argued to represent one of the most common methods of social research (Smith & Elger, 2014). Interviews can take many forms, including highly structured through specific questioning, informal conversations, group discussions and one on one exchanges (Smith & Elger, 2014). For critical realists, interviews can provide an important basis for accessing the attitudes, emotions and rich accounts of events and experiences of individuals that represents different facets of a complex social reality (Smith & Elger, 2014), which is what the present study seeks to explore.

Photo-elicitation was used alongside the interviews. Photo elicitation is a qualitative research method that can prompt and guide in-depth interviews (Bugos et al., 2014). Using photo elicitation is argued to be a dynamic tool that aids communication and reflection throughout the interview process, which can enable deeper reach into topics that may be sensitive and abstract, particularly with participants who may find the interview process a challenging context (King, Williams and Gleeson, 2017). The use of images in interviews with children can also make the interview process less structured and the images can become the focus of the encounter, making the process less discomforting, for example from not having to maintain eye contact with the researcher (Schwartz, 1989).

Cassell & Johnson (2006) state that the use of photo methods within research is influenced by researchers' diverse assumptions about reality and knowledge. Some researchers hold realist views, that is the perspective that a true reality does exist and it separate from one's mind (e.g., Guba, 1990 as cited in Hansen-Ketchum & Myrick, 2008). On the opposite end of the spectrum is relativism, that is the perspective that 'reality' is dependent on the mind and that there are no universal threads outside of individual constructions (Campbell & Bunting, 1999 as cited in Hansen-Ketchum & Myrick, 2008). According to Hansen-Ketchum & Myrick (2008), different ontological and epistemological positions can be held when utilising visual methods, although it is important to be clear about what position the research takes. There are examples of photo methods used in research from realist and relativist perspectives (see Hansen-Ketchum & Myrick, 2008 for examples).

By using the exploratory qualitative design described above from a critical realist perspective, the researcher was able to draw out the experiences of the young people and explore their experiences in greater depth than other designs may have offered, for example quantitative questionnaires. This approach was therefore deemed appropriate to answer the research questions of this study.

2.2.1 Participants

12 young people aged between 11-18 who identify as vegan were purposively recruited to ensure that they met the criteria detailed below. This number of participants is consistent with Gest, Bunce and Johnson's (2006) recommendations for a robust sample size in thematic analysis which was also deemed appropriate for a polytextual thematic analysis given the similarity in analytical process. All participants were recruited through

Facebook groups for vegans across the United Kingdom. After permission was sought from the group administrators, a research poster was uploaded (see appendix B.1). Parents contacted the author directly to request more information, except for two young people ages 17 and 18 who contacted the researcher directly. Upon request, parents and young people were sent the relevant information sheets and consent forms (see appendix C.1 and appendix D.1)

Inclusion Criteria

- Be aged between 11-18
- Live in the United Kingdom
- Attend an educational setting (or left within the last 6 months)
- Have identified as vegan for at least 12 months
- Be able to communicate verbally in English or with support from a trusted adult

A summary of the demographic information of the participants can be found in Figure 2.1. Pseudonyms are used for the purpose of confidentiality.

Name	Age	Gender (as identified with)	Area of residence	Length of time being vegan	Part of vegan household?
Claire	14	Female	Essex	2 years	Yes
Karen	16	Female	Norfolk	2 years	Mostly with the exception of 1 person
Abigail	11	Female	Suffolk	4 years	Mostly with the exception of 1 person
Toby	12	Male	South East	3 years	Yes
Richard	16	Male	Essex	14 months	Yes
Lucy	17	Female	Dorset	3 years 3 months	Yes
Rachel	18	Female	Bristol	5 years	No
Sarah	15	Female	Essex	2 years	Yes
Ben	17	Male	Essex	2 years +	Yes
Harry	13	Male	Norfolk	3 years +	Yes
Trinity	14	Female	North East	3+ years	No
Luke	13	Male	South East	2+ years	No

Figure 2.1: Participant information

2.2.2 Data Collection and Procedure

Once participants and parents, where necessary, returned the consent forms, the participants were invited to have a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams (due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19) between May and October 2021 at a convenient time for them and the researcher. Prior to the interview, participants were invited to take or create some images that represented their experiences of being a young vegan in education. Please see the participants information sheet that was sent to participants (see appendix C.1 for parental information sheet and appendix D.1 for under 16s) including the conditions of creating images (see appendix E.1). Due to ethical concerns, participants were asked to ensure that they and others were not in the images or any other identifiable places (see appendix E.1). The purpose of the images was to enable the young people to deepen discussions and to offer an opportunity to bridge a gap between the participants' word and mine (Harper, 2002). These images were subsequently used in the analysis, which is detailed further below. The images were uploaded to a secure OneDrive folder which the researcher sent to them via email prior to the interview.

Each interview began with an introduction, a reminder of the purpose of the study and an opportunity to ask any questions, followed by verbal consent to participate. The young people were then asked demographic questions including age, gender, region in which they live, length of time identifying as vegan and whether they live in a fully vegan household (refer to interview schedule in appendix F.1). The researcher then shared the images (for those that had uploaded some to the secure folder) on the screen and the young person was invited to talk about the image (what it represented, what it meant to them and how it related to their educational experiences). Questions from the interview schedule were asked if they were not already answered directly through the young people talking about the image. Out of the 12 participants, three did not create images for differing reasons; one did not fully understand the purpose, and the others simply did not want to. They were given the option to reschedule the interview for a later date if they wished to have more time to create images; none of them agreed so the interviews were held without images. These participants were asked questions as per the interview schedule, with follow up questions and prompts as deemed appropriate. In total, 35 images were created and utilised in this study.

The young people were given the option to have a parent or trusted adult in the room with them while they were interviewed. Only one parent remained. Parents of the other participants remained in neighbouring rooms so that they could reach their children quickly if necessary, except for the participants aged 16 and over who did not have parents present. Once the interviews finished, the young people were provided with the opportunity to ask any questions and they were reminded to seek the appropriate support if deemed necessary, with a list of organisations available on the information sheet.

The procedure from initial contact to conducting the interviews is seen below:

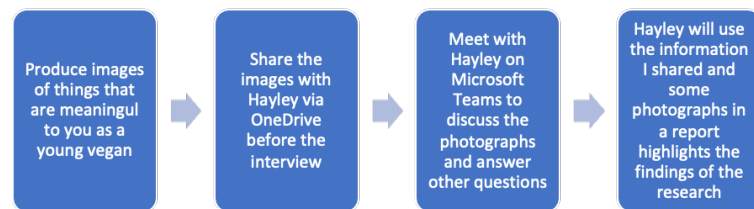


Figure 2.2: Procedure as shared with the participants

2.2.3 Analysis of Data

Data analysis is argued to be the most complex phase of qualitative research (Thorne, 2000) and how it is done can be transparently communicated to others (e.g. Malterud, 2001). Qualitative researchers have been criticised for omitting detailed descriptions of how data analysis was conducted in published papers (e.g., Tickett, 2005 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). In response to the criticism, qualitative researchers are encouraged to be clear about what they do, why they do it, how they do it, and provide a clear description of analysis methods (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006). By being clear about what assumptions and decisions were made to inform the research, researchers enable readers to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim (see example in appendix G.1) and the images were saved collectively in one secure folder. The researcher did not want to lose the richness that the images added to the interviews and felt it was important to include them in the analysis process. There is currently scarce

guidance on how to analyse both visual and textual data together. Typically, researchers that utilise visual methods in studies employ methods of analysis designed to manage the textual data alone, thus not capturing the visual aspect in the findings (Edmondson et al., 2018). In this study it was desirable to capture both the verbal and visual data in a combined manner to highlight the experiences of the vegan young people.

Gleeson (2011) developed an approach called polytextual thematic analysis to analyse visual data, which is based on the process of thematic analysis for textual data as developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Polytextual thematic analysis provides a useful framework for analysing visual data that is collected in research, and it can be easily combined with other data analysis approaches, for example discourse analysis (Farren et al., 2015) and thematic analysis (TA) (Schwark, 2017). Thematic analysis is an analytical approach which fits well with critical realism and for analysing interviews, and it also aligns well with polytextual thematic analysis. Thus, a combined method of polytextual thematic analysis and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The steps required for a thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke (2013) include: transcription, reading and familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finalising the analysis. Similarly, to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis steps (2013), Gleeson (2011) identified 12 steps to conducting a polytextual thematic analysis, including: familiarisation with the images by looking at them and taking notes describing key features that that evoke any themes (codes); making notes in a reflective log to capture assumptions and expectations; feel the effects of the images and describe them in the notes; collect together other images that may have a similar theme; write a brief description or definition of the theme; review all other images to see if the theme is recognisable elsewhere; collect together all images relevant to the tentative theme; continue until no further themes emerge; check the themes for clarity and write a new description, if needed; search for any higher-order themes; define higher-order themes, if they exist; make a judgement about which themes answer the research question. Due to the combined nature of the analysis used for this study, the steps as described above was merged to capture the textual and visual data as one source as opposed to two separate data sources. This was appropriate in this study as the images had been used in the interviews and therefore the textual data was closely linked to the images. Each participant's transcript and set of images were analysed in an iterative process whereby the researcher moved back and forth between text and images. This is

due to the belief meaning can be derived effectively through multiple sources of data together. Initially, the researcher familiarised herself with the data sets individually and wrote individual reflections for each image and transcript based on the initial thoughts and feelings that arose. This was particularly important as the research is part of the vegan community and therefore has her own lived experiences of being a vegan. The process of keeping a reflective journal throughout the research process can be described as bracketing, a means of examining and reflecting upon the researcher's engagement with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003), and it in line with the steps as detailed by Braun and Clarke for thematic analysis (2006) and by Gleeson for poly-textual thematic analysis (2011). The next step was to code the images and transcripts; codes captured meaning in the images and meaning in individual excerpts of the transcripts. The researcher revisited the coding process twice to allow for time between the initial coding and the subsequent steps due to the emotions and the influence of her lived experience that may have impacted on the analysis. The next step involved analysing the data as one source from all the participants images and transcripts; all codes were placed together to search for tentative common themes. The themes were subsequently revisited, refined and defined and named (see 'Findings' section for a theme map). This process was completed on Microsoft Word.

Baxter & Jack (2008) suggest that researchers involve other researchers to provide initial feedback on the analysis as a way of verifying that the research is staying close to the data. This was particularly important for the researcher given her close connection to the topic being studied. The research discussed the stages of analysis and the initial findings with her primary supervisor. See appendix H.1 for an example of the codes and the relative themes.

2.2.4 Ethics

This study presented with various ethical considerations, which were considered and addressed in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics. The School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia approved this research study (see appendix A.1).

Careful consideration was given to use of images in this study. To ensure that participants' identity remained confidential, participants were asked to ensure that their images did not contain any identifiable features, including their faces or those of others, names of streets or cities or any other information that could put their confidentiality at risk. This included the young people not taking

photographs while in school; instead, they were asked to draw or create images that represented their school experiences.

Although this research is inductive, the researcher anticipated the possibility of the young people sharing experiences of bullying and/or teasing or a disclosure of being at risk of harm to themselves or to others after engaging with the literature and reflecting on her lived experiences. Careful consideration was therefore given to the potential of disclosure of bullying in the interviews, and the safeguarding procedures that the research would follow. The procedure agreed included speaking with the young people's parents/carers for those aged 11-15 if any of the above was disclosed, or contacting the police directly if the young person was at immediate risk of harm by a member of their family. For those aged 16-18, the school or educational setting would be contacted directly to report a safeguarding concern if the young people shared the name of the institution, or the Local Authority would be contacted. There was one instance in which the researcher had to speak with a parent following a disclosure of recent bullying. The researcher was reassured by the parent that it was being dealt with by school in collaboration with the parents. Other disclosures of bullying were made although these were from previous experiences in other educational settings or experiences in the past that had been dealt with and were no longer a cause for concern.

2.3 Findings

Following multiple iterations of grouping codes to identify themes and refining the themes, the following core themes were identified:

1. Balancing Identity Disclosure and Raising Awareness
2. The School System
3. Intergroup Relationships and Interactions
4. Protective Factors

Each theme has subthemes, as seen in the diagram below:

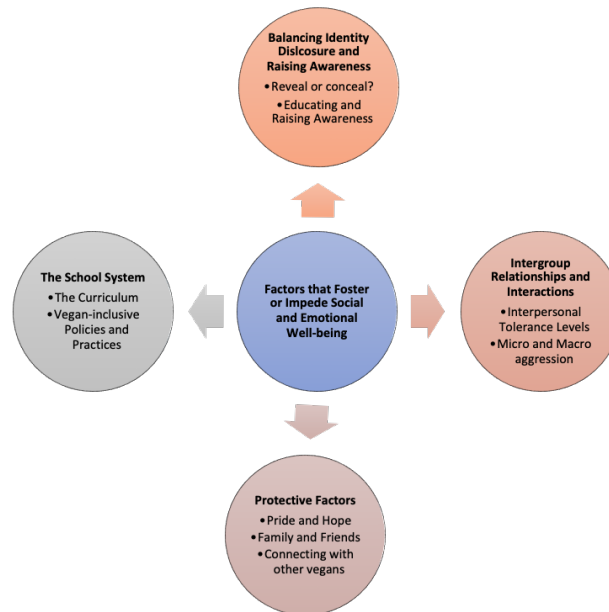


Figure 2.3: Thematic Map

The figure above shows in the centre ‘Factors that Foster or Impede Social and Emotional Well-being, which is an overarching theme that captures an idea underpinning the four core themes highlighted in the circles that surround the centre circle. Overarching themes are described as themes that tend to organise and structure an analysis as they capture an idea that underpins a number of themes; however, these themes are rarely analysed in depth (Braun and Clark, 2019).

Throughout the process of analysis and upon identifying the four main themes, the author also identified that each theme - relating to the experiences of the young people - either fosters or impedes the social and emotional well-being of the participants. This means that the social and emotional well-being of the young people seems to be linked to the four themes as described in depth below.

2.4 Balancing identity disclosure and raising awareness

The data analysis revealed that the vegan young people in this study view veganism as part of their identity and they each described veganism as a way of living for the animals, as Richard puts it: *“I realised there was a difference in my moral opinions. I think it is wrong... I think it would be wrong to kill humans for food. And then I was like, what is the difference between humans and animals that means we should kill one and not the other? And I couldn’t come up with a reason to justify that, so I decided to align my actions with my beliefs.”* Richard proceeded to share that he had discussions with his brother about

the difference in his moral opinions that he describes in the extract above, and that he and his brother decided to go vegan together which then prompted discussions with the wider family, resulting in others transitioning to veganism. *“So I talked to my brother about it quite a bit. We came to the decision together and then I suppose the rest of the family. And I have watched loads of documentaries but that was after I went vegan. But that has made me more, more like passionate about it but that wasn’t the reason in the first place... so it completely changed the way, erm, the way I looked at everything. So when I saw the...the, like, the abuse of animals before I was seeing the same thing but because I wasn’t vegan myself, I didn’t really think of it in the same way so it. Really opened my eyes to seeing, yeah, like...yeah, just...all areas of life you see animal products and it just really changes your outlook on it.”*

Richard describes a change in the way he sees life, particularly how he sees animals and food. This shift in Richard’s perspective contributed to a whole identity change, with him now identifying as an ethical vegan and actively trying to raise awareness about cruelty towards animals. Ethical veganism differs from plant-based which can be for other reasons, as Claire describes: *“To be fair in this in our house we sort of say, you know, you’re only vegan if you do it for the reasons of for animals (OK yes)... we take the mickey out my dad as he still occasionally says that he does it for...just for the health reasons and we call him plant based instead because, you know, it’s a bit more of an accurate descriptor to me.”*

As seen in the participant information table, each young person transitioned to veganism in recent years and have all had to navigate the change of lifestyle rather than growing up as vegans. Many of the vegan young people shared that they were the first within their families to become vegan, with family members later transitioning to a vegan way of life themselves. For example, Karen shared her experience of becoming vegan, as seen in the extract below:

“ So I had been vegetarian for a few years before that. One day I was in NAME OF CITY and saw a cube of truth and they were showing on the screens what happens to the chicks and the dairy cows. I was spoken to by one of the people doing it and he told me that being vegetarian is just not enough. So I went home and thought about it. At first, I thought that I was already doing enough and that being vegetarian was fine but after that, about a week later, I just couldn’t put the food in my mouth anyway and I said I don’t want to be a part of this anymore. So I went vegan...I was the first family member. My sister had been vegetarian for a while, since before me. I used to mock her about it because at that time I didn’t realise that animals were sentient beings. I thought eventually that I could do it if she can do it. Eventually after I went vegan my sister joined me after a few months and then my mum a month or so after that.”

Karen was then asked whether she felt that she contributed to her sister and mother transitioning to veganism, to which she replied: *“Yeah, I wasn’t particularly nice about the whole thing. I would put documentaries on in the house. Like Dominion. My sister definitely went vegan for the animals but my mum did it so I would leave her alone. So she was plant-based initially but then did become vegan for the animals. Now she is fully for the animals.”*

This suggests that Karen is vegan for the animals - what would be considered an ethical vegan – and that she feels passionate about sharing her knowledge of what happens to animals with others to encourage them to transition to a vegan way of life.

Sarah shared her experience of going vegan. *“Well, a couple years back, my dad got cancer and he was in hospital. I think it was sepsis. And he watched Game Changers on Netflix, and he messaged my mom saying, I want to go vegan. So we all did...”* What Sara described is her immediate family changing from a vegetarian diet to a plant-based diet for health reasons, specifically to help her father’s recovery from cancer. Those that are vegan for health reasons are not necessarily ethical vegans. Interestingly, Sarah later added that she had wanted to be vegan for several years. *“...a couple of years before that, I watched Earthlings when I was about a year 11 years old. I... we were vegetarian our whole lives before that. And when, yeah, when I was 11, like I said, I decided to watch Earthlings and it really, like shocked me. I asked my mom many, many times if we could go vegan, and she said no, obviously because we had my dad who's a meat eater. My brother is pescetarian and then we were vegetarians, and so it would be very difficult to maintain serving like three different meals every night”.* Here Sarah is describing wanting to be vegan for animal rights reasons since the age of 11 but her mother would not let her. Sarah shared how she found this emotionally difficult and was therefore delighted when her family finally decided to go vegan. This highlights how although Sarah did not go vegan first, she had wanted to and would have done should she have been allowed.

Some of the young people decided to go vegan without family support and some of their families were not very happy about their decision. For example, Rachel made a connection between animals and meat while on holiday with her family and immediately decided to go vegan. *“I was on holiday and they didn't have anything... It was like meat options and whatnot. And I just, I don't know, it just sort of clicked. I was like, Oh my gosh, I realised that milk wasn't like, mine, it's for a cow. I realised they didn't just give it, they actually exploited these cows. And then I was like, that's decided, literally split second. Okay, I'm not going to do that anymore. And I just went vegan. I was with my dad and my brother and they're big meat eaters so they weren't too happy. My dad, he kept on getting like, he wasn't happy. He's got there at last but it's taken about 2 years to fully accept it. And he used to be like, why don't*

you just try a bit of this? Why don't you just have, it's already dead? You can just eat?" This extract shows that Rachel made the decision to go vegan for ethical reasons without the support from her family.

The young people discussed the ways in which they share – or not - their vegan identity with others, particularly peers at school, while also raising awareness of veganism. There appears to be a balance between how much, if at all, the young people disclose their vegan identity and how they raise awareness. For some young people, this balance is not difficult to manage, whereas for others it is. This theme suggests that navigating a vegan identity is not simple for all. This theme is separated into 2 subthemes as seen below.

2.4.1 Reveal or Conceal?

Some participants did not experience any difficulties sharing their new way of living with others, for example as Karen describes: *"Going back to school with friends... it was, I think it just came around naturally when they were like why don't you go and get lunches? And I was like, Oh I'm vegan now and there isn't much selection. There wasn't much of a reaction as I said earlier. I think it was...it wasn't like, everyone listen – I'm vegan. It was just like in conversation, you know?"* For Karen and other young people, their vegan identity was not one they felt they needed to be quiet about or ashamed of. Some young people described not sharing their new way of living straight away as they did not feel it necessary, so they therefore remained quiet about it. For example, Toby said: *"I was a bit quiet about it at first because people already knew I was a vegetarian. I didn't really make too much of a fuss about it. So I kept that quiet for a bit until somebody asked what was in a cookie or in my food because it looks weird. So then I explained that to them and explained now that I have become vegan."* This suggests that for some young people, veganism is not a part of them they feel the need to announce or hide, but rather share as and when the subject arises.

For other vegan young people, concealing their vegan identity as much as possible is the preferred option. The reasons for doing so are related to the young people's assumptions that others will think about them differently due to misconceptions about vegans and veganism, not feeling understood by others, or due to previous negative experiences of being mocked, judged or bullied (these experiences are captured in depth in the subtheme Intergroup Relationships and Interactions). The image below captures what several young people described

as feeling suffocated by peers and friends, as described by Sarah: *“I found this one myself online and gets kind of resonate with me with the fact of kind of being pulled back on and suffocated by that being society or by my peers in school... nobody understands my point of view, and what’s right from wrong. And it it really does take a toll on me a lot.”*



Figure 2.4: Image from Participant 11

For example Claire talks about hiding her vegan identity in college, which was difficult for her to do but felt necessary at the time.

“That’s what I did first when I went to college. I didn’t talk about it for ages, and I wouldn’t wear any activism related clothing. It is really hard concealing that part of my identity and it felt like I was being quite secretive of something that isn’t even bad. It felt quite unnecessary, but it felt necessary at the same time too because I knew people would see me completely differently. I know most people my age aren’t doing activism but, erm, I am still very similar to them in other ways. It’s so hard.”

Claire describes not talking about being vegan for a long time and not wearing the type of clothing she would have liked to as her clothing would have informed others that she was vegan. She describes feeling secretive about her identity, an identity that is not bad and had the one purpose of trying to cause the least possible harm to animals. As a young vegan activist, this young person felt that she would be perceived differently to others her age although she wanted people to know that she was still like them, a young person with dreams and ambitions, despite her different beliefs. She proceeded to say *“It’s hard actually not talking about it because this is my whole life. This is what I do.”* This young person later explained that she eventually left college due to feeling isolated and misunderstood by staff and peers. For this participant, her vegan identity, she believes, caused her difficulties in feeling that she belonged and ultimately led her to seek out a vegan activist group in her local area where she could express her identity freely without any perceived judgement. Other young people also described not talking about veganism at all, even when people know they are vegan, unless they are asked questions about it, for example Trinity who stated that *“I never talk about it to anybody at all. Unless it’s someone who questions me about it and asked me a question. And that’s the only time I ever talk about it.”*

These feelings were captured in Richard’s selection of the below image, who described being a young person just like others, yet with a unique identity that made him stand out despite not wanting to. Richard elaborated by saying *“Nobody knows, erm, I’m vegan just by looking at me... but as soon as people do know I’m automatically different to them, like I stand out. I don’t like it. I try to not let people know I’m vegan cause I’m a kid just like them really.”*

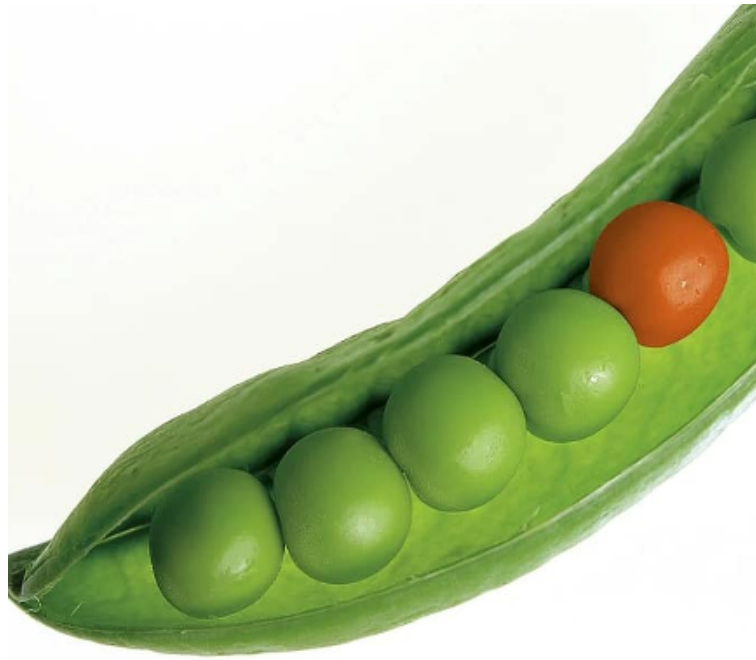


Figure 2.5: Image from Richard; Creator Unknown (a) (n.d.)

For other young people, concealing their vegan identity feels like hiding a key part of them which they are not comfortable doing. Abigail for example expressed, *“Yeah, I think being really open about your beliefs is the best way. Not specifically just for veganism. Just being open about what you believe in and talking to people about it.”*

Not only did participants talk about whether they should reveal or conceal their vegan identity, but some also described concealing activities they engage in, such as activism and having rescue animals, or not taking part in activities due to concerns about how they will be perceived by others for doing so or what the consequences might be. Claire had extreme fears of something bad happening to her rescue chickens if people found out about them. Because of this she hid that aspect of her life from others, which contributed to feelings of being different, of hiding who she was and having difficulty in connecting with people who do not share the same beliefs as she does.

“I have some chickens who I don’t tell anybody about because I want to keep them as safe as possible. There are some people who will seek them out. . . That’s another thing I have to hide about myself out of fear, things that I think are interesting. I couldn’t tell anybody, and people don’t see them as being sentient beings, they just see them as food.”

2.4.2 Educating and Raising Awareness

This subtheme emerged from the young people's experiences of feeling a need to 'educate the uneducated' on animal exploitation and the impact diet has on human health and the environment. However, they also described finding a balance between educating and raising awareness and managing the exposure of their vegan identity, which can result in difficulties with some people. For example, Toby described wishing he could do more activism and attend more protests to raise awareness to be there for the animals. He explained that he could not do that because his parents would not let him. When asked how he felt that doing activism and protesting would impact his life, he shared the following: *"Kind of. I feel like I would have more pressure and be shamed a bit more by non-vegans. It's kind of finding a balance between speaking up about it and not having problems with people, especially at school."*

The image below was shared by a young person who engages in peaceful activism; the image captures the young person's beliefs about the consumption of animals as wrong and shows the passion he feels for encouraging critical thinking in others. This type of activism is done outside of school hours and therefore has minimal impact on his educational experiences as he is able to keep the two separate.



Figure 2.6: Image from Ben

Ben described veganism as the bare minimum and gave the example of being racist vs being anti-racist to explain why vegans should actively stop animal cruelty. *"I think that being vegan is the bare minimum, not. . . it's like if you are not racist, that is the bare minimum. So not paying for animals to be*

abused, that's not a good thing by itself. You need to be actively trying to stop it."

For this young people, educating and raising awareness on vegan related topics is essential if the vegan community want the world to gradually become more vegan as a whole. This young person later described the importance of actively trying to educate and raise awareness while also looking after oneself. He talked about wishing he could be doing more but not letting it consume his whole life "because that will have a... too much of a negative impact on me" There seems to be a careful balance between the young people educating and raising awareness and looking after their own well-being. Another participant, Claire, described how exhausting educating and raising awareness can be, particularly due to the frustration the young people feel when others do not listen or show an interest in learning.

"Yeah. It can be exhausting. Especially when I'm talking to certain people and they just... they are using the same arguments that just don't make any sense. That can be definitely annoying. There are other people you can talk to about it though. If you talk to 100 people and 2 of them change and go vegan, or even if some of them eat less meat then that's still having a positive impact. I mean, I don't get burnout about talking about it in general, but to specific people it is very frustrating when they just won't listen."

To educate and raise awareness, the young people described needing to be educated themselves so that they have factual information to share and appropriate answers to questions. As Rachel puts it, *"I think at the start, I tried to always be very come back with more facts, come back with more facts for like, at one point I was a vegan encyclopedia and I had absorbed so much information."* Rachel described feeling like a vegan encyclopedia give the amount of information she had learnt about veganism so that felt well equipped to respond to comments or questions about her way of living. As Karen highlights, having her own knowledge of veganism from talking with siblings and watching documentaries enables her to encourage critical thinking in friends. *"I still don't know everything very well either. I'm starting myself to talk to my siblings more about it and watching more documentaries. I'm starting to get more educated myself but at the moment I'm starting to talk about it with my friend which means that they think about it more."*

One young person described an opportunity he had to deliver a talk in school

about something interesting about him and he decided to talk about veganism. Having this option was particularly useful for this young people as it gave him a welcome opportunity to share information about himself and to raise awareness about veganism. Toby described how giving the talk went particularly well and it even reduced the teasing he was subjected to by his peers.

“I just think it went really well. They asked me lots of questions after. Yeah, and... before that, when I first turned vegan which was probably about a year before that, they wouldn’t really bully me, but they would make fun of me because of it. But after the speech they got used to it and they just accepted it.”

In addition to verbally raising awareness and educating others, the young people shared other ways in which they raise awareness or play their part in the vegan movement. Most participants talked about ‘food as education’, where vegan foods show non-vegans that vegans eat a wide variety of foods that are not the stereotypical foods people associate with veganism, for example fruit and salad. The young people provided accounts of when they have taken vegan treats into school or college to share with their peers and staff, which they used as an opportunity to raise awareness of plant-based eating. For example, one young person shared a picture of the newly released McDonalds McPlant Burger which she used to show non-vegans that vegans can eat junk food too.



Figure 2.7: Image from Trinity

For some young people, raising awareness through food is a particularly useful method as they may feel less confident to speak about the topic due to anxiety, fear of conflict, because they feel less knowledgeable on veganism, or other reasons. Thus, food is a simple yet effective way for young people to actively raise awareness of plant-based eating, despite it not capturing the

whole ethical side of veganism, as described by Harry below.

“... whenever I bring vegan things into school that people aren't really used to, so for example if I bring cake into school or cookies or a fake egg sandwich or something, people would ask me... want to explore further how it's made. And often people would think that it is really hard but it's actually quite simple. So I get quite a lot of attention from that. Just people asking how to be vegan and what else I eat that they could probably make. Er, I think my classmates like to try and make vegan things themselves, but they can find it hard because people in their families struggle with that... It feels pretty good to show people that there are so many good yummy vegan things.”

Another way in which some young people described raising awareness was by engaging in vegan activism. However, there were differing views about activism and whether the young people felt it was suitable for them. Some young people shared experiences of engaging in activism and disliking it. For example, Rachel described trying different methods of activism and not liking them, for example the ‘Cube of Truth’ and ‘Joey Carbstrong’ approach, because of them being ineffective.

“I didn't like that because I thought it was too in people's faces. I thought it was too... to start at that point is just too much in my opinion, and I don't know, it just felt, it did feel a lot for people to see that and I know some people do need a shock and that works for some people like it worked for my dad. But for me personally that would have made me just be like no, I think it makes a lot of people push away, I think like the best thing to do is drip feed, just slowly drip feed and try the three different narratives, so animals, planet and health and see which one fits with that person and then go with that.”

Most young people described ‘hardcore’ activism as not being appropriate for them due to the significant emotional impact it could have on them, for example going into farming factories to capture footage, and because of the impact it could have on their social lives and how others perceive them. Instead, some young people described engaging in peaceful activism, such as peaceful protests and attending vigils, where vegan activists stand outside slaughterhouses and bear witness to the animals who will be killed. The purpose of this type of activism is to show the animals love in the last moments while documenting what they go through as described by Claire.

“I do a lot of activism because I know that even though there are people who

won't go vegan there are still animals suffering. I feel that we need to be there for the animals, to show them that our species isn't all bad and that many of us do care. We don't all want to hurt them."

2.5 Intergroup Relationships and Interactions

This theme emerged from the participants discussing their relationships and interactions with peers and staff who are not vegan. The young people reflected on their friendships and social interactions since becoming vegan and considered whether they felt that being vegan had impacted them. This theme is separated into two subthemes which captures in further depth the experiences of intergroup interactions.

2.5.1 Interpersonal Tolerance Levels

This subtheme captures the difference between the participants' interactions with non-vegans. Each young person had a different experience and view on how, if at all, their relationships and social interactions were impacted by their vegan beliefs. Some young people felt that veganism did not impact their relationships at all, whereas others felt that it impacted them significantly. Relationships and interactions, if impacted, were impacted by both the ways in which the young people view non-vegans and how non-vegans view and behave towards vegans.

When the young people described their experiences and explained their views, three levels of tolerance towards non-vegans emerged: 1) acceptance of non-vegans); 2) tolerance of non-vegans (tolerating them as to not become socially withdrawn, with some impact on certain friendships and interactions); and 3) avoidance of non-vegans (no desire to interact with non-vegans due to differing beliefs – big impact on friendships and interactions).

"Also, like I would still become friends with people who are not vegan. I don't really have too much of a problem with that. I think you can have friends with opposing values as long as you, like... cause if you are friends with somebody you are more likely to be able to talk to them about it as well. So it is better in that respect."

Abigail, the young person from the extract above, described not having a problem with having friends who are not vegan and who have opposing views to you. This young person shows acceptance of people with different views, values

and beliefs. While the young person described being passionate about veganism, she felt that acceptance was important to enable respectful conversations about veganism which could lead to somebody making changes to their own way of living. Thus, being accepting is not only useful from a friendship and social interaction perspective, but also to raise awareness about veganism.

Karen described engaging in certain activities and being around friends when they eat animal products. She described occasionally feeling upset in certain situations and wishing that her friends were vegan. However, as she was a vegetarian for some time before becoming vegan, she feels that she should be accepting of non-vegans as she was once one of them. The feeling that she 'should' be accepting suggests that she is tolerating and trying to force herself to be accepting to not have an impact on her friendships. Having this mindset appears to help this young person navigate some of the difficult situations she inevitably finds herself in.

"Yeah, because if I was to like. . . if, not many of my friends are vegan so if I was upset, obviously it does upset me sometimes and I kind of wish they were vegan but like, just sometimes, but like if I did get upset then I wouldn't have any friends. I don't have to be accepting but I kind of have to understand because I was vegetarian for ages eating eggs and dairy because I didn't know so if they don't know, then I can understand, you know?"

Some young people described not being able to relate to non-vegans due to significant differences between their ethical beliefs and way of life. For some young people, it is incredibly difficult for them to be accepting or tolerating of non-vegans when they hold strong moral and ethical beliefs about animal rights, as seen in the extract from Karen below.

"Yeah, I. . . when I first went vegan, the first people were just interested but I could feel that I was drifting away from them. As I said earlier, I didn't want to eat around them. And then when I left year 11 and moved to college, I didn't have any further contact with non-vegan friends from high school. My friendship group definitely shrunk quite a lot. And at college I struggled to make friends because of it. As I said, I wouldn't eat around them. . . I struggle to relate to non-vegans. I don't understand why they do what they do when they know there is a better way to live. Why don't they do it? So I don't really give them the time."

Interestingly, the levels of tolerance also exist for non-vegans towards the

vegan young people in this study suggesting that this theme is bidirectional. The young people talked about some friends being fully accepting, others being more tolerant with the occasional ‘eye roll’ and others who do not tolerate vegan beliefs.

This image was shared by a young person who described her non-vegan friends as completely accepting and understanding of her beliefs. They are highly supportive of her when she feels upset by something related to her vegan beliefs.



Figure 2.8: Image from Abigail

“My close friends are absolutely and completely accepting but some other friends... people I’m more distant with, occasionally I get the roll of the eye. I think lots of people hear the word vegan and think – ACTIVIST!”

This abstract suggests that while some young people are accepting of vegan beliefs, other non-vegan young people perceive vegan young to be activists who are actively trying to convert people or ‘push their views’ on others. The young person from the abstract above described not actively trying to convert people although she did often talk about veganism as it forms a part of who she is. A roll of an eye alongside not losing any friends suggests that some non-vegan young people tolerate vegans as much as vegans tolerate non-vegans.

Yeah, well, I don’t think I’ve lost any friends because of it (veganism) but people do... people do get annoyed about it.”

Toby from the extract below described having some small difficulties with friends when he first became vegan although he feels that nothing major happened to him. He believes that his friends were tolerant of his vegan beliefs at the beginning but not fully accepting or supportive. However, over time they began to learn more about veganism, and they became accustomed to the young person’s new way of life and the difficulties stopped. This suggests that

the levels of tolerance vegan and non-vegan peers have towards each other can change over time.

“I wish that my friends, erm, when I did go vegan were more supportive but then they did get used to it and they were fine after a while.”

Toby

2.5.2 Micro and Macro Aggression

This subtheme highlights how the young people interviewed have experienced varying levels of bullying and teasing in education due to their vegan beliefs. Some have had overall mostly positive experiences with some subtle verbal and behavioural microaggression. Others have experienced more serious aggression in the form of bullying and teasing. Both micro and macroaggression has been experienced by peers and staff in their educational settings.

Some young people described peers and friends making comments about whether their clothing was vegan or claiming that they were not vegan for doing certain things. The young person in the extract below described feeling as if she was always targeted by peers who would make remarks relating to veganism. This can be frustrating as the young vegans already feel a burden to educate yet they try to remain hopeful, and having people making comments about their clothing and other aspects of vegan living can be draining.

“... They’d like to question if my shoes are vegan. And whether the perfume I’m using is vegan as well. ...so it’s always me who’s getting questioned for something that I know, I’m not doing anyway. Like, I should be worrying about that for myself. And you don’t need to because you don’t care about that. So I don’t know why they have to come at me.”

Claire

The frequent comments and questions from peers can be draining for the young people, with Lucy describing having to ‘shut people out’, referring to trying to not be too impacted by people’s comments, as seen in her image below.



Figure 2.9: Image from Lucy

In addition to subtle comments from peers, the young people experienced a range of ‘lower level’ teasing or bullying from staff members, as seen in the extracts below.

“P: They have tried to pressure me to eat stuff. R: Oh, what kind of things would they say? P: It’s things like... just like little jokes. Like, oh go on... them not really understanding why I have a problem with it. Just uncool things like that.”

Abigail

While most of the young vegans did not report feeling distressed from these experiences, they expressed sadness that it had happened, particularly from the adults who they should be looking up to and seeking support from when necessary. A lack of understanding of veganism from the teachers’ perspective seems to be the main reason staff make such comments, as they do not have the understanding of why a comment or joke may be inappropriate.

“So I had this biology teacher for three years and at the start of it he was mocking my veganism so much.”

Rachel

“I feel vegans are laughed at a lot more than vegetarians are because, erm, people see it is as being over the top. And even one of my teachers, my maths teacher would talk about it regularly and make comments about it.”

Claire

Some of the young people experienced more severe bullying, such as having meat and animal products thrown at them and being harassed and sent graphic images of animals being slaughtered. The severe bullying was only reported to be done by peers.

“I do remember after people hearing about it, people in the cafeteria would

occasionally throw food at me.”

Ben

The participant from the extract above shared that he did not wish to make a big deal out of the animal products being thrown at him. He did not wish to stand out any more than he already did and did not feel that his school would understand why animal products being thrown at him was so offensive. Instead, the young person tried to remain resilient to the bullying and ignored it. This highlights the distrust in seeking support from adults in school for vegan related reasons. *“When I was a bit younger and first went vegan, a few boys in my class started picking on me all the time. At one point two of them grabbed me at breaktime, took me to a corner, pushed me to the floor on my belly and tied my hands up behind my back with a skipping rope. They said lots of horrible things about me being vegan and just left me there. Fortunately the school dealt with it very well but I will never forget that day. It was scary.”*

Luke

“So I’ve had numerous amounts of hate and harassment, because of my lifestyle. Via Instagram, in person, in front of many people, like I’ve had a whole classroom of people... there was, someone had written veganism and crossed out on the board and beef is good, and a lot of very nasty things on a whiteboard. And I was in the classroom, and there was no teacher. And those people had done that. And it was very embarrassing for me. And then, I had had a lot of messages online, from people I don’t know of. And they had been sending me pictures of like, people cutting up steak and saying, like, oh, nobody likes vegans.”

Trinity

The two young people above have experienced more severe bullying and abuse because of them being vegan. Both young people have since had difficulties in their educational settings feeling safe, making friends, and feeling that they belong in the wider school environment.

2.6 The Education System

The young people reflected on their educational experiences by sharing examples of times when they have felt included and excluded in their educational settings and how they feel about the curriculum content and delivery in relation to veganism and other closely related topics such as health and climate change. This theme captures the two key areas that the young people talked about, as seen in

the subthemes below.

2.6.1 The Curriculum

This subtheme highlights the young people's experiences in relation to the curriculum and learning activities. Many of the older participants talked directly about 'evidence-based learning' whereas the younger participants talked about the same topic without labelling it. The young people expressed frustration that the curriculum is not always evidence-based, and that content is often delivered with bias. This was particularly prominent in lessons that cover topics relating to food, health, the planet and climate change, and ethics. In these circumstances, the young people describe feeling irritated at the bias and lack of evidence being presented to children and young people in education. In addition, it made the young people feel pressure to fill in the gap where the evidence was not given.

"Especially when it comes to like the biology side of things, it's completely glossed over because. . . well, it's basically propaganda saying that you know we are supposed to drink milk because it will give us strong bones. Dairy milk actually strips the calcium from your bones when you drink milk which is. . . that should be something that should be taught in schools, it should be in these adverts saying this is not this is not what it does, this is what it does and it's pretty bad for you. And the education system, the government, you name it - they don't seem to care."

Lucy

This young person expresses frustration that the education system and the government do not listen to the evidence around dairy milk and continue to promote it, describing them as 'not caring'. This young person went on to describe the evidence after having read research articles about the dairy industry and the health impacts of consuming dairy milk. Many other young people did the same; it appears that being educated on veganism and other closely related topics is important for them so that they can share the evidence where appropriate. However, even when the young people are educated on certain topics, they feel that teachers often do not listen or ignore their comments, as seen in an extract from Claire below:

“I was just being put down again by the teachers and it’s very frustrating because I’m trying to be able to just tell people what actually does happen. And if a teacher says something’s wrong, then people are going to believe the teacher because they’re older. And because they know the curriculum and everything like that, but it’s just not. . . I just want people and schools and the government in general, to stop ignoring the fact that we are here, and that what we’re doing is really good for the planet.”

Here Claire describes wanting schools and the government to stop ignoring vegans and the evidence around veganism for the planet (referring to climate change). She describes people not believing her over her teacher as teachers are the professionals, the ones who know the curriculum. This subtheme is therefore capturing how some young people do not feel that their teachers are giving serious consideration to their voices and their views.

“And then also the teachers in lessons. . . I was doing a health and social care course and they would never mention how you can get all your nutrients from eating plants. I would. . . it was really hard to sit there and keep my mouth closed. I would speak up a few times and that would just make me worry for the rest of the day about whether or not I should have said something. It was quite hard.”

Karen

The young people talked about how animal exploitation is so engrained in the education system that it can ‘brainwash’. As Sarah described, *“So like the teacher at the front in the farming. . . the farming lessons that was compulsory. . . And it’s sort of, they weren’t teaching just about farming and what it does to animals, what it does to environment. It was pushing why farming is good. And our lessons were all about, how can we help our farmers to get the most chickens? How can we get the most eggs? And everyone sort of took that in. It just shows how education can kind of brainwash you.”* Sarah created the image below to capture her experience of being in a farming lesson where she felt isolated and frustrated at the content.



Figure 2.10: Image from Sarah

2.6.2 Vegan-Inclusive Policies and Practices

This subtheme emerged from the young people providing accounts of inclusive and non-inclusive policies and practices in relation to veganism. These varied between the young people, although a particularly common theme was that schools do not generally provide vegan meal options in the cafeterias, or if they do, they are more expensive, not clearly labelled or have poor nutritional value. One young person shared an image of the standard vegan option available in her educational setting, consisting of a chips and beans. While the young person expressed gratitude for a vegan option, she felt limited and disappointed in the choice, and that it was unfair to have a less nutritionally balanced meal to her peers.



Figure 2.11: Image from Trinity

This experience was common among participants, as Sarah describes: “Unfortunately I have to take packed lunches. When I was vegetarian, it was ok but since going vegan I have to take my own food. It would be nice for a change to have vegan options. It’s quite simple to make more vegan things and I think it would inspire more people to try the foods and stuff.” Sarah describes wanting

more vegan options for her own sake but also to encourage others to try vegan food.

Other examples of non-inclusive policies were related to the uniform and expectations of the young people in school. Claire gave an example of a policy that was a barrier to inclusivity in her school: *“For example with my shoes. I didn’t want to wear leather shoes, I wanted to wear vegan ones. The school policy didn’t allow it, but I think that any of the individual teachers would have allowed it because they would have seen that I was clearly distressed.”* This extract suggests that individual teachers can be understanding and vegan-inclusive, but they are restricted by wider school policies. For this vegan young person, wearing leather school shoes was particularly distressing as it goes against all her beliefs and values.

The young person from the extract below described the inclusive practice in his school in cooking lessons, where he is allowed to use alternatives to meat and other animal products which have the same effect. When asked how that made him feel, he shared that it made him feel good because his beliefs are respected, and he does not feel he has to go against them to achieve in school. This is particularly important for this young person as it enables him to feel included in the lessons.

“I think it is quite good because some people would think, oh but it’s work, you have to do it. But if it goes against my beliefs then I think I shouldn’t have to do it as long as it is not a... a really important thing...”

Luke

When young people’s vegan beliefs are not considered or their beliefs values, this can lead to young people feeling distressed or avoiding lessons as to not be exposed to animal exploitation or activities and learning that goes against their beliefs. School or lessons avoidance can have particularly harmful effects on young people, such as social withdrawal, reduced academic progress and increased mental health difficulties.

” Generally, if I knew there would be a dissection, I just wouldn’t go in on that day because I wanted to avoid it.”

Ben

Abigail person described a drama activity in which her class were asked to pretend to be farmers and think about what a farmer would do if they were trying to produce meat and what the ‘ups and downs’ would be. This activity

was an emotional trigger for the young person, as it reminded her of what animals go through when they are bred for meat, and she found it difficult to stop thinking about their pain. “A couple of weeks ago we actually did something where we had to pretend we were like a farmer and what we would do if we were that person trying to produce meat. And that got me a bit sad.” She further elaborated stating that the teacher did not consider the emotional impact of the activity because she normally manages well in those situations. *“But I guess she didn’t think that it would make me feel sad because I’m usually alright with stuff like that. But just thinking about the animals and what they go through, that made me a bit upset.”* This was captured in Abigail’s image below, with two supporting friends providing comfort.

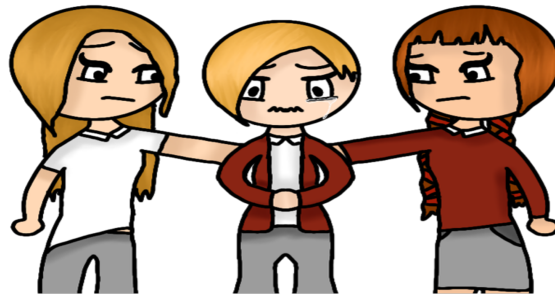


Figure 2.12: Image from Abigail

For the older participants who were considering their end of school, post 16 and post 18 options, veganism appeared to play a large role in them deciding on their first jobs, future careers and universities or companies they would apply for. For some participants, it was important for them to consider whether a chosen university, for example, would be able to meet their vegan needs, for example by offering vegan-only rooms or halls. This desire stems from many vegans not liking the idea of sharing a fridge with non-vegans who would most likely store and cook animal products in the same area as them.

“I went for a tour around a university that I’m looking at. And the guy he showed me around... I asked him, I said ‘do you think you could request a fully vegan hall for uni?’ because the idea of the kitchen just makes me want to puke because like uni students are disgusting anyway, let alone me and just the fridge state in the sink and everything just horrible... he said to me, he said well funnily enough, out of my friendship group I know about eight vegans out of about a group of about 25 of them and when you think about the size of halls

he said that's not an unrealistic thing to ask and he said he recommended that I email say, you know, maybe you guys should think about this. Because they do alcohol free halls, they do girls only halls, which are both tend to mean only for religious reasons why people pick either of those two, yeah, but they don't have vegan hall and I actually think that would be really beneficial."

Rachel

For other young people, looking into the vegan inclusiveness of the courses they were applying to was important, as they do not want to complete a course that obliges them to do something that goes against their ethical beliefs. This is therefore an additional thing for the vegan young people to think about when exploring their options, as it is not widely advertised whether a course is 'vegan friendly', and some courses claim to be 'for animal lovers' when they still engage in acts that go against vegan beliefs, such as visiting farms, abattoirs or doing dissections. This highlights the hope that more degrees and courses would be more vegan inclusive.

"I mean, I hope that this course will be okay. I mean, obviously, going through school, going through college, I've now realized that a lot of teachers have been not very respectful. So, I'm hoping that go into university, it'll be fine... I phoned up to check. And they said, Yeah, you have to do compulsory weekly dissection of pigs. And I was like, is it not optional? Because, like, I don't want to dissect pigs, but like, no, it's compulsory, you have to do it to pass. So I'm glad I didn't apply. But it's sort of like, I hope that they're not going to change something in this course, then be like, Oh, no, now the fish dissection's compulsory, because then I'll go and get my degree, I'm not gonna do that."

Ben

"Even apprenticeships, like I've been researching degree apprenticeships and I'm like, I didn't want to go there because of animal testing or because I want to do marketing and a lot of big hair care brands, makeup brands, you know, test on animals, yeah."

Lucy

2.7 Protective Factors

This theme highlights that despite the difficulties the vegan young people face at education, there are several factors that contribute to their resilience to manage a world which in many ways goes against their ethical beliefs. For the young people it was important to recognise the things that help them in their daily lives as to not feel torn down by the world around them. This theme is divided into three subthemes as seen below.

2.7.1 Pride and Hope

All participants described feeling proud of themselves for being vegan as they feel that they are making a big difference to animals, the planet and their health. Although at times being a young vegan can be difficult, particularly in education, they described the fight as ‘worth it’. For example, Richard stated: *“Just think I’m doing this for the animals, I’m saving lives and that is huge. So you just keep on doing it. Even if you’re having a hard time, it is worth it.”*

One young person shared an image with positive comments she received after her story of discrimination at college and how she fought it was heard by others in the vegan community. By writing down the positive comments and realising how much of an impact she had had on others by encouraging them to keep fighting for justice, she felt immense pride in her achievement for herself and for the animals.

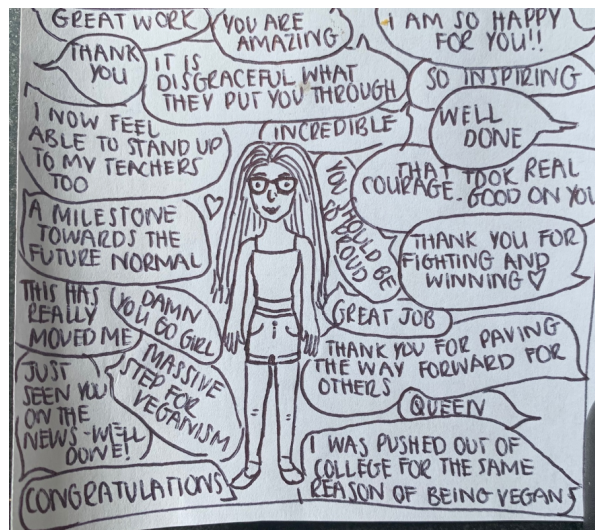


Figure 2.13: Image from Lucy

Not only do the participants feel proud of being vegan but they also feel proud of their achievements of converting people to plant-based or veganism or

making small changes. The image below captures the joy and pride the young person takes in showing peers that vegans eat a wide variety of foods, including cakes and sweet treats. In knowing that she is actively raising awareness and gaining a sense of pride from doing so, this contributes to her to feeling able to continue living a life that going against the current social norms.



Figure 2.14: Image from Abigail

Closely related to pride is the young people's feelings of hope; the young people expressed feeling hopeful that animals will be treated equally to humans and no longer exploited given how much progression society has seen in other areas of social justice. They also feel hopeful that with their passion for veganism and determination to make the world a better place, they will contribute to positive changes.

"I guess the fact that just everything. . . the, generally how, how progressive people are. Like things like racism and sexism, over time it does get better, and people become more accepting. So I think that logically, that will happen with animals."

Richard

"You are doing everything you can, and you have got the whole rest of your life to live like this and it's just. . . I just kept thinking about all the time I have got left and if I have converted 4 or 5 people already, what are you going to do with the rest of your life, you know?"

Karen

This pride and hope is particularly important for the young people as it enables them to keep fighting their cause without constant feelings of despair. While the young people experience sadness, distress, despair and a general sense

of frustration with society, remaining proud and hopeful appears to give them some relief and reassurance.

2.7.2 Family Support

This subtheme captures the importance of vegan young people having a supportive and understanding family network around them. This is the case for all young people, regardless of whether they are vegan or not, although the key difference here is the importance of having a family who understand and support their vegan beliefs. While not all the participants have fully vegan families, having close people in their lives who respect, and value veganism is crucial.

“Especially the meals. I don’t have to worry about separating stuff, like we just. . . I don’t know what I would if they weren’t vegan too. I’d probably feel like I was a hassle, you know, having to buy and make completely different meals. So yeah, I’m very glad we all went together.”

The above extract from Karen focuses on meals and how having a vegan family means that there is no need to make different meals for different family members. The young person described probably feeling like a hassle if the family had different dietary needs, which could cause a strain on the family. The young person here is demonstrating great consideration for how her home life may be different should her family not be vegan or support her vegan way of life. Abigail expressed being glad that her family transitioned together, which was common across other participants whose families transitioned to veganism with them or closely after them.

“I think it helped me quite a lot because most of my family were already vegan and I’m guessing that is why other people find it harder because nobody in their household is used to it.”

Even when the young people’s families were not fully vegan, they shared how understanding is important to support them. One young person’s father was not vegan at the time of interview, yet the young person described him as fully supportive by, for example, not consuming animal products in the home in front of them and buying vegan options for his daughter. Thus, living in a fully vegan household is not necessary to feel fully supported, although the preferable option for the young people.

“He’s fully supportive. He buys vegan things when he goes to the supermarket, and he won’t drink any milk or other things in the house in front of us because I have complained about that in the past. He knows we don’t like that.”

Claire

The extract below highlights how having a vegan mother and sister enables the young person to talk about vegan-related topics and emotions that she knows will be fully understood. Feeling that her emotions are valid and being empathised with is important to support moments of distress. While her wider family would not understand, having her closest family members support was a particular protective factor. This shows that having a vegan or vegan supportive family is necessary beyond just the eating aspect of veganism; it is necessary for the emotional aspect.

“I can talk to my mum and my sister about things. It’s so great I can talk to them about how I’m feeling. I don’t have other family members I can talk to.”

When the young people were asked about support available at school should they require it, many of them responded that they would not access support or that support was not easily available. Thus, having a vegan family or a supportive family to seek support from at home was key to supporting the emotional well-being of the young people. As the young people from the extract below suggests, having a vegan family made her feel as if she dealt with difficulties at school slightly better. This is because she felt understood by her family when it came to expressing difficulties related to veganism.

“To be honest, my school is pretty shit. There is one counsellor for 1250 pupils so unless you’re literally, you know in a dire situation then you don’t go because it’s just, there isn’t the availability there. . . but I. . . cuz I don’t know whether it was because I was living with a vegan family, which is probably what other people have said. It didn’t get to me that much.”

Rachel

“Obviously, I had my mom when she was a great support really, like just telling me that people are just pathetic, and that I should just not listen to what anyone’s saying and clean. They don’t have anything interesting to do with their life.”

Lucy

2.7.3 Connecting with Other Vegans

This subtheme captures the benefits of the young people having connections with other vegans, whether they be staff members, peers, or the wider vegan community albeit online or in person. Due to the difficulties finding other vegan people, some young people connected to other vegans through activism and described their activist group as family. The image below represents a young person engaging in a vigil alongside her ‘activism family’ who are there to support her at any given point.

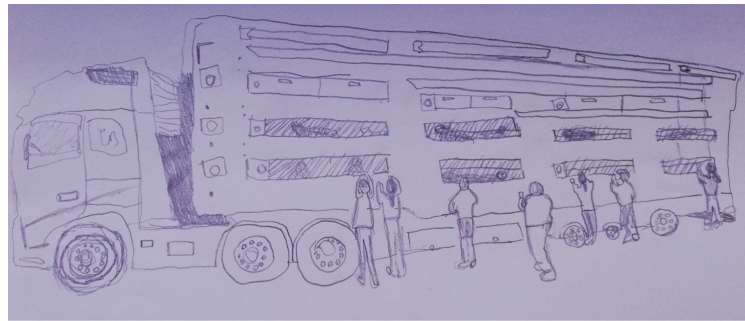


Figure 2.15: Image from Participant 1

Connecting with other vegan young people seems particularly useful for young people as they can share recipes and experiences. Knowing that there are other vegan young people in the world makes the young people to feel as if they are part of a wider group that is fighting for the same cause. This can ultimately reduce the pressure and loneliness they feel in their vegan journey. Sharing experiences can also open young people’s eyes to the difficulties other young people face which may be perceived as worse than theirs; while comparison is not necessary something to be encouraged, it appears to help the young vegans reflect on some positive aspects of their educational and life experiences.

“I think it was harder when I didn’t know other vegans. And then in the first lockdown, it started from a Facebook group... Yeah, so me and this other girl from (Name of City) started this vegan Instagram group chat. And now we’ve got 30 from there from all over the world. And that helped everyone kind of share their own past experiences and then that makes you feel better because you’re like, oh, okay, they’re experiencing that too. And some people are experiencing way worse.”

Rachel

There are challenges with meeting other vegans for the young people; they often only meet other vegans on social media and live far away from one another.

As Ben states “*you get all excited, you’re like, yeah, they seem so alike. And then you get to know them. It’s quite like either you click and then you’re like, you live in Australia, we’re never going to see each other. And a bit sad that you can’t meet up... so it’s I guess it’s bad.*” Thus, while it is nice for the young people to know other vegans, they expressed a desire to meet local vegans who they could potentially build a friendship with. This can be challenging as vegan young people are still a minority group and it can be difficult to identify vegans from non-vegans.

Another important aspect of connecting with other vegans is recognising that not all vegans share the same beliefs, values, and approaches despite them both living the same ‘cruelty-free’ life. For some young people, other vegans are described as like family. Claire shares: “*It’s extremely important. When you’re speaking out for the animals and there are so many people around who don’t care, you really need people around you who understand. Whenever I have free time I’m mostly around those people and they have become a second family to me really. I’m really close to them. It’s so important to be with people who are like you, or you might go mad.*”

On the other hand, Ben explained that just because two people are vegan does not mean that they will automatically get on. “*Although you’re vegan, and you think that when you meet other vegans, they’re going to be just like you, but they’re not. Oh, these people are so like-minded. They’re just like me, they’re vegan for the animals. And then you walk along and you’re, like, realise that you’re, you’ve met loads of vegans who are really opinionated and maybe given veganism a bad name. But then people back down because you’re like, Oh my gosh, you’re making people hate vegans because you’re being so like, attacking on people.*”

This subtheme therefore captures the benefits of connecting with other vegans although it is important to not assume that friendships will develop simply because two or more people share veganism.

2.8 Discussion

This study aimed to explore the educational experiences of vegan young people in the England. This was achieved through conducting interviews with photo

elicitation with 12 young people in England, which were analysed using a combined thematic analysis and polytextual thematic analysis. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study in England exploring this area of research.

The research questions were:

1. Do vegan young people view veganism as a core part of their identity?
2. What are the experiences of vegan young people in educational settings?
3. What influence, if any, does identifying as vegan have on young people's relationships?

Overall, following analysis of the data, four main themes were identified:

1. Balancing Identity Disclosure and Raising Awareness
2. The School System
3. Intergroup Relationships and Interactions
4. Protective Factors

The sections below summarises and interprets the findings in relation to the research questions detailed above. An interpretation of how the responses to the research questions link together is provided.

2.8.1 Do vegan young people view veganism as a core part of their identity?

This study suggests that for the young people that participated, veganism is a part of their identity in how they perceive themselves and share that understanding with others. Most participants reported being vegan for animal rights reasons and they hold strong moral beliefs that animal exploitation is wrong. Even those who went vegan initially for other reasons (environmental and/or health) now identify as being vegan for the animals (ethical vegans). While this study did not examine the difference between the identities or ethical vegans and other types of vegans, some research suggests that there are significant differences between such identities. For example, Greenebaum (2012) found that vegans for animal rights construct an in-group known as ethical vegans and outgroups for other vegans, such as 'health vegans'. By constructing such groups, ethical vegans create a standard for what makes one an ethical vegan and criticise others who they perceive and insufficiently vegan. The vegan young people in this

study all discussed ethics and what adhering to a vegan lifestyle means to them, thus highlighting their own unique sense of ethical veganism and standards that one must adhere to. This further suggests that veganism is a core part of their identity.

Further, most participants were the first to go vegan within their family, suggesting that these young people were not raised vegan or encouraged to be vegan by their families. Generally, the young people made the decision to go vegan themselves after making a connection between what they eat being sentient beings that are killed for human consumption, something they could not morally agree with. Thus, all participants identify as ethical vegans who view veganism as a core part of their belief system, and therefore their sense of who they are (i.e., their identity). These findings link well to Marcia's adolescent identity development theory (1980). As the vegan young people made the decision to go vegan themselves, it can be argued that they have actively evaluated their options (i.e., to be vegan or to not be vegan) and experimented with who they want to be and become, known as the moratorium status. During this stage, the young people decided that they wanted to adhere to a vegan way of life for animal rights reasons and they therefore fully committed to veganism, which can be described as having an achieved identity (Kroger, 2003). It is possible that for other children and young people who are raised vegan or only fed a plant-based diet at home are committed to veganism due to parental and/or societal beliefs, which could result in young people conforming to a vegan/plant-based identity without exploration of other identities. It would be useful to further explore this in future research.

All the young people described taking an active approach trying to educate others or raise awareness about veganism, while also navigating their vegan identity as young people. There appears to be a fine balance between how much the young people wish to share their vegan identity and feeling the need to raise awareness about veganism. The young people hold strong beliefs that they want, and feel is necessary to talk about for the sake of the animals, yet in doing so can put them in a difficult position in how their vegan identity is perceived by others. For some, this is not a significant difficulty, and they feel confident enough to be open about their vegan identity and to talk about it without hesitation. Others find ways to navigate the visibility of their vegan identity while raising awareness, for example by raising awareness through food. For some, the constant balance of trying to fit in and raising awareness can be emotionally impactful.

Veganism being a core part of the young people's identities is in line with previous research which explores food-choice identity. For example, Bisogni et

al. (2002) suggest that one's eating behaviours are highly intertwined with one's identity, shaping how they understand who they are as individuals and how they communicate that to others. Rosenfeld (2019) later found that vegans see their vegan way of living as highly intertwined with their identity. Thus, this study supports previous research, although adding to the literature from the point of view of young people. These findings also support the work of Griffin (2017) who found that a vegan identity is fluid and context dependent, and that people who are deemed to have an 'abnormal identity' may feel the need to hide or carefully manage their identity to avoid questioning, conflict or hostility (Goffman, 1963; Quinn & Earnshaw 2011).

Another particularly relevant theme is 'Intergroup Relationships and Interactions'. This theme captures the varied levels of tolerance the vegan young people have towards non-vegans and how the levels of tolerance impact their social relationships. Evidently, each individual young person has their own personal identity as a vegan, whether they identify as a highly accepting, non-judgmental ethical vegan or as a vegan with strong ethical beliefs who is not willing to tolerate non-vegans. In addition to their own personal vegan identity, it is evident that the young people identify as part of a wider social group, namely 'vegans', who are all fighting the same cause, despite the different personal approaches and beliefs. Interestingly, the young people described a sense of discovering what type of vegan they want to be and have actively tried different activist approaches or, particularly for the younger participants, would like to try when they get older and have fewer parental constraints. These findings are in line with Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1985), in that a person's identity consists of two parts: the personal and the social. In social identity theory, Tajfel argues in order to maintain a positive social identity, one must perceive other social groups more negatively. The other social group were referred to in this study as the 'meat-eaters' or 'non-vegans'. While the young people referred to non-vegans as a separate wider social group, they also recognised that they often share other social groups with the non-vegans. Thus, while some young people view non-vegans as morally inferior to vegan young people, they have to share other social identities, such as being part of the same friendship group, going to the same school or having a particular hobby. For some of the young people, associating with non-vegans is extremely challenging due to the significant moral and ethical differences in their belief systems.

2.8.2 What are the experiences of vegan young people in educational settings?

This research question is answered by considering all the themes and how they are associated. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the young people in this study have varied experiences in education. The theme titled 'The School System' captures two key areas that the young people reflected on which are associated with the overall curriculum, the delivery of it, and whole school policies and practices.

For the vegan young people, the current education system can often be troubling due to the perceived level of 'brainwashing' that children and young people are exposed to in relation to learning about food and eating, farming, human health and climate change. As described in the subtheme 'Educating and Raising Awareness, the young people feel a need to be educated on topics related to veganism and feel passionate about sharing that knowledge to raise awareness. As the young people believe that they are educated on such topics, they expressed frustration at the lack of evidence base being used to teach topics of great importance to them, such as those mentioned above. For example, the young people wish that the curriculum would be more balanced by teaching the benefits of eating a plant-based diets for human health and climate change, alongside pupils being taught about the traditional eating schemes that includes non-vegan products. By doing so, the young people believe, will reduce the pressure that the young people feel to educate others and raise constant awareness, as the education system would be taking on that role. This would enable the young people to feel less 'burdened' by veganism and allow them more head space to develop friendships, engage in learning, enjoy their hobbies and to live their young lives without a need to raise awareness whenever they can. While the education system becoming more evidence based does not mean all young people would stop wanting to raise awareness, but it may mean they do not feel it was a necessity. The young people also felt frustrated at staff members who discredit veganism by ignoring the young person's views or information, or publicly dismissing evidence-based information about veganism, for example in lessons such as food tech and biology. Educational staff discrediting the evidence-base for veganism and/or having negative perceptions of vegans is discrediting and dismissive, which is in line with the literature of veganism being discredited by mainstream media (MacInnis and Hodson, 2015; Cole and Morgan, 2011).

In addition to having a more balanced and less biased education system, the young people provided accounts of non-inclusive policies and practices which impact them daily, albeit to a different extent for each young person inter-

viewed. Food was a particularly pertinent example of where the young people feel that their schools are not inclusive; most young people reported no plant-based options, or if they did have vegan foods the available option(s) was more expensive, not clearly labelled or had worse nutritional value than the meat or vegetarian options. The young people did not describe being distressed or particularly upset at the lack of vegan options at schools; however, they deemed it an important aspect to reflect on in relation to their educational journey as they found it difficult to understand why schools cannot provide simple, healthy, and affordable plant-based options that all could enjoy. In addition to being inclusive for them and enabling them to eat with ease and comfort with their school and college peers, they reflected the value of eating plant-based for the environment. Many of the young people talked about climate change and how by being vegan inclusive can have direct positive impacts on tackling climate change.

Linking back to the theme 'Educating and Raising Awareness, the young people also reported that having vegan options in school could reduce the pressure they feel to educate others and raise awareness, as more young people would be encouraged to try plant-based food through a simple change to the school system. These findings link with the research carried out by Sakiz et al. (2020), for example that schools may lack inclusive approaches for all students and that schools' cultures need to build further inclusive communities. In addition to the above, the young people also experienced differing levels of bullying, teasing and mocking by peers and staff while in the educational establishment and outside, for example online. This is evidenced in the theme 'Intergroup Relationships and Interactions' under the subtheme 'Micro and macro aggression'. The young people viewed their vegan identity, or their way of life, as the core reason that they experienced bullying and teasing. Many of the young people tried to remain resilient to the bullying and avoided seeking support in school due to feeling that they would not be understood by staff or not wanting to appear overly sensitive. In some instances, the more subtle comments and teasing were done by staff members, which further contributed to them not wanting to seek support from staff. The bullying and teasing had varying levels of impact on the young people. Some young people felt able to ignore what was happening, although they recognised it was frustrating to have to do so. Others were significantly impacted by the bullying that it had an impact on their social, emotional and mental health, resulting in avoidance of lessons or the whole school and social withdrawal. These experiences are in line

with findings of research carried out with vegan adults in that they experience social difficulties (e.g., Fiesta-Flores & Pyhälä, 2017) as do other minority groups (e.g., Irvine & Fenwick). These findings also link to the literature on stigma; stigma is believed to begin with a labelling process (Goffman, 1963), and vegans can be given negative labels (e.g., extremist, activism, psycho) which leads to stigma from the public and those around them (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019).

2.8.3 What influence, if any, does identifying as vegan have on young people's relationships?

This research question can be answered differently for each individual vegan young person; as seen in the findings section, each individual has a unique experience. The influence that identifying as vegan has on relationships seems to depend on several factors. Most notably in this study, the levels of tolerance that the vegan young people have towards non-vegans is equally as important as the levels of tolerance that non-vegan young people have towards the vegan young people. The levels of tolerance found in this study include acceptance, tolerance and rejection. The young people that are more accepting of non-vegans and have friends who are accepting of vegan beliefs are more likely to see their relationships little impacted by their vegan way of life. Some of the young people described having to learn to be accepting and the process taking some time, although the benefits were increased social acceptance and enjoyment. Those that tolerate non-vegans attempt to be accepting; the acceptance can be challenged at times where non-vegan friends or peers engage in something in front of the vegan young people that they strongly disagree with due to their ethical beliefs. For example, many young people described having to emotionally prepare themselves for certain activities, such as food sharing, where they knew their levels of tolerance towards their non-vegan friends would be challenged. When challenged, these young people have different techniques to manage, such as reminding themselves that they were once non-vegan and that their friends are entitled to have different beliefs. It appears that the tolerance acts as a protective factor for peaceful relationships and is bidirectional, highlighting the need for non-vegans to be tolerant of vegans as well. Finally, the young people who reject non-vegans experienced the biggest impact on their relationships; in these cases, friendships became less strong, they drifted away from their once friends and they actively avoided interacting with non-vegan peers. In some instances, this contributed to social isolation and

withdrawal, avoidance of lessons or attendance to school/college, and an impact on emotional well-being. It is important to note here, though, that ‘rejecting’ non-vegans was not the only contributing factor to these negative impacts, as other reasons such as those above also have an impact. Furthermore, those that actively rejected or avoided non-vegans sought support and new friendships from the vegan community; it is therefore possible that the social isolation and withdrawal may be short-lived for some.

These findings are interesting when considered in relation to the literature on intergroup relationships and tolerance. Early theoretical approaches to tolerance either include prejudice as a prerequisite for tolerance, or state that prejudice is a separate phenomenon to tolerance yet include questions to gauge attitudes towards outgroups in the tolerance measures (Hjerm et al., 2020). Hjerm et al. (2020) reject the theory that prejudice is associated with tolerance and instead define tolerance as a ‘value orientation towards difference’. The findings from this study suggest that the vegan young people do strongly disagree with the way in which non-vegans eat and live their lives in ways which actively exploit animals. Whether the vegan young people prejudice against non-vegans is arguable; while they have clear reason for disagreeing with the ways in which people eat and live, they do not express a dislike for non-vegans for other reasons. Instead of prejudice, then, it could be argued that there are disagreements between strong ethical and moral beliefs. This is in line with Hjerm et al. (2020) and others (Allport, 1958; Walzer, 1997) that tolerance and prejudice are two distinct phenomenon, albeit related. Hjerm et al. (2019) identified three expressions of tolerance: acceptance of, respect for, and appreciation of diversity. While some young people were accepting of non-vegans, none of them presented as having respect for or appreciation of their ethically diverse ways of living. Instead, many of them viewed acceptance and tolerance as a necessity to manage their social lives and to be able to actively and positively interact with non-vegans, which also gives them the opportunity raise awareness. Thus, this study does not align with Hjerm et al.’s (2019) theory of tolerance.

2.8.4 Overarching theme - Factors that Foster and Impede Social and Emotional Well-being

The themes and findings of this study are all connected in a way that has been identified as the factors that foster and impede social and emotional well-being of vegan young people. The vegan young people’s social and

emotional well-being appears to be dependent on several factors identified in this study, including:

- Their individual level of ethical beliefs around veganism.
- Their individual coping mechanisms and protective factors.
- The level of family support, particularly while still living at home, for example the level of family support, particularly while still living at home.
- The tolerance levels the vegan young people have towards non-vegans.
- The tolerance levels that non-vegans (peers, staff, family) have towards the vegan young people.
- The level of vegan inclusive practice in educational settings.

This list is not exhaustive, and it is expected that further research will expand upon and further explore these findings. Ultimately, each vegan young person has unique beliefs, support systems, coping mechanisms and tolerance levels that will contribute to their overall social and emotional well-being. Alongside this, each vegan young person will live in a different area where veganism will be more or less accepted, or ‘mainstream’ which may impact peer and staff attitudes in educational settings as well as inclusive practice. Thus, this study highlights that while the vegan young people report difficult experiences in school for systemic reasons, there are also individual factors to take into account.

2.8.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the small sample size and its qualitative nature means that the findings cannot be generalised. It is also important to consider the limitation of the methodological approach used for this study. While individual interviews and the use of thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to answer how and why questions, findings can be biased due to its subjective nature. Adopting a multiple case study design could have been a useful alternative. Case study designs allow for in-depth investigations of individuals, groups, time periods or events, and they encompass a range of research tools, both quantitative and qualitative, to investigate a topic and provide a historical view. Case study designs are recognised as more holistic than standalone research techniques, providing a more detailed understanding of a topic. By using multiple research tools and capturing multiple perspectives, multiple case designs can reduce research bias. For example, a multiple case design could be employed to examine how different schools consider veganism

within their inclusive practice, or to explore the influence veganism has on young people's relationships. A multi case study design could also be utilised as a follow up for the present study.

Participants were all recruited via Facebook pages which may have resulted in a sample that is not representative of the wider vegan community. For example, it is possible that people who are part of vegan Facebook groups are more actively involved in the vegan movement. This may explain why most young people's families are also vegan and this may have skewed the findings of this study. Further, using social media to recruit discriminates against those who do not use or have access to Facebook, limiting the sample variation. So further research should be done with a more diverse sample, not only in relation to if young people's families are vegan but also in relation to ethnic, cultural and faith groups. However, this study can be used as a starting point in this area of research and further studies can be built on the findings to establish whether other young people have similar experiences.

It is important to also consider the extent to which the interview questions asked to participants were leading and made assumptions about their experiences. For example, participants were specifically asked to identify both positive and negative aspects of being a young vegan in education. While this encouraged the young people to reflect on their experiences, it also prompted participants to find examples of positive and negative experiences which they may not have otherwise felt important to share. Thus, some participants may have shared examples of 'negative' experiences to answer the question, yet it is possible that the extent to which the experiences were negative in reality may have been different. Another question asked was 'Do you feel that your beliefs and values are respected?' which assumed that the participants held vegan beliefs and values. It is therefore possible that the findings of this study could have been different if other questions were asked or an unstructured interview approach was utilized.

Another consideration to give is the young people's self-identification as vegans. The term 'veganism' has a clear definition although each individual has their own unique reasons for being vegan and every vegan has their own thoughts and beliefs about what is considered acceptable within their vegan way of life. In this study, participants had to identify as vegan; although most of the young people were vegan for animal rights reasons, some had other primary reasons. In future research it would be useful to distinguish between the 'reason' for living a vegan lifestyle as this may be associated with their lived experiences.

Another limitation was the wide range of ages used for this study, ranging

from 11-18. This wide age group was selected as it would allow an exploration of experiences across high school and college where young people are developing a sense of who they are and who they want to become. It was evident from the interviews that the young people in college had more mature considerations to reflect on, such as going to university and considering their future careers and vocations. Instead, the younger participants reflected mostly on their social interactions and experiences with less in-depth consideration of how this formed part of who they are or wish to become. Thus, a tighter homogenous sample may have provided clearer findings in relation to age. It would therefore be useful to narrow down the age range to enable analysis of each age group's experiences in-depth, as in this study certain interesting topics mentioned by participants did not become themes. Thus, having a tighter homogenous sample in relation to age could have provided clearer findings.

2.8.6 Future Research

This study has given some insight into the educational experiences of vegan young people across England. However, due to the small sample size it would be beneficial to build on this research by conducting a further study with a larger sample size. Further, the inclusion criteria for this study stated that participants had to be between 11 and 11 years old. The reason for this age group was to explore the vegan identity at an age when identity development is at its greatest. All participants were at secondary school except for one who was at primary school. While the experiences were similar and the data was not affected by this, it would be useful to further explore the experiences of vegan pupils by separating key stages of the curriculum. This would enable further exploration of whether there are different experiences at different stages of the educational journey.

Beyond the scope of this study was to explore the ‘transitioning’ experiences of young people, that is those who transition from a non-vegan diet to a vegan way of life. This study suggests that young people can (but not all necessarily do) experience frustration, sadness, distress, and isolation for reasons related to social interactions with peers and staff and a sense of ‘carrying the world on their shoulders’. It would be useful to explore further what the transition to a vegan way of life is like for young people and how it immediately impacts, if at all, their lives. There is some literature on ‘transitioning vegans’ that could prove useful to inform this future research. A study conducted by Larsson et al. (2003) found that adolescents who transition to a vegan lifestyle are influenced by one or several reasons of more or less importance; internal reasons relating to the reason for their transition and external reasons relating to significant others in their lives, such as family and friends. The study also found that adolescents have perceived negative and positive consequences of becoming vegans, such as the attitude of others, the support of family and friends, and the negative interactions with unsupportive family and other young people. While the study only consisted of 3 participants and was conducted in the early 2000s, its findings may still be relevant today. This small-scale study could be built on with consideration of the findings in the current study and could investigate how transitioning vegans experience the change of lifestyle and how their educational and personal journeys are impacted.

A key protective factor in this study was having family support and understanding, and most of the young people's families in this study were vegan. It would be worth investigating the experiences of vegan young people who do not have vegan families and how, if at all, this impacts their daily experiences in and out of school.

Based on the finding around concealing or revealing their vegan identity, it would be useful to explore through further research how a young person can feel empowered to not hide who they are.

This study has given some insight into the experiences of vegan young people's interactions with peers and staff which suggest there can be some difficulties due to bullying, teasing and levels of tolerance. This study could not explore to a good extent whether the vegan young people show micro and/or macroaggression towards their peers and school staff, although several comments in the transcripts suggests this could be the case. It would be useful to further investigate how those that show the most difficulties with peer interactions interact with others who do not share their vegan beliefs. This could be achieved through further interviews with vegan young people, interviews with friends and staff of vegan young people, through observational methods (although potentially more challenging) or through quantitative methods, such as through questionnaires. Positive peer interaction in schools has been found to be associated with harmonious school communities where pupils support one another, well-being improve, and aggression reduces (Gristy, 2012).

Finally, as some of the young people find living in a non-vegan world particularly difficult, it would be useful to further investigate whether some of the young people would be considered as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and exploring what support is most effective for them if the non-vegan world and their daily experiences is a key aspect that effects their well-being. It would be useful for future research to consider the effectiveness of whole school approaches (e.g., whole school training and inclusive policy development) through to individual approaches (e.g., direct school based therapeutic support or specialist external support).

2.8.7 Implications

This study has real-life implications for different groups. As such, the recommendations for implementations is divided for clarity of reading.

For Educational Psychologists (EPs)

EPs are highly valued professionals who are experts in working with and supporting children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). EPs are also well placed to work at a systemic level, for example by supporting schools at a whole school level to develop policies and adapt practices. EPs are also increasingly working at an individual level by working therapeutically with children and young people. This study has highlighted some of the experiences of vegan young people, with many of the current difficulties relating to the whole school and the wider education systems. This study suggests that schools may be able to develop further their equality, diversity, and inclusion EDI policies to consider veganism alongside other philosophical beliefs, which EPs are well placed to do. In addition to EDI policies, EPs could further support schools to reduce bullying and teasing towards vegan pupils by offering or signposting to evidence-based interventions. Further, EPs are well placed to assess and work directly with young people are experiencing SEMH needs, which may be related to veganism for some young people and require SEN support.

For Schools

As described above in the ‘For EPs’ section, schools could consider reviewing their EDI and bullying policies to ensure that vegan pupils are included and being appropriately supported in education. School staff could be trained to understand different philosophical beliefs – including veganism - and how to adapt to ensure that no pupil feels excluded or belittled. Staff could be trained and encouraged to have an understanding of how to respond to vegan pupils who experience distress related to their vegan identity. Schools could also ensure that young people have a safe space to voice their thoughts and beliefs without their beliefs hindering their peer interactions, for example in a ‘club’.

For parents/carers of vegan young people

This study suggests that family support is a key protective factor for vegan young people as they navigate their way in a non-vegan world and through an education system that can often feel that goes against their ethical and philosophical beliefs. Thus, parents, carers and other key adults in young people’s lives could endeavour to support young people throughout their transition to veganism and beyond. What support each young person will require and want

will differ, and thus listening to their views is crucial.

2.9 Conclusion

This study explored whether veganism is a core part of vegan young people's identity, what the educational experiences of young vegans are and whether their relationships are impacted by their vegan identity.

The findings of this study demonstrate that veganism is a part of the young people's identities, and that veganism is a moral belief, not simply a diet. The findings suggest that there having a vegan identity has a varying amount of influence on the young people's educational experiences and social relationships and interactions. Regardless of the level of impact, the vegan young people identified challenges, such as questioning whether or not – or to what extent - they should reveal their vegan identity, managing the emotional impact of being a vegan young person in a world and educational system that often presents non-vegan stimuli, experiencing micro and macroaggression from staff and peers, and interacting with non-vegans. These challenges could be reduced with vegan inclusive policies and practices, and tackling stigma surrounding veganism, for example by normalising it within the school environment and curriculum. These findings can therefore be considered in relation to the literature on inclusive education.

Despite the challenges vegan young people face, remaining hopeful and maintaining a sense of pride, alongside having a good family support network and connecting with other vegans are protective factors that support their social and emotional well-being. When balanced with an inclusive school environment, it may be possible to reduce some of the difficulties that the young people currently face.

This study offers insight into what it is like to be a young vegan in England in 2022, a population that is rapidly growing and yet currently underrepresented in the literature. While this study does not represent the whole English vegan learner population, it is hoped that these findings will enable further discussions about inclusion and identity in educational settings, with a broader focus that encompasses veganism as a philosophical belief. It is also hoped that these findings will encourage further research into veganism and young people, adding to our understanding of their experiences.

Chapter 3

Bridging and Reflective Chapter

Reflexivity is essential in research although it is more dominant in qualitative research (Karin et al., 2007). Palaganas et al. (2017) argue that conducting qualitative research changes a researcher in multiple ways, and that through reflexivity researchers can acknowledge the changes brought upon themselves as a result of the research process. Further, the researcher can acknowledge how the personal changes impact the research process. What ‘reflexivity’ actually means is less clear, as it is often poorly described (Palaganas et al., 2017). Reflexivity is a process and a concept (Dowling, 2006 as cited in Palaganas et al., 2017): a concept because of the level of consciousness it requires, including self-awareness and the acknowledgement of researchers that they are part of the social world they are studying; a process because of the process of reflection by the researcher of their values and being able to recognise, examine and understand how their experiences and assumptions influence the research process.

It is claimed that most researchers report strategies to enhance the rigor of their work, including the sample rationale; analyst triangulation; specification of problems or limitations; careful representation of analysis; the use of a theory of conceptual framework; and reflexivity, but much less so, among others. The absence of reflexivity in publications, Barusch et al. (2017) argue, could be because researchers fear that disclosing their personal characteristics could be unprofessional or intrusive. The purpose of this reflective account is to detail my own reflections throughout the research process. I aim to be as open and honest as possible, as I believe that reflexivity has formed a large part of the undertaking of this research. First, I examine the process of identifying a research area drawing on my research interests and identifying a gap in the literature. Then, I turn to the process of conducting a literature review, following by the formulation of my research questions. I then discuss the research paradigm

used for this study with a focus on my epistemological and ontological position, followed by a discussion of the methodology used (including the ethical considerations) and the analytical approach. I conclude with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

3.1 Identifying a research area

First and foremost, I did not expect to be doing my thesis on this topic. I wanted to but I was scared. As a vegan and somebody who is passionate about education, inclusion and adolescence, this research felt like the perfect fit for me. However, I was worried about people judging me for wanting to research a controversial topic. I originally proposed a different research project; it was a larger, more complex mixed-method study focusing on the link between food consumption and student well-being, another area I am passionate about. I wrote my research proposal and my ethics application, preparing myself to go. My course directors then asked to meet with me as they were concerned about how realistic my proposal was and they felt that it was not an authentic proposal. Ultimately, what they were telling me was that the proposal was not manageable and that they knew I had something else that I truly wanted to put my energy into. I am so happy they gave me the opportunity to share my true passion as I told them what I wanted to research I had it all planned out. I had looked at the literature, I had experience of exploring veganism qualitatively in my MSc dissertation and I knew exactly where the gap was and what I wanted to do. There was no rolling of the eyes and I have received nothing but enthusiasm and interest from those who have asked me about my project. There was some initial stress as I needed to re-write my proposal, my ethics application and begin my literature review in a short amount of time. However, the sleepless nights that I was having before due to feeling miserable about my original project were no more. I finally felt that I was doing the project I was destined to do. It felt incredible to be able to merge my passion for veganism with my passion for applying psychology to support children and young people.

3.2 Conducting a literature review

I found conducting a literature review and making decisions on what to include and exclude in the written review for this study difficult. As already highlighted

throughout this thesis, there is little published research on the experiences of vegans, and none that I could find on the educational experiences of vegan young people. For that reason, I included the information from the Vegan Inclusive Education (VIE) website and the information from their survey in the literature review; it was a starting point for considering what education might be like for young vegans. While I recognise that the survey is not an academic paper published in a peer-reviewed journal, it was a useful starting point when I was ‘wondering’ what the experiences of young vegans were. Given that the VIE website is regarding education and the survey findings specifically address educational experiences, I thought it worth considering as part of my literature review. I considered the findings of the VIE survey alongside research on vegan adults’ experiences and found that common themes included discrimination, social rejection, bullying and feelings of distress. One of the most noticeable differences was that vegan adult literature explored in depth the reasons why participants were vegan, thus highlighting how veganism is a philosophical belief and a part of one’s identity. This was not relevant to the VIE survey and I could not find other literature on vegan identities in children and young people. It therefore felt appropriate to explore this further. As veganism is arguably part of one’s identity, it felt necessary to explore the literature on identity development in childhood and adolescence. While I could not explore vegan identity specifically, it was particularly useful to engage with the literature on identity development in adolescence, to understand the concept of food identity, to explore the role of educational settings in supporting identity development and how one’s identities can influence their daily experiences. I found it particularly interesting when I discovered how identity development theory can be linked with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, something I had not considered before. During my engagement with the literature on identity, I reflected deeply on my own vegan identity as I recognise how my own experiences and personal beliefs and values may influence the research process. It was particularly useful to do this at an early stage as I was able to tease out any expectations or assumptions I held about what it is like being vegan. What helped me was the fact that I am an adult who has the power to make my own decisions about where I work, who I socialise and interact with, where I live, what I spend my money on and what I eat for dinner. As Bhopal et al. (2000) highlights, children’s power is generally constrained by adults who regulate children’s bodies and minds. However, Valentine (1999) argued that children do have the

ability to counteract the adult power that hinders them, although this ability can be limited. Thus, it is widely accepted that children are faced with unequal adult-power relations and therefore need to negotiate to gain greater control over certain aspects of their lives (Punch, 2007). Considering this made me really wonder what it must be like to be a vegan young person who has less power in their lives than I do. While I was not completely unbiased, I feel comfortable with the open mind I began the research process with.

3.3 Formulating a research question

As with all research, the formulation of a research question was a process that required reflection, repeated engagement with the literature and adaptation. As Agee states (2009), research questions are formulated when one has an intellectual curiosity or a passion for a particular topic, both of which align with my curiosity and passion for veganism and education. I initially developed the following research questions:

1. Do vegan young people view veganism as a core part of their identity?
If not, why? If so, how do they construct their identity in a non-vegan world?
2. What are the experiences of vegan young people in educational settings and out in the wider community?
 - (a) Does being vegan impact their daily experiences and well-being? If so, how and why?
 - (b) Do vegan young people experience discrimination or social exclusion? If so, how and why?
 - (c) What support, if any, do vegan young people receive to protect them from discrimination, inequality and exclusion?
3. What influence, if any, does identifying as vegan have on young people's friendships and school community dynamics?
 - (a) Do vegan young people feel supported by those important to them?

Agee (2009) argues that part of the process of developing research questions is to write drafts and reflect with others about the suitability of the research

questions. After further consideration and discussion with my supervisor, I came to the realisation that the above research questions were broad and leading. While I wanted to keep the overall topic related to identity, educational experiences and friendships, the additional questions felt unnecessary and too much to answer in one study. I therefore refined my research questions to the following:

1. Do vegan young people view veganism as a core part of their identity?
2. What are the experiences of vegan young people in educational settings?
3. What influence, if any, does identifying as vegan have on young people's relationships?

I felt that the above questions would enable me to explore first whether veganism is related to young people's identity and educational experiences which a key focus of the study, and whether being vegan impacted relationships with others.

3.4 Research Paradigm

As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), research paradigms consist of four elements: epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. Understanding what one's beliefs are in relation to each is key for upholding research based on a paradigm. I first explored what my own personal assumptions, beliefs, normal and values, as each are linked to different research paradigms (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), to determine what research paradigm would sit well with my study.

Epistemology

Based on the word episteme in Greek, meaning knowledge, epistemology is used to describe how humans come to know something, what is considered knowledge within the world, and how we know 'truth' or 'reality' (Davidson, 2000). There are debates about whether there is such a thing as 'truth' Some of the questions I asked myself were: Do I believe knowledge can be acquired or is it personally experienced? What is the relationship between me, the inquirer, and what is known?

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with one's assumptions and belief systems as a researcher, specifically about the nature of being and existence (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Example questions I asked myself include: Does reality really exist or is one's reality constructed by one's own mind? Is reality objective or a result of individual cognition? These questions were crucial to help me orientate my thinking about how I would approach my research and answer my research questions.

After exploring the two above elements, I found that my own beliefs and assumptions were that there is a 'truth' out there, although each individual constructs their own 'truth' and 'reality' through their own cognition, cultural and societal experiences. Thus, a critical realist stance underpinned this study; a critical realist perspective is based on the idea that objective reality does exist, but it can only be partially known and is mediated by individual perceptions as well as societal, cultural, and historical factors (Maxwell, 2012). Critical realists are concerned with deep understanding and are often drawn to qualitative methods to answer research questions, which was an appropriate fit for my research questions as highlighted above. By adopting this stance, this study recognised that vegan children and young people share an 'identity label' (that of vegans) although each child and young person's reality will be influenced by multiple contextual and societal factors and therefore perceived uniquely to each individual. The purpose of this study is to consider common themes and experiences of vegan young people, while acknowledging that each young person's experiences are influenced by their own contextual and societal factors.

Alternative research paradigms could have been used as an approach for this study, although they did not fully fit with my epistemological and ontological beliefs. One alternative approach could have been social constructionism, which focuses on things that are created through the process of social interaction (Taylor, 2018). This research paradigm is subjectivist and holds the position that all knowledge is constructed, including representations of physical and biological reality (Taylor, 2018). While I personally believe that we construct a certain level of knowledge, I also believe that there is an objective 'truth' in the world. For this reason, a social constructionist approach was not deemed a good fit and a critical realist approach was employed.

3.5 Methodology

Methodology is a broad term that refers to the design, methods, approaches, and procedures used in a research investigation (Keeves, 1997). After identifying my epistemological and ontological position, and therefore using a critical realist approach, I needed to decide on how to obtain the desired data with the appropriate design and methods to answer my research questions.

3.5.1 Design

As highlighted in the literature review and empirical paper, there is little research to draw on related to the experiences of vegan children and young people, and no studies that I found on the educational experiences. For this reason, an exploratory research approach seemed appropriate as it allowed me to explore the research questions and to help develop a better understanding of vegan young people's experiences. Exploratory research designs often answer questions that begin with what, why and how (Singh, 2007), which is in line with my research questions. The most common data collection methods for exploratory approaches include interviews, although surveys, focus groups and observation methods can also be used (Singh, 2007).

For this study, semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation with individuals was deemed an appropriate method, as it would allow exploration of individual experiences that could then be analysed collectively to explore shared experiences, thus identifying common themes. I recognise that there are disadvantages when using exploratory research methods, particularly interviews, such as smaller sample sizes than large scale surveys and experiments; this can make generalisation difficult. To tackle the lack of generalisability, in qualitative research one can consider the transferability of the research, which refers to the applicability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As described by Korstjens & Moser (2018), it is the researcher's responsibility to provide a thick description of the research process and of the participants to enable readers to make their own assessment about whether the research findings are transferable to their context. Thus, the transferability judgement is made by individual readers, not me as the researcher. It is hoped that the descriptions provided in this thesis is sufficient for readers to make their own judgements.

3.5.2 Participant recruitment

I did not find it hard to recruit people; instead, I had to reject many interested individuals. I gained ethical consent to recruit via social media as I felt that my access to closed vegan groups and my being part of the population would enable me to gain participants from a minority group. My research poster gained much attention, with many parents contacting me to ask if their child could participate. I was pleased to see the enthusiasm for my project, and it gave me the incentive to keep going. Unfortunately, many of the parents stated that their children were under 11, and my inclusion criteria was for young people to be aged 11-18. In addition, I had parents who home educated ask if their young people could participate. In these instances, the young people were the right age but another inclusion criteria were that the young people were in education or had only left a maximum of 6 months ago (this was for those who had perhaps left school or college recently yet still had recent school experiences). I had several parents who asked if their young people could contribute via a questionnaire due to anxiety or language barriers. Finally, I had parents who live outside of the U.K. ask if their children could participate. I reluctantly apologised to parents if the inclusion criteria were not met. Upon reflection, having to reject participants was an interesting experience. One of my main concerns was not having an interest, yet that concern quickly vanished. What was interesting was that I had not considered vegan young people who are home schooled and the reasons why they were home schooled. From the limited information I was given via emails; many vegan young people were home schooled due to experiences of bullying and due to an ethical clash with the curriculum. While there is most certainly much more to it, it would be useful to explore this in further research. Regarding the request to involve younger children, this was easier for me to make sense of. I was clear from the beginning of this project that I was interested in young people's experiences specifically because during adolescent years is when identity formation is most dominant. I wanted to explore how a vegan identity is experienced and I felt that younger children would not have been able to talk in depth about their vegan identity to answer my research questions. It would be fascinating and useful to explore the educational experiences of vegan primary aged children in future research.

3.5.3 Method

As highlighted above, semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation was used to collect rich, meaningful data from the young people. I believe this was an appropriate method as it enabled deep discussions with the young people. I could have used unstructured interviews to allow the young people to complete lead on what they wished to share. I did reflect on this when developing my research proposal. I came to the conclusion that in order to answer my research questions and ensure that the young people did not only focus on the negative or positive aspects of their experiences that semi-structured interviews was more appropriate. Having an interview guide to refer to was useful as it ensured that all the young people would cover the same key topics that would enable me to analyse and look for common themes, which may have been more difficult in unstructured interviews. Upon reflection, some of the young people found it difficult to talk about their vegan identity and educational experiences as they initially felt that there was not much to say about it. Having an interview guide enabled them to think about aspects of their experiences they may not have considered or thought useful to share with me. Using photo elicitation alongside the semi-structured interviews was an interesting and useful approach. As already described in the empirical paper, photo elicitation can help to reduce anxiety and intimidation, particularly for young people, and it can also aid communication and offer deeper insight into one's experiences. I began by letting the young people tell me about their images, what they meant to them and why they decided to share them with me. Some of the questions in the interview guide were already covered by what the young people shared, although I was able to follow up and ask further prompts to better understand their experiences. For those that did not bring images, the interview guide ensured that all young people covered the same topics. I particularly enjoyed the photo elicitation aspect of this study as I was fascinated by the images that young people had created and downloaded. I chose to not look at the images before the interview as I did not wish to develop any preconceptions about what the images meant or represented; instead, I opened them in the interviews and allowed the young person to share. I feel this was particularly important as a member of the population myself; I did not wish to be overly biased by assuming that an image represented something that I felt before hearing what the young people felt. Once the young people shared what they represented, I was able to reflect on my own initial thoughts and beliefs about the images as part of the analytical stage described below. Overall, I feel that the

method employed was appropriate and enabled deep and rich discussions about a topic that little is currently known about.

3.5.4 Advantages and disadvantages of conducting research online

The impact of COVID-19 has challenged us all in one way or another. I am not sure that words can express how much our lives have been impacted. The pandemic meant that my research could only take place online. Thankfully, this did not significantly impact this study. If anything, I feel grateful that I could conduct my interviews online and therefore reach children and young people beyond my geographical location. I strongly believe that I may have found it difficult to recruit the same number of participants in my local area. I personally found it useful to interview online as I could use a digital recording device and save everything immediately into a password-protected folder. I recall the anxiety of carrying consent forms and a recording device from interviews in my undergraduate and master's degrees. This anxiety was reduced by conducting the research online. There were several limitations of interviewing online: first, the internet connection and second, rapport building. In several of the interviews, either the YP or I had poor internet connection. This often resulted in one of us disconnecting from the call or 'breaking up' while talking. This made it incredibly difficult to maintain the flow of the interview and to then subsequently transcribe. One of the shortest interviews had such poor connection that I feel as though much rich data was missed. The YP was incredibly tolerant of the connection difficulties and me asking politely if they could repeat. Given how long it had taken for us to find a suitable time to meet and that the YP had already given me much of their time, I did not feel it was fair to ask if we could meet a second time. I reassure myself that I am not the only person who has experienced technical difficulties since the COVID-19 pandemic, and that I did the best I could under the circumstances. Rapport building felt more difficult than what I normally experience when I work with Children and Young People (CYP). I also have a son in the age range and feel competent in speaking with young people. Yet online it felt awkward at times, and I felt a need to talk a lot to fill in silence, to make sure I had been understood and to make sure I had understood them. Some of the YP were quieter, more direct and offered less information. I wonder whether this was simply their personalities or whether in person they would have felt more comfortable. I will not get the answers to these questions. It is simply interesting to reflect on

some of the barriers of working online. In the future, if I engage in further research, I would like to meet people in person, where possible.

3.5.5 Analysis

I was seeking a way to enable me to use the visual data in the analysis as opposed to simply using photo elicitation as a method to increase the richness of verbal data. I felt it would be a shame to lose the powerful nature of the images by omitting them in the analysis. The qualitative data, both verbal and visual, was therefore analysed and reported on using an integration of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) and polytextual thematic analysis (Gleeson, 2011 in Reavey, 2011) as detailed in the empirical paper. The thought of trying something new was exciting yet terrifying. Neither of my supervisors had used this analytical approach before so it was a learning journey for us all. Upon reflection, there was little information for me to draw on regarding how to do an integrated analysis. I sought example papers to help me understand how it is done and ensure that this was the right approach for my study. I had some initial confusion over whether integrating the two analytical approaches was necessary, as I read some papers that used polytextual thematic analysis as a single method of analysis for textual and visual data (e.g., Edmondson et al., 2018) while others described the polytextual thematic analysis as only for visual data (e.g., Tsang, 2014). I revisited Gleeson's chapter (2011) on polytextual thematic analysis to clear any doubts I had about the analytical procedure and from then on felt confident that polytextual thematic analysis was a method to analyse visual data – sometimes multiple sets – and not a method to analyse visual data and textual data. However, as Gleeson described, there are plenty of researchers who have combined polytextual thematic analysis with other analytical procedures, for example with other visual analytics (Presi et al., 2016), with multimodal critical discourse analysis (Farren et al., 2015) and with inductive thematic analysis (Schwark, 2017). This clarified for me that the polytextual thematic analysis would enable the analysis of the visual data I collected although I required an analytical approach for the textual data (the transcripts). An inductive thematic analysis (TA) was deemed the most approach fit for this study, as it fit nicely with the analytical procedure of a polytextual thematic analysis, with my research paradigm and is an effective method for analysing qualitative, exploratory data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I am so closely connected to the topic being studied, reflectivity was a large part of the research process.

I therefore had a big focus on reflexive

(Big Q) TA to ensure that I continuously queried my assumptions and the conclusions I was making throughout the coding, interpreting, and reporting process. This was a particularly good fit for this study. Upon reflection, I feel that completing this analytical approach may have been more successful with a larger sample than included a large range of images created by the participants. Several of the subthemes that emerged from the data were only apparent in the textual data, as not all young people brought images to the interviews. However, I do feel that the images added an extra layer of richness and depth to the data and analysis that visually captures the experiences. I am pleased that I included the images in the analysis and would like to use this method again in the future. I explored alternative analysis methods prior to deciding on the combination of polytextual thematic analysis and TA, for example using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA and TA have differences and similarities, although the final reporting of the analysis may not show any obvious differences (Braun & Clarke, n.d). The key difference that enabled me to make my decision is that IPA has the dual focus of exploring the unique characteristics of individual participants and highlighting the meaning across the group of participants (Braun & Clarke, n.d). TA, on the other hand, is focused on patterning the meaning across the group of participants. While either can be used to answer similar research questions about experiences, TA is more recommended when the research focus is on patterned meaning across the data set. As I wanted to explore the experiences of a group as a whole rather than focus on individual lived experiences, a TA felt the most appropriate.

3.5.6 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations were considered thoroughly for this study. An ethical approval application was submitted to the University of East Anglia School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee for approval.

Some amendments were required after the first submission for reasons related to the consensual participation of young people, ensuring their confidentiality, as well as consideration of safeguarding concerns. As I interviewed young people between the ages of 11-18, I had to ensure that there were two different processes in place: one for those aged 11-15, which included gaining parental consent and making the consent form easier to read, and another for those aged 16-18, who did not require parental consent and therefore required a more detailed

information sheet and consent form. I ultimately decided to ask for evidence of age for those aged 16 or over to ensure that parental consent was not required. This did not prove to be a difficulty in the study. There was some risk about the use of images in the study as participants may have wanted to take photos of identifiable places and/or people which may have put their identity at risk of exposure. For this reason, I wrote a guide to highlight what things were okay and what things were not okay to be included in the images (see appendix E.1). The young people were asked to upload the images to a safe folder in my UEA One Drive account to ensure that they were safe and confidential. All of the young people's names were changed to pseudonyms and the images were thoroughly checked to ensure that there were no identifiable features. I anticipated the possibility of the young people sharing accounts of teasing and/or bullying at school; as a member of the vegan community and a member of multiple vegan related Facebook groups, I have seen parents share accounts of bullying online which made me anticipate this coming up in the interviews. Due to the possible serious effects of bullying on children and young people, I knew that I had to consider carefully what I would do in the case of a young person disclosing something to me. Not only was this important to me on a personal level, but also crucial as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). As per the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) standards of practice for psychologists and the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct, practicing psychologists should 'understand the need to act in the best interests of service users at all times' (HCPC, 2016) and should always show ethical awareness of the engagement we have with others (BPS, 2016). As approved by the ethics committee, I decided that the best course of action would be to assess the disclosure before deciding on the next steps. For those aged 11-15, if a disclosure was made that did not suggest that the young person was at risk of harm to themselves or others then I would request to speak with a parent/carers at the end of the interview to inform them of the disclosure and encourage them to speak to their child's educational setting. If the disclosure did suggest the young person was at risk to themselves or others, then safeguarding procedures would be followed such as contacting the police and/or other relevant agencies. For those aged 16-18, parents would not be spoken to although the rest applied as above. I am glad to say that it was not necessary to follow safeguarding procedures as no concerning disclosures were made about current bullying. Disclosures were made about serious incidents that occurred in the past, although the young people all described the situation as being either resolved or from a very long time ago.

3.6 Limitations

While I am pleased with the sample size of 12, I recognise that this study could have been improved upon with more participants and therefore more visual and textual data. Some participants did not create images for the interviews for varying reasons. This meant that there were fewer images to analyse alongside the transcripts. I did not want to lose the richness of the images that other participants had created, particularly as the images add extra depth to this study, because some young people did not create images. I therefore had to analyse with the images that I had, with the full acknowledgement that should there have been more images to analyse my overall findings may have differed. However, as the analysis involved coding both the text and images and then analysing as one data set, I feel comfortable with the overall findings as the themes were apparent.

Another limitation is that the participants were mostly from completely vegan households and therefore had regular access to support, when required, and their homes and family act as ‘safe spaces’ where animal exploitation is absent as much as is practical and possible. As already noted in the empirical paper, several of the participants did not live in a fully vegan household may contribute to some of the challenges they face in their daily lives, such as managing the emotions of living in a non-vegan world. It would be useful to further explore the experiences of vegan children and young people who do not live with a vegan family in a separate study.

One particular limitation that I do feel disappointed with is that I did not explore the diversity of the young people who participated in this study. I had hoped to have a diverse sample to ensure that voices of people from diverse backgrounds were captured, which would ultimately add to the richness of the data and explore different experiences. I cannot comment on the diversity of my sample other than based on the information as shown in Table 1 (empirical paper). It is difficult to specifically seek out a diverse population when the population itself is still relatively small and hard to reach. However, in future research, I would endeavour to find out, as much as possible, about the diversity of the sample.

3.7 Contribution to knowledge and implication for practice

This research contributes to educational psychology research by introducing another area of inclusion which is currently under explored. As Lambert & Frederickson claim (2015), one of the fundamental roles of EPs is to promote and support inclusion for children and young people at an individual and school level. This study has highlighted the importance of inclusion for vegan children and young people, and EPs are well placed to advocate for all children being included. EPs are trained to support children, young people, families, and schools with a wide range of needs. The work that we do is wide ranging and, when done well, impactful. This study has highlighted some of the experiences of vegan young people in England; the burden of needing to educate others, the impact on relationships, the avoidance of lessons, and the emotional impact for some of living in a world which goes against all their values and beliefs. It will not be surprising, then, if some EPs work with vegan children and young people for reasons relating to SEMH. However, from this study I would also not be surprised if vegan children and young people who do struggle keep their difficulties to themselves for reasons captured in the findings, such as not wanting to be perceived as ‘different’ or out of fear of not being understood, bullying and teasing. EPs are well placed to work at an individual, family, and whole school level, and therefore can be involved in any of these suggestions.

It is important to consider how this research can be applied alongside other inclusive practice, particularly when educators already have many priorities. As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, there have been numerous social justice movements gaining traction over the last few years, such as The Black Lives Matter Movement and equality for LGBTQ+ people. These have prompted educators to adapt their practice and challenge their views to ensure that all groups of children and young people are treated fairly and equally. Educators must also ensure that the delivery of the curriculum is differentiated to the need of all students to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) have the same opportunities to learn. Without a doubt, educators must think of a lot when preparing and teaching, or in the case of EPs, when conducting assessments, holding consultations, or engaging in any work with families and children.

While the findings of this study are important to consider and implement, it would be unrealistic to expect that EPs raise discussions of veganism

unprompted during their practice. Each EP holds their own set of values and priorities. However, as Lambert & Frederickson claim (2015), one of the fundamental roles of EPs is to promote and support inclusion for children and young people at an individual and school level. As veganism is protected under The Equality Act 2010, EPs should therefore understand what veganism is and how it links to inclusion. It would be useful for EPs to receive further training on The Equality Act 2010 with detailed examples of each of the protected characteristics, including veganism under ‘philosophical beliefs’. By focusing on the wider legislation rather than just veganism will enable EPs to refresh their knowledge and learn about veganism at the same time.

When considering how EPs can apply these findings in their day-to-day roles, it is worth considering how EPs already promote inclusive practice in educational settings. This is achieved in various ways, for example through systemic work, written reports, consultations, and casual conversations with staff, to name just a few. By understanding veganism, EPs are well placed to talk about it as part of their already existing inclusive practice. EPs could consider offering a systemic piece of work examining the inclusive practice of a whole educational setting in which veganism is considered. For example, while EPs may not have direct involvement with vegan families, they may wish to consider whether a school has policies that discriminate against vegans and support them to adapt policies accordingly, not only for vegans but for all groups of children and young people.

3.7.1 Contribution to personal development and knowledge

I began this research journey with experience only at undergraduate and master's level, both of which are very different to completing a doctorate that consists of completing a thesis alongside working on placement. As a TEP, I felt comfortable and excited starting the research, as I loved engaging in research since completing my undergraduate dissertation, yet this research journey has tested me to my limits; I have had to learn new ways of working, I have had to be adaptable and flexible, and I have had to reflect more than I ever anticipated. I believe that I have progressed my skills as a researcher, developing new skills and building more confidence.

I feel that conducting this research has improved my skills as an evidence-based practitioner, which is crucial to practice as an educational psychologist; as per the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct, practicing psychologists must show competence in their area of work, for example by understanding advances in relevant psychological research (2018). Within the HCPC standards for practice, educational psychologist must: (3.1) keep your knowledge and skills up to date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development and.

Engaging with the literature on identity development in adolescence and learning about the influence of schools on adolescent identity development was a fascinating and useful aspect of the process that I can now apply to real-life settings, particularly as I have an interest in specialising in adolescence in the future. For example, the papers by Verhoeven et al. (2019) on the influence of schools on young people's identity was particularly insightful, as it enabled me to reflect deeply on the role schools play intentionally and unintentionally on how adolescents develop a sense of self. Since completing this research, I have considered deeply how the young people I work with on placement feel about themselves and how their behaviour and well-being may be linked to their identity development. I have worked with several young people who have been or are involved in gangs and I have been able to apply the psychology of identity and belonging to the formulation of those young people, thus aiding an understanding of their needs. I have also become more confident when talking to parents and carers with adolescent children that are exploring who they are, as I have a deeper understanding of adolescent development.

This study has impacted me on a personal level in many ways and detailing how in every way would be beyond the scope of this chapter. I truly believe that I am a better human being now than when I began the doctorate and this research process. I have become a better listener, I have learnt how to interact with people whose opinions and beliefs I may not always agree with, I have learnt much about childhood and adolescence that is supporting me to be the best mother I can to my children, and I have learnt much more about veganism. Although the process was one of the most challenging things I have ever done in my life, it was a worthwhile challenge and one I will remember forever.

3.8 Recommendations for Future Research

It is fair to say that there is still little research on the experiences of vegans worldwide. More research is conducted on vegan diets (plant-based eating) and the health impacts. There is also research examining the impact of eating animal products has on climate change. The research that has been done on the psychology of veganism has been mostly conducted with adults. To the best of my knowledge, no research has been published on the psychology of vegan children and young people at the time of writing this thesis. I hope that this study sparks an interest in further research being conducted on the lived experiences of vegan CYP as well as quantitative research to determine whether the qualitative findings apply to a wider population.

Based on this study and my reading around veganism in the literature, I would suggest the following areas as a focus for further research:

- An exploration of primary aged children's experiences of being vegan in and out of school. Do the experiences mirror those of older children?
- An exploration of the experiences of 'transitioning' vegan children and young people. Is the transition a period in which CYP may benefit from additional support?
- An exploration of vegan CYP whose families are not vegan, or plant based. Does have a vegan family make a significant difference to vegan CYP or not? What can families do to support their vegan CYP?
- A case study examining how inclusive policies and practices can benefit vegan students.

- Exploring therapeutic approaches to support vegan CYP who require emotional support.
- How do vegan children and young people remain hopeful?

3.9 Proposed Dissemination

I plan on disseminating this research through several sources. I recently joined The Vegan Society's Education Network, which develops resources for educational settings to raise awareness of veganism in education. The network aims to have its first conference towards the end of 2022 where I may have the opportunity to present my research. I am also a member of the research network at The Vegan Society and will therefore have opportunities to disseminate my research through this network, which may lead to further presentations at conferences or online webinars. I recognise, however, that those attending these conferences and webinars may only consist of those interested in veganism which may limit the extent to which my research is read. I therefore hope to public my research in a peer-reviewed journal such as the International Journal of Inclusive Education, which appears to be a good fit for my study; this is because the journal states that it is suitable for readers who work in areas such as curriculum and instruction, policy and administration/supervision in the early childhood, primary/elementary, secondary, further/higher/tertiary, and vocational educational sectors, student exclusion and disengagement, intra-cultural studies and social theory, all of which are relevant to this study.

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Appendix A.1

Ethical Approval

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2020-21

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Hayley Lugassy
School:	EDU
Current Status:	EdPsyD
UEA Email address:	H.lugassy@uea.ac.uk
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	2021_04_HL_AH

Approval details	
Approval start date:	18.05.2021
Approval end date:	31.05.2022
Specific requirements of approval:	
Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.	

 EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B1

Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED



DO YOU KNOW A VEGAN YOUNG PERSON AGED BETWEEN 11 AND 18 WHO WOULD LIKE TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BEING VEGAN IN EDUCATION? IF SO, I WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

My name is Hayley Lugassy and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia. I am conducting research into the experiences of adolescents who identify as vegan in the United Kingdom. If your child is a young person who meets the below criteria and would be interested in being interviewed on Microsoft Teams, please do contact me on the email below.

Inclusion Criteria

To be able to participate in this research the young person **must**:

- Be aged between 11 – 18
- Live the United Kingdom
- Attend an educational setting (or left within the last 6 months)
- Have identified as a vegan for at least 1 year
- Be able to communicate verbally in English or with additional support from a trusted adult

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact me via email at h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk. This research has been approved by the University of East Anglia Ethics Committee and is being supervised by Dr Andrea Honess.

Appendix C.1

Parent Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Hayley Lugassy
Trainee Educational Psychologist
23/03/2021

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong
Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

An exploration of the educational experiences of young people who identify as vegan in the United Kingdom

PARENTAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Thank you for expressing an interest in my research study. Below is an overview of the research to help you decide whether you consent for your child to take part. Please note that even if you consent to your child participating, your child will also be required to read an information sheet and decide for themselves if they wish to participate.

(1)What is this study about?

Your child is invited to take part in a research study about their educational experiences of being a vegan and how, if at all, being vegan has impacted their educational experiences. Your child has been invited to participate in this study because they are aged between 11-18, identify as vegan and have done for at least a year, live in the United Kingdom, attend an educational setting, or left one within the last 6 months and speak English well. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to let your child take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving your consent you are telling me that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree for your child to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your child's personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Parental Information Statement to keep.

(2)Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by Hayley Lugassy, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia – h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk

This project is being supervised by:

Primary Supervisor: Dr Andrea Honess – a.honess@uea.ac.uk

Secondary Supervisor: Dr Kimberly Bartholomew – k.bartholomew@uea.ac.uk

(3)What will the study involve?

This study will involve your child producing several images (e.g., photographs or drawings) that will help them to share and express their identity and experiences as a vegan in an online interview held on Microsoft Teams. The date and timing of the interview will be agreed with you should you and your child consent.

Your child can be creative when producing images **as long as they contain no identifiable information, such as people and specific locations, or any illegal items or explicit content.** If images do contain identifiable information, I may be able to crop or blur them, although this will be discussed with you first. There is no minimum or maximum limit for the number of photographs.

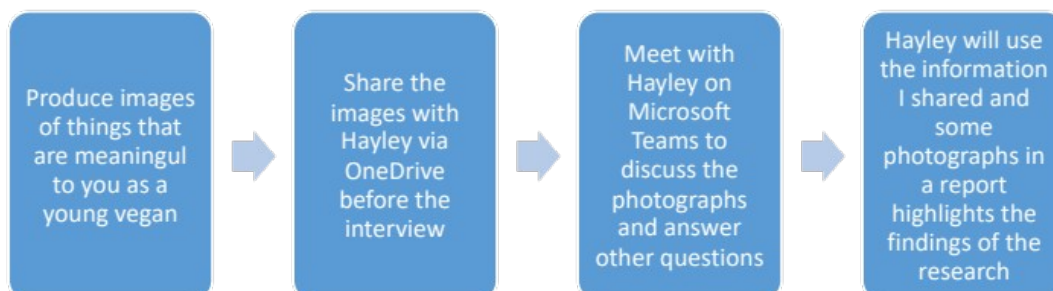
I will send you an email with a link to upload the images to a private OneDrive account which only I will have access to. You can upload the images there before the interview.

During the interview, I will share the images using the 'share' function and ask your child to tell me about the images while also asking them questions about their identity and their educational experiences as a vegan.

The type of questions asked include: Can you please tell me how long you have been vegan?; Why did you choose to become a vegan; What does veganism mean to you?; How does being vegan make you feel?; What is it like for you to be vegan at your school/educational setting?; Can you provide an example of something positive about being vegan at schools? What about something that isn't positive?; Do you feel well supported as a vegan at school?.

The interview will be audio recorded (no video recorded) so that the verbal data can later be transcribed. The audio recording, transcript and any images will be securely stored and later used for analysis and a write-up of the research findings.

1. Graph showing what is involved in the study



(4)How much of my child's time will the study take?

The interview time will be different for each young person although it is not anticipated to last longer than one hour (60 minutes). Your child will also be asked to produce some images prior to the interview which will be shared with me via OneDrive (please see previous section). The time required to create the images is expected to be minimal, and there is no minimum or maximum number of images that can be brought to the interview.

Once the interview is over, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript if you consent to this. Your child will have 2 weeks to read the transcript and let me know if there is anything they want changing or removing. While this is optional, it is additional time for your child if they wish to read the transcript.

(5)Does my child have to be in the study? Can they withdraw from the study once they've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and your child does not have to take part. Your decision whether to let them participate will not affect your or their relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future. If you decide to let your child take part in the study and then change your mind later (or they no longer wish to take part), they are free to withdraw from the study at any time up until when the study has been written and submitted as part of my training (May 2022). There will be no consequences for withdrawing from the study and if you or your child wishes to do so, please simply contact me via h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk to request the withdrawal.

Your child is free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information your child has provided will not be included in the study results. Your child may also refuse to answer any questions that they do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw your child from the study, their information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(6)Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Talking about our personal experiences can sometimes be upsetting, particularly if we have had negative experiences. As we will be talking about the experiences of being vegan, it is possible that your child will find it upsetting to talk about negative experiences if they have had any. Your child will be reminded that they can stop the interview at any time, take a break or withdraw completely. Your child does not have to answer every question and can refuse to do so without any consequences. Should they become upset or distressed, then the interview will be stopped and an adult – who should be nearby – will be sought to support them.

If after the interview you or your child feels upset and you wish to seek emotional support, please visit the following website for links to charities and organisations that provide support to children and young people: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/useful-contacts/>

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

While there are no direct benefit associated with being in this study, it may be a positive experience for the participants to discuss their experiences as vegans in educational settings. The findings from this study are hoped to be used to inform future research on the same topic, which may lead to improvements in educational practice and policy. This may, in turn, have a positive effect on the vegan child population more widely.

(8) What will happen to information that is collected during the study?

The information collected and used in this study will include your child's age, gender, country in which they live, the length of time that they have been vegan and whether they are the only vegan in their household, in addition to the photographs and verbal data obtained in the interviews. All data will be used as part of a wider analysis, including the data from other children who participate. The findings of this study will be used to write a doctoral thesis and may be subsequently published in academic journals or presented in presentations. The findings may also be used to inform future research projects. The only people with access to the data will be the primary researcher and her supervisors (please see question 2 for details).

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about your child for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019).

Your child's information will be stored securely and your child's identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published. Your child's identity **will not be identifiable from the write-up of this project**, with the exception to this being if you or your child wish to share that they have participated and share the images used in the write-up with other people, which could be traced back to the project. However, due to the use of pseudonyms and production of image guidelines, their identity will be protected. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if we would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Hayley Lugassy will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Hayley on h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk.

(10) Will I be told the results of the study?

You and your child have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell me that you wish to receive feedback by ticking in the relevant box below in the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary which outlines the key findings of the study. You will receive this feedback after August 2022.

(11) What if we have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee. If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Hayley Lugassy
 School of Education and Lifelong Learning
 University of East Anglia
 NORWICH NR4 7TJ
h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my primary supervisor: Dr Andrea Honess – a.honess@uea.ac.uk

If you (or your child) are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

(12) OK, I'm happy for my child to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it to me via email at h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I,.....,consent to my child
[PRINT CHILD'S NAME] participating in this
 research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Information Statement and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that my child may stop the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that my child may refuse to answer any questions they don't wish to answer.
- ✓ I understand that my child will be asked to produce images (e.g., digital photos) that relate to the experiences as a vegan and that these images will be shared with the researcher and may be used in the publication of the project. The images should not include any people or identifiable information, such as locations and addresses. I understand that if my child shares an image that contains illegal or explicit content then the primary researcher will follow safeguarding procedures to record this.
- ✓ I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect my child's identity, they may be identifiable in these publications due to the nature of the study or results.

I consent to:

- Audio-recording of my child YES ☐ NO ☐
- Images that my child produces being used in the analysis and in the write up of this project
 YES ☐ NO ☐
- Receiving a copy of the interview transcript for my child to review YES ☐ NO ☐
- Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
 YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

- ☐ Postal: _____
- ☐ Email: _____

Signature

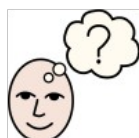
PRINT name

Date

Appendix D.1

Under 16 Information Sheet and Consent Form

Study Information Sheet



Hello. My name is Hayley Lugassy and I am training to be an educational psychologist at the University of East Anglia. I am doing a research project about the identity and educational experiences of people aged 11-18 who identify as vegan. I thought that you might be interested in being part of my study because you are a vegan. You can decide if you want to take part in the study or not. **You don't have to!**

This sheet tells you what I will ask you to do if you decide to take part in the study. Please read it carefully so that you can make up your mind about whether you want to take part.

If you decide you want to be in the study and then you change your mind later, that's ok. All you need to do is tell me that you don't want to be in the study anymore.

If you have any questions, you can ask me or somebody you live with to contact me via email on h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk.

What will happen if I say that I want to be in the study?

If you decide that you want to be in my study, I will ask you to do these things:

- Take some photographs of things that are meaningful to you and might relate to your experiences in school or college as a vegan. If you do not have access to a camera, you could draw instead.
- Once you have taken some photographs or drawn some pictures, I will arrange with your parents or carers a time to speak with you on Microsoft Teams. If you are 16 or over, I can arrange the interview without other adult involvement.
- You or your parents (depending on your age) will send me the photographs or scans of the pictures you have drawn before the interview.
- In the interview, I will ask you to tell me about the photographs or pictures and I will ask you some questions about what it is like to be a vegan young person and your experiences of education. If you don't want to answer some of the questions, that is ok. If you want to stop the interview at any point, that is also ok. If you say it's ok, I will record what you say with an audio recorder so that I can later write down everything you said and use that information for my research project.

Will anyone else know what I say in the study?



I won't tell anyone else exactly what you say to me, except if you talk about someone hurting you or about you hurting yourself or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone to keep you and other people safe.

Once I have written everything we spoke about in the interview, I can send you a copy of this for you to read and check you are happy with it. Once I have sent this to you, you have 2 weeks to let me know if you have any doubts or if you want anything removed.

All the information that I have about you from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully. I might use some quotes and/or some of the images you send me to write a report about my research project, which other people might read. You

should not be able to be identified as I will give everybody a false name and remove any personal details about you.

How long will the study take?



The interview might take about 1 hour and taking photographs or drawing pictures will take as long as you would like it to.

Are there any good things about being in the study?



You will be helping researchers to understand what it is like to be a vegan young person, which will hopefully help people understand veganism better.

Are there any bad things about being in the study?



This study will take up some of your time, but it won't cost you any money. You might find some of the questions a bit tricky to answer or you might find answering some of the questions a bit upsetting if you have had some bad experiences. I can always stop the interview or move on to another question if things are making you upset.

Will you tell me what you learnt in the study at the end?

Yes, I will tell you about the study if you want me to. There is a question on the next page that asks you if you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study. If you circle Yes, when I finish the study I will tell you what I learnt.

What if I am not happy with the study or the people doing the study?



If you are not happy with how I am doing the study or how I treat you, then you, or an adult if you are under 16, can write an **email** to my supervisor, Dr Andrea Honess – a.honess@uea.ac.uk Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

Please complete the form below to say you are happy to take part and ask your parents or carers to return it to me via email at h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk

This sheet is for you to keep

Consent Form

If you are happy to be in the study, please

- **write** your **name** in the space below
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I,[PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

- ✓ I know what the study is about.
- ✓ I know what I will be asked to do.
- ✓ Someone has talked to me about the study.
- ✓ My questions have been answered.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.
- ✓ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.
- ✓ I know that Hayley won't tell anyone what I say when we talk to each other, unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now I am going to ask you if you are happy to do a few other things in the study. Please circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you would like.

Are you happy for me to audio record your voice?	Yes	No
Are you happy for me to keep and use your photos or pictures in my project?	Yes	No
Would you like me to send you a copy of what we talked about in the interview?	Yes	No
Do you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study?	Yes	No

.....
Name

.....
Date

Appendix E.1

Preparation for Interview Information

Preparation for the Interview

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about your identity and experiences of being a vegan. I really look forward to speaking with you!

You should have read in the information sheet that I would like you to produce some images, either digital images or drawn pictures, before we meet on Microsoft Teams for an interview. The images that you produce are supposed to be images that are meaningful to you as a vegan young person and will help you to talk about your identity and experiences of being vegan. I am also interested in your experiences at school and with friends as a vegan. **You can be creative with the images you produce, as they should be meaningful to you and your experiences. However, please make sure that they follow the guidelines below.** You can produce as many or as few images as you want.

As the images will be used in my research project, it is very important that we protect your identity and that of others. Can you please ensure that:

- Your images **do not** contain people, unless drawn and unidentifiable
- Your images **do not** contain any identifiable content, such as a location or home address
- Your images **do not** contain any illegal or explicit content
- You **do not** take any digital images in or of school/college. If you wish to share an image with me about school/college, please draw, paint, or sketch instead.

If you send me any images that do not follow the guidelines above, I may be able to crop the images or blur out any identifying information. If this is the case, I will speak to you first to check you are happy with that. If you decide you are not happy with that, I can delete the images and not use them in my project.

I will send you an email with a link to upload your images to a private OneDrive account that only I have access to. Once your images are ready, please upload them to this account and I will confirm that I have received them.

In the interview we will talk about the images and I will ask you questions. If there are any images that you would not like to be shared in the research project publication, please let me know.

I look forward to seeing your images and speaking with you! ☺

Appendix F.1

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Draft Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Data to be obtained at the beginning of interview

Age:

Gender identified with:

County:

Length of time having been vegan:

Part of a vegan household?:

Draft Interview Questions

- Can you please tell me how long you have been vegan?
- Why did you choose to become a vegan?
- What does veganism mean to you?
- How does being vegan make you feel?
- What is it like for you to be vegan at your school/college? Do you feel well supported as a vegan at school? Do you feel that your beliefs and values are respected?
- Can you provide an example of something positive about being vegan at schools?
- What about something that isn't positive?
- Tell me about your friendships as a vegan? Does being vegan influence your friendships?
- Has being vegan ever influenced your relationship with other people in the school, either adults or other young people? If so, how?

Appendix G.1

Example Transcript

53 Well, so people didn't really people care about me being vegan, but they generally wouldn't enjoy
54 me trying to debate them. Like, convincing them to go vegan. People don't like that.
55
56 Was it something you wanted to talk about a lot?
57
58 Yes, I did talk about it, and I annoyed it. It was kind of, erm, it was much more important to me to
59 talk about it than offend people. And, and...through that, I have...I think there are 3 or 4 of my friends
60 who I have convinced to go vegan, so I think overall, yeah, that's much better than just annoying
61 everyone.
62
63 Wow – that's incredible. It can take a lot of effort to convince people to change.
64
65 Definitely. Sorry, do you mind if I come back in a moment. I need to go find a charger.
66
67 Of course, no problem.
68
69 PAUSE IN AUDIO
70
71 Okay, hello.
72
73 Hello! Cool, so I was just wondering...it sounds like you speak up quite a lot. Can you tell me about
74 your friendships and relationships since going vegan?
75
76 Yeah, well, I don't think I've lost any friends because of it but people do...people do get annoyed
77 about it. And don't want to talk about it generally because they've realised that they don't have an
78 argument against it, and it makes them feel bad to keep on pointing out that what they are doing is
79 wrong.
80
81 And how does that make you feel?
82
83 It's very frustrating. I don't care so much about individual people I speak to. It's more just about, just
84 the amount of people that don't realise it, don't do it. The vast majority of people aren't vegan,
85 obviously. So...it's something that just seems so obvious to me, and I don't, erm, yeah, get it.
86
87 So, you went vegan during the first lockdown, right?
88
89 Yeah, yeah.
90
91 And you're in your last year of school?
92
93 I've just finished my last year. I have a big summer holiday ahead of me now.
94
95 Oh wow – congratulations! I'm envious of the summer holiday. (Laughs). So, can you tell me what
96 it was like to go back to school after lockdown as a vegan?
97
98 There are different things. So the school doesn't offer any vegan options in the cafeteria but that
99 doesn't affect me too much because I generally, I brought my own lunch even when I wasn't vegan.
100 There were vegetarian options, but they weren't vegan options. Some things. Might be vegan but they
101 aren't like specifically for vegans, they might just happen to be vegan. I know that. has affected other
102 people in my school who are vegan.
103
104 How many vegans do you know of in your school?

Appendix H.1

Example of Coding

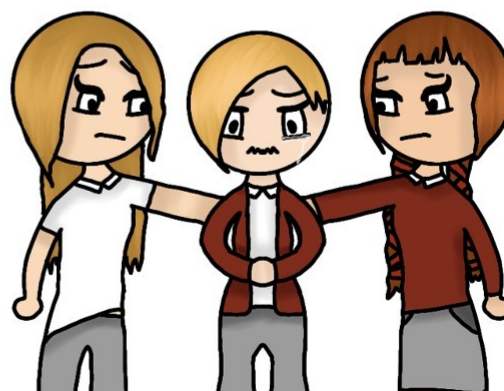
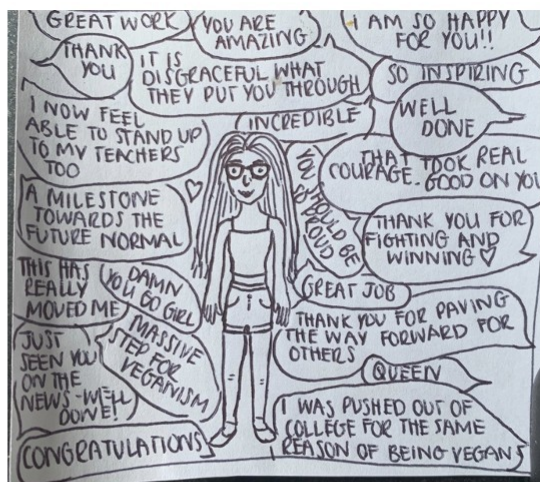
Example of Codes from Thematic Analysis And Polytextual Thematic Analysis				
Theme	Balancing Identity Disclosure and Raising Awareness	The School System	Intergroup Relationships and Interaction	Protective Factors
Thematic Analysis Codes	Wanting to save the animals	Poorly labelled school food	Friends' beliefs and attitudes towards vegans	Transitioning as a family
	Talking to veganism with others	Limited food options	Response from friends about transition and lifestyle	Influence of family on well-being
	Assessing other people's views before deciding how to gently encourage veganism	Pessimistic about school adaptations	Accepting omnivores	Family Support essential
	Wanting to convert others	Price of alternatives	Subtle response from peers	Being able to speak to family about vegan related topics key to well-being
	Developing knowledge of veganism as a defence	Not voicing issues	Learning acceptance and tolerance	Vegan Connections important, even if only online
	'Need' to convert others	Teacher asking about beliefs	Relating to being a pre-vegan helpful in being tolerant	'Bonus' benefits of veganism nice to be aware of
	Emotions vs friendships – which to choose?	Non-vegan products reminder of exploitation and can be distressing	Friends impacted by veganism	Pride in encouraging others
	Subtly sharing new lifestyle – afraid of people's responses	Food given as rewards – not many vegan options	Feeling understood by friends	Veganism shaping their lives
	Vegan or not? Questioning vegan identity status over some life and school choices	Being pressured to go against beliefs by teachers and peers	Accepting friends	Veganism providing a sense of purpose
		Not impacted by lack of vegan treats	Appreciation of friends' thoughtfulness	
		Desire to normalise veganism in school	Bullied – meat thrown in face	
		Respect dependent on staff member	Minimising severity of bullying	

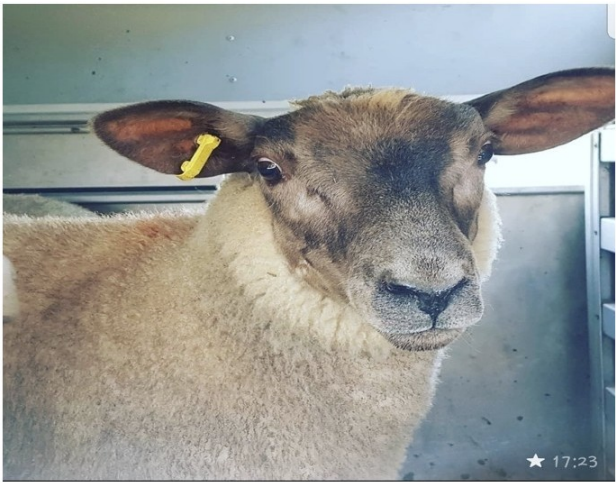
	<p>Guilt from exploitation of animals pre-vegan life</p> <p>Openness about beliefs</p> <p>Veganism a big part of life</p> <p>Multiple reasons for being vegan</p> <p>Eating alone to avoid exposure to meat (due to emotional responses)</p>	<p>Teachers don't change opinions Educators to educate on the animal industry</p> <p>Triggering school activities</p> <p>No consideration of emotional triggers</p> <p>Inclusion in cooking lessons</p> <p>Teachers not listening to evidence</p> <p>Education propaganda for heavily subsidised industries</p> <p>Having to educate others because of inadequate curriculum draining</p> <p>Individual teachers can be understanding but restrained by school policy</p> <p>Missing out on educational opportunities due to distress</p>	<p>Accepting vs Non-debating friends Not expecting others to adapt to you always</p> <p>Angry vegan upon transitioning – friendship impacted</p> <p>Comments from teachers and other students too overwhelming</p> <p>Relationship breakdowns</p> <p>Feeling suffocated by negative perceptions of vegans which affect people's beliefs</p> <p>Not being understood by peers and staff</p> <p>Targeted and questioned about clothes by non-vegans</p> <p>Positive response from peers and teacher about vegan talk</p>	
Polytextual Thematic Analysis Codes	<p>Constant reminders of non-vegan world</p> <p>Doing it for the animals no matter how hard</p>	<p>Curriculum promotes animal exploitation</p> <p>Discrimination in lessons</p> <p>Vegan beliefs ignored or mocked</p>	<p>Desire to fit in</p> <p>Different but the same – tolerated by some, rejected by others</p> <p>Feeling different to peers</p>	<p>Feeling proud of being vegan for different reasons</p> <p>Veganism gives a sense of purpose</p>

	<p>Activism essential to raise awareness</p> <p>Needing to convert others Feeling obliged to do activism</p> <p>Wanting to encourage critical thinking in others</p> <p>Mixed emotions about vegan life – ups and downs on daily basis</p> <p>A constant battle between living a 'normal' life and raising awareness</p> <p>Stress associated with being vegan – images popping up in head are reminders of animal exploitation and cruelty</p> <p>Feeling alone and in a dark place due to non-vegan world going against vegan beliefs</p> <p>Feeling pulled back and suffocated by society and peers in school</p>	<p>Some lessons and school experiences emotionally triggering (reminder of animal exploitation)</p> <p>Distress at seeing meat and animal products in school (and out)</p> <p>Pastoral team lack understanding of veganism so therefore cannot help</p> <p>Nobody understanding vegan point of view</p> <p>The world and education wanting to 'brainwash you' into exploiting animals</p> <p>Feeling unable to speak about vegan beliefs</p>	<p>Struggling to make friends</p> <p>Feeling able to have non-vegan friends</p> <p>Supportive friendships who understand and accept veganism</p> <p>Vegetarian friends often more understanding</p> <p>Importance of supportive and understanding friends</p>	<p>Connecting with nature Pride in showing peers vegan is not just 'rabbit food'</p> <p>Joy in being asked questions about veganism</p> <p>Finding strength in the positives rather than focusing on the negatives</p> <p>Food as education</p>
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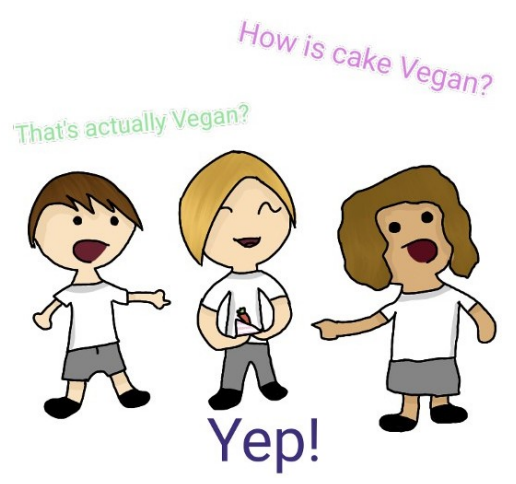
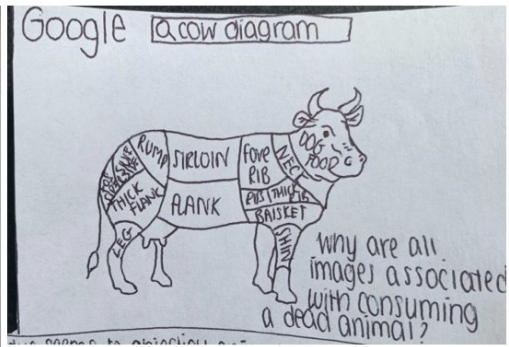
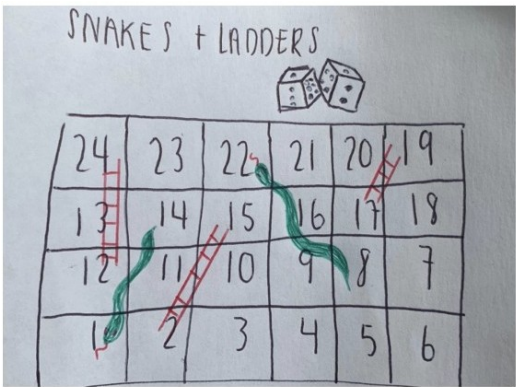
Appendix I.1

Sample of Images









Appendix J.1

Over 16 Information Sheet and Consent Form

Hayley Lugassy
Trainee Educational Psychologist
23/03/2021

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong
Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

An exploration of the educational experiences of young people who identify as vegan in the United Kingdom

INFORMATION STATEMENT

Thank you for expressing an interest in my research study. Below is an overview of the research to help you decide whether you consent to take part.

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about your identity and educational experiences of being a vegan and how, if at all, being vegan has impacted your educational experiences. You are invited to participate in this study because you are aged between 11-18, identify as vegan and have done for at least a year, live in the United Kingdom, attend an educational setting or left one within the last 6 months and speak English well. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving your consent you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by Hayley Lugassy, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia – h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk

This project is being supervised by:

Primary Supervisor: Dr Andrea Honess – a.honess@uea.ac.uk
Secondary Supervisor: Dr Kimberly Bartholomew – k.bartholomew@uea.ac.uk

(3)What will the study involve?

This study will involve producing several images (e.g., photographs or drawings) that will help you to share and express your identity and experiences as a vegan in an online interview held on Microsoft Teams. The date and timing of the interview will be agreed with you.

You can be creative when producing images **as long as they contain no identifiable information, such as people and specific locations, or any illegal items or explicit content.** If images do contain identifiable information, I may be able to crop or blur them, although this will be discussed with you first. There is no minimum or maximum limit for the number of photographs.

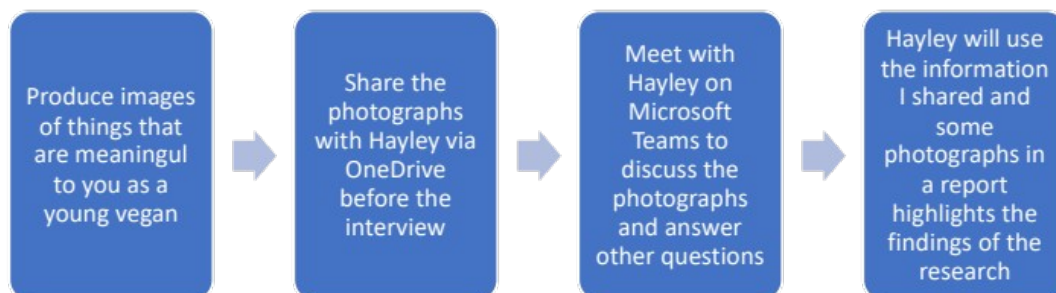
I will send you an email with a link to upload the images to a private OneDrive account which only I will have access to. You can upload the images there before the interview.

During the interview, I will share the images using the 'share' function and ask you to tell me about the images while also asking you other questions about your identity and your educational experiences as a vegan.

The type of questions asked include: Can you please tell me how long you have been vegan?; Why did you choose to become a vegan; What does veganism mean to you?; How does being vegan make you feel?; What is it like for you to be vegan at your school/educational setting?; Can you provide an example of something positive about being vegan at school/college? What about something that isn't positive?; Do you feel well supported as a vegan at school/college?.

The interview will be audio recorded (no video recorded) so that the verbal data can later be transcribed. The audio recording, transcript and any photographs will be securely stored and later used for analysis and a write-up of the research findings.

1. Graph showing what is involved in the study



(4)How much of my time will the study take?

The interview time will be different for each young person although it is not anticipated to last longer than one hour (60 minutes). You will also be asked to produce some digital images prior to the interview which will be shared with me via email (please see previous section). The time required to take the images is expected to be minimal, and there is no minimum or maximum number of images that can be brought to the interview.

Once the interview is over, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript if you consent to this. You will have 2 weeks to read the transcript and let me know if there is anything you want changing or removing. While this is optional, it is additional time for you if you wish to read the transcript.

(5)Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future. If you decide to let take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time up until when the study has been written and submitted as part of the researcher's training (May 2022). There will be no consequences for withdrawing from the study and if you wish to do so, please simply contact me via h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk to request the withdrawal.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study, your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(6)Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Talking about our personal experiences can sometimes be upsetting, particularly if we have had negative experiences. As we will be talking about the experiences of being vegan, it is possible that you will find it upsetting to talk about negative experiences if you have had any. You will be reminded that you can stop the interview at any time, take a break or withdraw completely. You do not have to answer every question and can refuse to do so without any consequences. Should you become upset or distressed, then the interview will be stopped.

If after the interview you feel upset and you wish to seek emotional support, please visit the following website for links to charities and organisations that provide support to children and young people:
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/useful-contacts/>

(7)Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

While there are no direct benefit associated with being in this study, it may be a positive experience for you to discuss your experiences as vegans in educational settings. The findings from this study are hoped to be used to inform future research on the same topic, which may lead to improvements in

educational practice and policy. This may, in turn, have a positive effect on the vegan child population more widely.

(8) What will happen to information that is collected during the study?

The information collected and used in this study will include your age, gender, country in which you live in the UK, the length of time that you have been vegan and whether you are the only vegan in your household, in addition to the photographs or pictures and verbal data obtained in the interviews. All data will be used as part of a wider analysis, including the data from other young people who participate. The findings of this study will be used to write a doctoral thesis and may be subsequently published in academic journals or presented in conferences. The findings may also be used to inform future research projects. The only people with access to the data will be the primary researcher and her supervisors (please see question 2 for details).

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019).

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published. Your identity **will not be identifiable from the write-up of this project**, with the exception to this being if you wish to share that you have participated and share the images used in the write-up with other people, which could be traced back to the project. However, due to the use of pseudonyms and production of image guidelines, your identity will be protected. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if we would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Hayley Lugassy will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Hayley on h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk.

(10) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking in the relevant box below in the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary which outlines the key findings of the study. You will receive this feedback after August 2022.

(11) What if we have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee. If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Hayley Lugassy
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my primary supervisor: Dr Andrea Honess – a.honess@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

(12) OK, I'm happy to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it to me via email at h.lugassy@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I,....., consent to participating in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions they don't wish to answer.
- ✓ I understand that I will be asked to produce images (e.g., digital photos or drawn pictures) that relate to my identity and experiences as a vegan. These images will be shared with the researcher and may be used in the publication of the project. The images should not include any people or identifiable information, such as locations and addresses. I understand that if I share an image that contains illegal or explicit content then the primary researcher will follow safeguarding procedures to record this.
- ✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about I will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect my identity, they may be identifiable in these publications due to the nature of the study or results.

I consent to:

- | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| • | Audio-recording of me | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • | Images that I produce being used in the analysis and the write up of this project | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • | Receiving a copy of the interview transcript to review | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • | Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal:

☐ Email:

Signature

PRINT name

Date