Enough on their plates? Understanding the experience of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world

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Understanding the experience of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where other sources are clearly and identifiably cited.

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ABSTRACT

Veganism is a way of life that seeks to exclude all animal products where possible. Associated with the lifestyle are possible health benefits and a reduction in the environmental impacts caused by animal husbandry. Studies to date have explored the experiences of vegan adults, largely focusing on motivations, barriers to uptake, and the expression of vegan identity. Some research has also examined how vegans are perceived by non-vegans, and to what degree resistance to the lifestyle exists.

However, experiential research with vegans remains scarce and there are very few studies that detail what it is like to raise children in a vegan family. How veganism is experienced within a society that normalises meat eating – the 'non-vegan world' – also remains unexplored. This study therefore examines how a group of twelve vegan mothers experience child-rearing in a non-vegan world. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women, and the transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA).

The women's experiences are presented across three empirical chapters. The first provides an in-depth analysis of each mother's lived experience, from which five key themes emerged. These themes encapsulate the context of the non-vegan world; the decision-making processes involved in raising vegan children; how identity is constructed as a vegan parent; the impact of vegan parenting on self-concept; how social integration takes place between vegans and non-vegans.

The second chapter presents a deeper analysis of one of the original themes, using the concept of the lifeworld to gain closer proximity to the meaning-making processes the women go through in their everyday lives. The final chapter introduces FDA to explore the discursive context within which the women's experience takes place, offering insights into the impact of power relations between vegans and non-vegans.

Findings demonstrate that a key feature of the women's experience relates to how far they and their children are able to participate socially in a non-vegan world. The rise in vegan-friendly products and meat substitutes provides convenience, and supports with the practical elements of the lifestyle. However, concerns around the impact of veganism on a child's social integration may be a prohibitive factor for families to commit fully to a vegan lifestyle.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEFINITIONS

<u>Understanding veganism</u>

The below definitions serve as a reference point when using these terms throughout this thesis and are adaptations or direct extracts from The Vegan Society's website.

Veganism

"Veganism is a philosophy and 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; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals" (The Vegan Society, n.d.a).

Health vegan

Health vegans are those who follow a vegan diet as a means to improve their physical health.

Environmental vegan

Environmental vegans are those who follow a vegan diet to reduce their impact on the environment.

Ethical vegan

Ethical vegans follow The Vegan Society's full definition due to concerns around animal welfare, the environment and social justice.

<u>Understanding the women</u>

The below descriptions represent my own interpretations and are intended as broad definitions related to the participants of this study.

Vegan parent

A parent who is vegan to the best of their ability. In an ideal world, both they and their children would be 100% vegan all of the time. However, it may be that there are instances where this is not possible, or where a decision has been made for their children not to be fully vegan at all. Within this study all participants were mothers, although they are intended to represent the experiences of vegan parents more generally.

Vegan child

The children of the mothers who took part in this study. Some of these children have been vegan since conception and some transitioned to veganism later in life. One child in this study was being raised as a 'low dairy vegetarian', and others were not strictly vegan when under the care of a non-vegan parent or guardian. For those who are fully vegan, this is maintained to the best of their mother's ability.

Lifestyle choice

There is debate around how veganism should be conceptualised and how individuals identify with veganism is extremely personal. Throughout this research, I attempt to be sensitive to self-identification and to avoid sweeping generalisations; reference to veganism as a 'lifestyle' or 'lifestyle choice' feels appropriate in the context of this study.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

"According to traditional code, one who breaks bread and shares salt with a Bedouin thereby achieves that person's protection."

(Kaplan, 2020, p.46)

Personal reflection

The catalyst for this PhD began before I had even considered pursuing doctoral research. I was approaching the dissertation phase of my Psychology Master's degree, certain that I wanted to employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) but undecided about the exact focus of the thesis. I had several keen interests and the duration of the Christmas break to prepare a proposal for my research. At this point, and despite IPA's primary concerns with lived experience, I had not considered that it would be my own personal life events that would influence the direction of my studies.

I remember sitting at the kitchen table having a conversation with my mother over breakfast. She raised the topic of the upcoming Christmas Day meal, questioning what I was going to eat given that I had transitioned to veganism earlier that year. What at face value appeared to be a neutral question, quickly escalated into an emotionally charged discussion around my health as a result of adopting a vegan diet. However, it struck me that the concerns she was raising went beyond the possible health implications associated with excluding animal products from my diet. It was as though the removal of certain foods represented a different kind of loss; the loss of a shared lifestyle with familiar traditions, such as enjoying turkey as a family on Christmas Day.

It was at that point that I began to consider what lived experience must be like for many other vegans. Veganism is not a siloed part of someone's social world; the social context within which a vegan person exists is integral to how they experience the lifestyle, and plays a large part in the meaning of the lifestyle to them. This seemed particularly relevant to IPA, and something that had potential to be explored further as part of my Master's.

Within my dissertation, I provided an account of the experiences of five London-based vegan women. Veganism played a significant role in each one of their lives, permeating most aspects of their social interactions. Yet, the literature review carried out as part of the study highlighted a lack of pre-existing research into the experience of being vegan. Further, whilst the women described being committed to the lifestyle and dedicated to the principles of veganism, questions arose for them around how and whether children could be included. It is for this reason that I became particularly interested in how vegan families approach child-rearing in a non-vegan world.

Introducing the research

It is considered that wide variation exists in the way that veganism is approached, which is largely dependent on motivations for adopting the lifestyle. Approaches to veganism are broadly split into two categories: 'ethical vegans', who consider the avoidance of cruelty to animals as their primary motivation for the lifestyle, and 'health vegans', whose primary concern is that their diet is free of animals products for the purpose of their own health.

This PhD began in late 2019, and at the time it was estimated that there were 600,000 vegans, representing a significant rise from numbers recorded in 2014 which stood at 150,000 (The Vegan Society, n.d.b). The Vegan Society have since collated a range of sources relating to the prevalence of veganism in families with children. Increased parental concern with protecting the environment through meat reduction, trends in plant-based diets, as well as interest from children in vegan diets, suggest that the increased uptake of veganism is likely to be represented across families as well as for individuals.

Research with vegan families has so far focused on the health implications of the diet for pregnancy and young infants. It has been shown that with appropriate guidance and the correct care, it is possible to have a safe pregnancy on a vegan diet (Pawlak, 2017; Piccoli et al., 2015; Sebastiani et al., 2019). It has also demonstrated that a well-planned vegan diet can be adequate for children at all stages of life (Baroni et al., 2019; Mangels & Messina, 2001). However, some argue that data is inconsistent and vegan diets for children should be avoided. This is down to the availability of sufficient sample sizes for such a small population, and a lack of longitudinal data to identify the implications of childhood veganism later in life (Barlow, 2020; Kiely, 2021; Schürmann et al., 2017; Sutter & Bender, 2021).

In addition to conflicting evidence around the safety of vegan child-rearing, it has been shown that the lifestyle is received with hostility, with negative attitudes often present across a range of media communications (Bresnahan et al., 2016; Cole & Morgan, 2011; Earle & Hodson, 2017). This lack of regard for veganism from others, teamed with uncertainty about its safety for children, calls into question whether a vegan parent would decide to include their child in the lifestyle. It also points to the absence of knowledge about what the experience of vegan parenting is like for those who do decide to involve their children.

However, very little experiential research has been conducted with vegan individuals, let alone with vegan parents. Studies with individuals have focused on motivations for veganism, barriers to uptake, an examination of vegan identities, and how vegans are conceptualised by non-vegans. Qualitative research with vegan parents and families is extremely scarce, as is the understanding of the how and why negative attitudes towards vegans are so prevalent and so widely accepted. The stark absence of available research felt discordant with the growing popularity of the lifestyle, and in the context of its continued disparagement within mass media.

This thesis therefore explores the experience of vegan parenting in the context of a world within which meat eating is normalised: the 'non-vegan world'. I use IPA and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to examine the experiences of twelve vegan mothers, providing insights into their decision-making processes, interactions with life events and other people, and the place veganism has within their overall identity.

It is made up of three empirical studies in order to demonstrate this. This first study provides an in-depth account of how the women navigate daily life and negotiate relationships with others, and how meaning is generated from these experiences. Emphasis is placed on the changes that take place with the presence of children in the women's lives, and attention is paid to the context of the non-vegan world.

The second study deepens the original analysis, applying the concept of the lifeworld to a smaller section of data as a way to gain closer proximity to the women's sense-making processes. This secondary analysis is centred specifically around social integration, which was a particularly pertinent theme across all of their narratives and is deserving of its own chapter. By taking a more theoretical perspective, I also invite the reader to understand more about how lived experience takes place.

In the third study, the concept of the non-vegan world is brought to the forefront and FDA is used to examine constructions of vegan parents. The women's original data is then used to examine how they engage with these constructions and how their experiences are influenced as a result. This study came about in response to findings from the first two, in which IPA provides a strong understanding of what vegan parenting is like for the women. However, the data required further interrogation of the context in which their experiences took place. Using a dual approach in this way provides a unique methodological contribution to an unexplored but relevant social issue.

<u>The chapters</u>

Chapter two

In Chapter two I review relevant literature, providing an overview of existing knowledge relating to my study. In the absence of substantial amounts of past research, I provide an overview of how veganism is understood and experienced by individuals as a foundation from which to add and compare the experiences of vegan parents. In this chapter, I also include a review of the media messaging around vegan parenting. This is intended to fill the gap in existing literature as well as to introduce my decision to focus on the discursive context of vegan parenting in my third empirical study.

Chapter three

My third chapter introduces the methodological foundations for all three studies, as well as to outline my own epistemological position. This chapter focuses most heavily on phenomenology, providing an overview of the developments within the philosophy that led me to my primary approach of IPA. I also include an introduction to discursive psychology, within which I present the value of using FDA as part of my final empirical study.

Chapter four

Chapter four presents the overall design of this study, including considerations for the interviews with the twelve women who took part. I provide an overview of how and

why I conducted the analysis in the way I did, which includes reflections on the obstacles to fieldwork that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapters five to seven

The following three chapters are dedicated to my three empirical studies and are designed to be unfolding, and to invite the reader into my emergent process of interpretation. Starting with the broadest overview of the women's experience in Chapter five, I provide an in-depth interpretation of their interviews and begin to contextualise the non-vegan world, from which five themes emerge. Chapter six then hones in on one of these themes, using the concept of the lifeworld to illuminate how the women access meaning from their experience. Within this chapter I make more explicit connections between what the women share and the hermeneutic theories discussed in Chapter three. Chapter seven then addresses the increasing attention that the women paid to the consequences of the non-vegan world. I critically examine two constructions of vegan parents for their presence in the women's narratives, as well as to explore how they influence their experiences.

Chapter eight

In this penultimate chapter I discuss my findings in light of the literature, pointing to the implications of my research for policy and practice, and how my findings are applicable to wider contexts.

Chapter nine

This final chapter is used to evaluate the quality of my research, its substantive and methodological contributions, as well as to make recommendations for future research. I end this thesis with brief reflections on my personal growth as a result of this study.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

I am conducting this review to examine the literature that exists surrounding the experience of vegan families who live in a predominantly omnivorous society, in order to identify space for my own research.

The literature search conducted during my Master's degree in 2018 highlighted a number of studies relating to the exclusion of animal products, ranging from reported health benefits, the environmental impact of animal husbandry, and the position of different cultures and religions on eating meat. Having come back to the literature several years later, there has been an exponential rise in the coverage of veganism, with increasing attention being paid to the inclusion of children and the health implications of the diet for them. Whilst these studies explore veganism and parenting through a broad range of lenses, with some experiential literature existing for both separately, what is missing almost entirely is any exploration of the lived experience of vegan families.

Alongside the growing body of academic literature covering veganism, an even larger amount of non-academic material arose too, such as news articles, policy documents, and a range of digital resources. The social implications of being vegan in a non-vegan world have been increasingly present in media reporting, with the messaging largely negative and unaccommodating of the lifestyle.

Through the following appraisal I will demonstrate the scope of the academic literature that is most closely related to my area of interest: the experiential nature of veganism, and conceptualising what a non-vegan world is. My assessment will also extend to a critical review of media messaging for the final part of this chapter, in order to gain an up-to-date grounding in common conceptions about vegan families and how their experience may have been shaped.

Part one: Academic literature

Conducting the literature search

Given the topical nature of my research area, and the change in the landscape that occurred during the short time between completing my Master's programme and beginning my PhD, it was important for me to stay abreast of emerging literature

throughout the entire course of this study. Whilst I was discerning with what I included, I consumed a wide range of sources which I did not report on, such as podcasts, radio broadcasts and some television programmes. Instead, these were used to support the focus of my research, strengthening my understanding of the key concepts, and provided catalysts for further investigation.

To inform my targeted search strategy I initially conducted a scoping review guided by my research question. This was intended to gain a grounding in the literature and understand how it had evolved since my Master's, before using a more targeted search to distil the available literature for this review. I broke down my research question into key words relating to the phenomenon of vegan parenting. I began by searching for "vegan famil*", "vegan child*", "vegan mother*", "vegan parent*", "vegan pregnan*" across a range of databases without any exclusion criteria other than peer reviewed articles, to see what was available. This search returned hundreds of results, much of which employed quantitative methods relating to the fields of nutrition and growth, medical science, and environmental sciences. Whilst these areas are important in understanding the wider context of veganism, my aim was to provide a rigorous review of the literature that directly related to experience. By excluding quantitative literature, the same search returned less than 10 articles. A qualitative-only search for "vegan*" proved more successful.

It is for this reason that I decided to prioritise the methodological focus of my search, reviewing qualitative-only literature but including mixed method papers that had a qualitative element. This enabled me to understand what the experience of veganism is like before reviewing how the lifestyle is experienced when children are involved. I was selective in the resources used, focusing on databases that provided an index of the most pertinent literature, which included: Academic Search Complete, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, MEDLINE, and Scopus. Only peer reviewed academic journals using English language were included, and I was mindful of the authors and funders associated with the research where there may have been a specific interest in the findings that could influence the credibility of the papers. Theses, dissertations or presentation abstracts that were not published in peer-reviewed journals were excluded from the final corpus.

Whilst meat eating can vary according to variables such as socioeconomic status, religion and geography (Harper, 2011; Simoons, 1961), I chose to include literature from within and outside the UK in order to capture as many articles as possible. Due

to the contemporary nature of veganism, and the benefit of understanding how changes in social context may affect how veganism is experienced, I was relaxed with the date of the articles and did not filter for publication date.

My final keyword search was made up of: "vegan*", "vegan* fam*", "non-vegan*", "vegan parent*", "vegan child*", "vegan mother*", Vegan pregnan*". From this point, I applied an organic approach, using the reference lists within relevant articles to source further literature, specific authors, journals and relevant books. I was satisfied that all avenues had been exhausted when I became repeatedly signposted to the same authors and articles.

Despite the vegan-specific parameters, a large amount of literature relating to vegetarianism arose from my search. According to a paper by Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017)

> *Veganism is not a separate practice from vegetarianism; rather, veganism is a type of vegetarianism. Every vegan is a vegetarian, but not every vegetarian is a vegan. Thus, unless specified otherwise, the term, "vegetarians," includes vegans as well (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017a, p. 79).*

I therefore decided to incorporate papers that included vegetarianism where this was relevant to my particular area of interest (experience). Whilst not all returns were strictly experiential, they served as a building block to understand as far as possible what it is like to be vegan in a non-vegan world, from which my own research will provide the additional phenomenon of parenting within that context.

To review the final corpus, I arranged the literature thematically. Under the umbrella of 'Who are vegans, and why do they choose the lifestyle?' I will discuss the motivations for veganism and maintenance of the lifestyle, the relationship between veganism and identity, and how gender features in vegan identity. I will then go on to identify how 'the context of a non-vegan world' exists across the literature, including how vegan and non-vegan relations are experienced and how children may be involved in the lifestyle. I will finish my survey of the academic literature by discussing the value added to the field by existing studies that have employed phenomenological approaches.

<u>Who are vegans, and why do they choose the lifestyle?</u>

*Food habits – how we produce, procure, prepare and consume food –
represent powerful systems of symbols whose associations are closely
held, in their own way, by nearly everyone. Looking at people's
relationships with food can speak volumes about people – their beliefs,
their passions, their background knowledge and assumptions, and their
personalities (Miller & Deutsch, 2010, p. 9).*

Motivations for and maintenance of a vegan lifestyle

Veganism is a way of living that seeks to avoid harm to, or exploitation of animals for
any purpose. Vegans exclude foods containing animal derivatives, as well as animal-
based goods or products that have been tested on animals (The Vegan Society,
n.d.a). However, veganism does not represent a homogenous way of life and it is
considered that there is wide variation in the motives for uptake of the lifestyle, as well
as the way in which it is practised and identified with (Greenebaum, 2012). Despite
the individual experience and identification people have with vegan principles, for the
purposes of this review I will be referring to veganism as a lifestyle choice.

Several key concepts relating to the identity or 'types' of vegans are widely
understood, according to the popular motivations of health, environment and animal
rights (Fox & Ward, 2008; North, Klas, et al., 2021; Plante et al., 2019; Radnitz et al.,
2015). Motivations for adopting veganism are complicated, not least because being
vegan is seen as challenging in certain environments, but also because dietary
choices change according to social environment (Devine, 2005). According to North,
Klas, et al. (2021) motivations for all popular dietary lifestyles – whether omnivorous,
vegetarian or vegan – converge around attitudes towards ethics, ease of the diet and
social norms. They identified veganism specifically as difficult, requiring commitment
against challenges both from outside and inside the community. Of key importance to
maintaining such a challenging way of life was the need for greater purpose, beyond
food choices.

Vegans are therefore required to engage with a continuous cycle of re-assessment of
their purpose and reason for a lifestyle that is at odds with social norms, viewing the
food on their plate beyond sustenance or pleasure; what vegans eat represents their
'moral health', that is, how moral they are as individuals (Paez, 2017). This
explanation goes some way in beginning to understand how vegans connect with the

lifestyle and make the decision to continue with it. However, in doing so it highlights preoccupation with diet, which ignores the other facets of the lifestyle which generate meaning for the individuals who follow it, and those who attempt to make sense of those individuals.

Within the literature, some attempt has been made to understand non-vegan perceptions of the lifestyle beyond diet, which are largely negative, and surround a normative stereotype of vegans as hostile and oversensitive (Cole & Morgan, 2011). In fact, the foundations of the lifestyle according to vegans, surround morally driven behaviour with a concern with the 'sanctity of life', 'enacting the authentic self' and 'freedom' (Napoli & Ouschan, 2020). And this begins to expose the ideological position of the predominantly non-vegan world that ignores these virtuous motivations. Understanding the pejorative narratives around veganism is an important element that underpins the experience of the lifestyle and could provide insight into barriers to uptake of the diet, which much of the literature seeks to address. However, motivations for adopting a vegan lifestyle are often explored in a siloed way, ignoring the impact of social context on these motivations.

de Visser et al. (2021) go some way in understanding how perceptions of veganism and experience of the lifestyle may vary according to context. They highlight the 'Meat free Monday' (MFM) initiative as an example of how non-vegans can be encouraged to eat less meat. Findings suggest that those who were able to engage well with MFM had more positive attitudes towards vegans and vegetarians, which begins to open up the importance of shared beliefs and practices in forming social connections. Whilst connection and social acceptance from others may go some way in understanding the satisfaction with or ease of a vegan lifestyle, it does not take into account individual differences or catalytic experiences that drive the decision to become vegan in the first place.

A longitudinal study by Trent Grassian (2020) offers some answers to this, focusing on how behaviour change takes place by identifying those who had tried and 'failed' to abstain from meat. He highlights the sacrificial nature of vegan choices, reinforcing the need for a strong sense of purpose in order to maintain the lifestyle, but also looking to alternatives such as individual differences as to why veganism may appeal to some more than others. As an example, it is argued that for vegans who view meat with a sense of disgust, dietary choices may not actually be viewed as a sacrifice. This then calls into question the moral motivations of vegans and ascetic nature of their

decisions, which non-vegans have used to highlight their 'otherness' (Cole & Morgan, 2011).

The more literature I consumed, the more obvious became the heterogeneity within a community that shares a clearly defined purpose. Not only this, but the stereotype of the vegan who takes the moral high ground and sacrifices meat despite finding the taste appealing began to be challenged (De Groeve et al., 2021; Napoli & Ouschan, 2020; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017a; Testoni et al., 2017). What also became clear was the need to move beyond food when assessing vegan motivations and experience.

Hirschler (2011) furthers the concept of sacrifice, extending this beyond food to highlight how interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts exist as a result of making the decision to become vegan. Within his research he identified the tension vegans feel between the personal positives and benefits of the lifestyle alongside non-vegan relationships, within which challenges exist. To a degree, the positive experience of veganism is offset by the negative experiences of non-vegan interactions. In this sense, it would seem impossible to completely avoid sacrifice as a vegan, even if the exclusion of meat did not feel like a hardship.

With this in mind, it would appear that the vegan experience can only be understood when taking into account the range of ways individuals identify with the lifestyle, alongside the range of interactions with non-vegans. The work of Bates (2020) provides a unique perspective when highlighting how vegans make sense of their personal identification with the lifestyle in the context of external relations. She does this by examining attitudes towards vegan and vegetarian diets of those with learning disabilities. Within a group that were already able to identify as different, veganism provided a sense of belonging with a more diverse range of people. In this sense, the motivations of vegans transcend the broadly reported categories of ethics, health and the environment, leaving space for the experience and meaning of veganism to be understood more existentially.

Cherry (2015) offers one of the few studies that strip away predominant concern with the ethics of veganism, to understand what the meaning of conformity has to the lives of individuals. In her comparison between veganism and punk as lifestyle movements, she begins to bridge the existing gap in the literature between vegan experience as an individual, and how this plays out in a group setting. She furthers the assertion that veganism creates a sense of belonging, suggesting that commitment to any group that

exists on the peripheries of convention requires strong personal identification with the shared purpose. Similarly, the symbolic interactionism that takes place as a result of that shared purpose can also increase longevity of the lifestyle (Larsson et al., 2003).

Vegan identity

Despite collective action and a sense of belonging that occurs when becoming vegan (Judge et al., 2022) inequalities exist within the subculture, which may call into question the ability for all individuals to identify with veganism. Harper (2011) highlights how the luxury of food choice and eating for health is afforded to the middle classes, with socioeconomic factors impacting access, and culture dictating the meaning of certain foods (Navarro, 2021; Willard, 2002). Greenebaum (2018) identifies the presence of marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities within the vegan minority, meaning that commitment to veganism could lead individuals to feel othered within a group that is already othered in a non-vegan world. For this reason, the white middle class privilege of veganism would undoubtedly impact the uptake of the lifestyle, yet the significance of factors such as ethnicity and social class has been largely ignored in research into the vegan experience.

The experience of prejudice and discrimination that minority groups have been through, and continue to go through in the present day, is relevant when theorising the vegan experience (Earle & Hodson, 2017; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). Where veganism is a lifestyle *choice*, and so enjoys privileges as well as disadvantages, it is incomparable with the experiences of those whose inequality is steeped in historical oppression and who continue to experience structural disadvantage (Judge & Wilson, 2019). However, vegans *are* marginalised, and this is on account of their difference, and so it makes sense for them to maintain a flexible and fluid approach to the lifestyle to allow for greater interaction with the majority. This could have implications for the aforementioned sense of meaning and belonging vegans feel as a collective, whilst at the same time reducing the homogenisation of vegan stereotypes which leave them more open to attack. It is for this reason that focus is best placed on the identity of the individual rather than the collective identity of the lifestyle, in order to break down strict boundaries that can marginalise those minority groups (Kurz et al., 2020).

The abovementioned structural inequalities that can impact access to food are just one of the reasons why suggesting veganism is simply about health, ethics or the environment is overly simplistic. Rosenfeld (2019) suggests that the more a person is

seen to deviate from the norm, the greater their affinity with an 'other' identity. That is, veganism is seen as more 'extreme' on the scale of alternative diets, suggesting that great personal significance of the lifestyle must exist. However, being vegan does not always have to come with great political or ideological significance. The enjoyment of vegan food can be a central point to the experience, from which pleasure could be gained independently of the overarching meaning of the lifestyle (Bertella, 2020).

Chuck et al. (2016) assessed a range of diets to consider how identities were formed through belonging to minority food cultures. They suggest that in isolation an alternative diet may have implicit meaning to an individual, with no great need to form part of their expression of identity. However, when this becomes challenged, the dietary choice then becomes political, and personal reflection about food choices is required in order to maintain commitment. This in turn causes the individual to become increasingly detached from the mainstream, solidifying the choice as part of their identity (Davis et al., 2019; de Boer et al., 2017). This relationship between internal and external influences in identity formation is reinforced by Bisogni et al., (2002), who suggest that identity is formed through a reciprocal and evolving relationship between the individual with reference to others, that is consistently under review. In this sense a vegan identity may be defined and acknowledged conceptually and then identified with, but is then shaped through lived experience (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017).

Given the danger for vegans to be othered by non-vegans, and to be seen as unrelatable, it is unsurprising that an element of identity management takes place for vegans. Sneijder & te Molder (2009) make reference to 'doing being ordinary', solidifying the position of vegans as outsiders, different, and abnormal, and requiring the need to diminish elements of the self if they wish to fit with the majority. This sort of identity management was also highlighted by Paxman (2021), who used the communication theory of identity to suggest that vegans may withhold their identity, or downplay their affiliation to the lifestyle, due to the derisive views held about vegans. Vegans may also be likely to physically distance themselves in social settings, particularly those involving food, which also reinforces their position as outsiders (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Phelan et al., 2008).

However, the notion of concealment when it comes to vegan identity is disrupted by vegan activists who deliberately garner attention to the detriment of their social relationships. For these vegans, membership to the movement and belief in the need

for change overrides their desire to connect socially (Turina, 2018). Greenebaum (2012) sees veganism as a public declaration of identity, whilst still acknowledging a need for identity management. That is, individuals may outwardly share their identity as a vegan but are required to be robust in their decision-making so as to avoid attack when contradictions in ethics and actions occur. Further, due to differing individual approaches to the lifestyle, a vegan hierarchy can occur, with veganism for health reasons criticised most heavily (Fox & Ward, 2008).

Veganism and gender

A key association with veganism is femininity (Oliver, 2023), which I became increasingly aware of due to the high prevalence of female participants represented in the studies. According to Rothgerber (2013), emotional indifference to animal suffering aligns with hegemonic masculinity, providing a possible reason for the higher uptake of the lifestyle by women. With meat eating being seen as a masculine trait, not only is it justified differently by men and women, but veganism potentially undermines masculinity and destabilises what it means to be male. This means that identifying with ethical veganism or veganism for animal rights reasons is more likely to be done by women, with men more likely to associate their exclusion of meat with health motivations (Fidolini, 2022).

Where men were previously stigmatised for being vegan and 'unmanly', the landscape is changing. A greater emphasis now exists surrounding the health benefits of veganism as something for everyone to aspire to (Mycek, 2018). This could mean that veganism has the potential to change men's eating behaviours for the better, and to reimagine what being vegan means in the context of gender (Aavik & Velgan, 2021). However, the patriarchy is seen by some as analogous with the powerful omnivorous majority, and it is argued that women have an affinity with veganism due to their shared position as a reproductive resource (Adams, 2010). Therefore, if the vegan space were to become dominated by men, the opportunities to challenge gender inequality both within and outside of veganism may be reduced (Adams, 2010; Oliver, 2023; Greenebaum & Dexter, 2018).

It is for this reason that veganism appears to go beyond a representation of individual or collective identity and is comparable with other systems of power within society. The conceptualisation of a non-vegan world has also begun to emerge from the aforementioned perceptions of and attitudes of vegans. However, in order to truly

understand the vegan experience, one must fully understand the context of the social environment within which meat eating is normalised and serves to socially bind and strengthen the position of the majority (Boyle, 2011).

The context of a non-vegan world

> *For anyone who is not born a vegetarian, eating meat represents the*
> *status quo from which veganism is a departure. In general, people*
> *have a preference for the status quo, even when alternative choices*
> *could be superior (Bryant et al., 2022, p. 6).*

Whilst there is a scarcity of academic literature that explicitly denotes a 'non-vegan world', an omnivorous majority which is hostile towards vegans and approaches the lifestyle with a sense of anger and discomfort, has formed the backdrop to many of the articles reviewed (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Further, the position of vegans as 'other' serves to normalise a lifestyle which is at odds with their beliefs, and

> *by derogating and distancing socially from those who behaviorally*
> *deviate from norms, the norms themselves are reinforced as*
> *acceptable and legitimate; as a result, this induces conformity to*
> *normative behaviors (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019, p.3).*

However, despite the hegemonic and deep-rooted practice of meat eating (Bryant et al., 2022; Buttny & Kinefuchi, 2020; Harris, 1998), a 'meat paradox' exists whereby the enjoyment of meat is in conflict with attitudes towards animal suffering, resulting in the need for moral discomfort to be alleviated through 'cognitive dissonance' (Khara et al., 2021). However,

> *The ethical information required to affect the taste of something might*
> *have to be more direct and intense than ordinary knowledge. It might*
> *have to be really jarring, such as a hidden camera video of animal*
> *production or a first-hand encounter with the sights, sounds, and scents*
> *of the slaughter (Kaplan, 2020, p.83).*

Therefore, with the majority able to create emotional distance to the origins of meat, and remain ignorant to the prolonged suffering of animals in advance of their slaughter

(Singer, 2020), meat eating continues to be viewed as normal and vegans continue to be positioned as abnormal.

It is worth noting that in a non-vegan world, meat is identified as potentially harmful to health, whilst at the same time something that can have a positive impact on health (Corrin & Papadopoulos, 2017; Leroy et al., 2018). So, there is a great deal of contradiction in messaging even before the issue of morality is considered. Vegans are more likely to be engaged with the morality of their actions and inclined to have feelings of remorse (Kaivalya & Maheshbabu, 2020). Not only do they become othered by their inability to engage in normalised practices of meat eating, but they then experience significant feelings of frustration due to the hypocrisy of the status quo.

Growing evidence of climate change has been seen globally through extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding (Pink, 2018). These environmental shifts negatively impact both agriculture and human health, with such changes likely to continue at speed unless mitigating changes are achieved (Healey, 2014; Rogelj et al., 2018). Böhm & Sullivan (2021) state that animal agriculture is largely to blame for the unsustainable use of land that is most damaging to the environment, and so there is increasing pressure to reduce meat consumption in order to slow down continued environmental harm (Alexy, 2023). Consequently, there is an increasing recognition of this relationship between meat production and damage to the environment, and a need for everyone to take action. Growing support to address climate change has been seen through acts of protest and shifts in media narratives, as well as attempts to setup more sustainable food supply chains (Böhm & Sullivan, 2021). With more people embracing a reduction in animal products, it is possible that shifts in what are considered to be 'normal' diets, may occur.

Despite this, out of the range of diets that reduce animal products, Rosenfeld (2018) suggests that attitudes toward vegans are the most negative. This not only highlights the distance between the majority and veganism, but also how widely accepted negative attitudes towards veganism are (Judge & Wilson, 2015; Judge & Wilson, 2019). As an example of how I saw this play out in the literature, even within a study which sought to address how to improve communication between vegans and non-vegans, the reference to vegans as 'meat-refusers' by Weiper & Vonk (2021) felt problematic, positioning them as in conflict with the norm.

Accepted and normalised attitudes towards vegans were also evident in the aforementioned work of Cole & Morgan (2011), who examined vegan discourses from national newspapers in the UK. They found that a common conception of vegans as 'contravening common sense' in their deviation from meat eating norms, appeared to justify the sense of ridicule they received. When not being derogated or ridiculed, veganism was viewed as an unsustainable way of life or as temporary (Twine, 2014), therefore discrediting it as a legitimate lifestyle but also suggesting that 'normal' is a social construction (Bryant et al., 2022; Cook, 2015).

Denigratory discourses surrounding veganism also have the potential to be harmful beyond their social implications. In their assessment of the medical system, Aavik (2021) suggest that diagnoses provided by medical professionals can be distorted when veganism is anecdotally assumed to be the source of health problems. In fact, even when I was reviewing a study which on the surface appeared to be an informative piece for vegetarians during pregnancy (Penney & Miller, 2008), the focus heavily surrounded the dangers of such a diet and the problems that could arise. This narrative overshadowed the potential of the article to create a space for expectant mothers to seek reassurance and support, and see themselves represented in healthcare settings.

Accordingly, Buttny & Kinefuchi (2020) suggest that vegans will manage institutionalised challenges and conflict by making informed decisions about disclosure and adopting conciliatory ways of talking about their lifestyle. Indeed, health-related reasons for veganism, rather than ethics, may be more palatable to non-vegans as they are less likely to be interpreted as a moral judgement about meat eating. However, this places the onus on vegans to resolve social norm conflicts and employ resolution strategies – particularly in less secure relationships – which further reinforces the position of power that is held by non-vegans (Salmivaara et al., 2022).

In order to be measured, it is worth being mindful of the fact that despite the narratives within the literature tending to focus on the negative experiences of passive vegans at the hands of non-vegans, activism may play a role in the lives of some vegans. Whilst activism does not represent a malicious attack, it does represent an active attack on convention, which provides a basis for why veganism may be resisted, or vegans may be conceptualised as challenging (Cherry, 2010; Kalte, 2021; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019).

Vegan children and relationships with non-vegans

According to information provided by the NHS, when carefully planned with appropriate supplementation a vegan diet can be sustainable in pregnancy and during breastfeeding (*NHS Pregnancy Guide*, n.d.). In fact, the advice given to vegan women planning parenthood is similar to non-vegans, with both equally reliant on certain supplements for the health of the mother and baby, such as a folic acid (Barlow, 2020; *NICE Guidance*, n.d.).

A well-planned diet that excludes animal products can also provide the necessary nutrition required by infants, children and adolescents (Baroni et al., 2019). During infancy, care should be taken when approaching vegan food choices, and supplementation is necessary to ensure sufficient vitamins and minerals are made available (Jones & Burton, 2023). For example, vegan parents are advised to ensure they are including appropriate sources of calcium, iron, vitamin D, vitamin B12, iodine, selenium, and omega 3 fatty acids for both themselves and their children (NHS Live Well, n.d.). This advice also applies to those who do not exclude animal products, as it is the case that poorly planned omnivorous diets are insufficiently balanced (Alexy, 2023). With many young children not eating enough fruit and vegetables (NICE Guidance, n.d.), it is arguably important that parents focus on plant-based foods to address this imbalance, with early exposure to a variety of plant-based foods possibly being beneficial to eating habits later in life (Baroni et al., 2019).

My specific area of interest involves the decision-making that leads up to the inclusion of children in veganism, and subsequent experience of vegan parenting and familial relations. However, so little literature exists to explore this field that I was required to shift focus in order to support the generation of my own lines of enquiry. Below I have included an introduction to this area with related literature that I was able to find, drawing on relevant food-related experiences within the household.

Decisions around food choices not only evoke conflict between adults, but can extend to how children are fed. For example, I anticipate that the provision of food at nurseries may be an obstacle for vegan parents, given the likelihood of this provision to align with conventional omnivorous diets (Metcalfe et al., 2011). It is also already known that children's attitudes towards food are heavily influenced by their social environment, with a wide body of psychological research suggesting that family mealtimes can serve as a source of connection as well as to generate conflict (Fiese

et al., 2006). As a result, eating practices within the family unit may not be upheld by children outside of the family home.

By exploring pathways into animal rights activism, Pallotta (2008) found that a predisposition for sympathy to animal rights may exist more in some individuals due to early childhood experiences. Further, the ways in which families may adopt a diet can impact the repetition of food choices, with ethical reasons for veganism most likely to be replicated in the behaviour of children when leaving the family home (Chwialkowska, 2018). However, Beardsworth & Keil (1992) focused on the experiences of children leaving the family home as an opportunity to deviate from the dietary choices they were brought up with. Situating this in the context of veganism in a non-vegan world, they suggest that when a previously omnivorous child choses to be vegetarian, this is viewed as a direct rejection of family values. It could be possible then, that this would be turned around if a vegan child eventually decided to join the meat-eating majority. It will be interesting to see how the vegan parents I include in my own empirical work feel about this.

As well as consideration for their children's own sense of agency, there will undoubtedly be times when vegan parents are reliant on the input of others – including a spouse – to help maintain the vegan status of their children. According to Paisley et al. (2008), the role of significant others in dietary change can be one of support, but dietary change may also be responded to with negative emotions. It will therefore be interesting to see if vegan parenting is experienced differently according to whether both parents identify as vegan, or only one is vegan.

I anticipate that the input of wider family members will also be significant in shaping the experience of vegan parenting, with possible variation according to the vegan status of family members. In the work of Beardsworth & Keil (1992), they make reference to a 'chicken row' which took place within a family unit with mixed dietary preferences:

> We're very close, in proximity to Fred's mother. And we have the usual annual row at the moment, about Christmas, in that she is expecting to be invited for Christmas… and I don't really want the chicken row, as I call it... she came last Christmas, and she actually arrived with her own chicken... ready cooked, and sat there at the table saying how lovely and fresh it was, and how wonderful it was, and a lovely, lovely dinner...

she's done that to me every year... so now we're at the stage where
Fred is going to have Christmas with his mum, and I'm going to have
Christmas with my brother (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992, p. 278).

The participant in this study who is quoted above clearly mirrors some of the disregard for vegetarians and vegans discussed earlier. Where familial relations are often complex, and dietary choices may vary across and within families, I can only imagine situations like this will be amplified when children become involved. Not only this, but it will likely mean that separating family members as a resolution to conflict will no longer be an option. Understanding the intricate meanings of social interactions not only in the context of veganism in a non-vegan world, but also according to varying beliefs about child-rearing, will therefore be integral to understanding the experiences of vegan parents.

Along with the management of relationships as a vegan in a non-vegan world, vegans are also expected to practically navigate a non-vegan world. With an increasing social acceptance of the lifestyle (Kersche-Risch, 2015), practising veganism is arguably becoming easier, with a greater number of options available in restaurants, grocery stores and for household items. I have seen these for myself. However, there appear to be attempts to assimilate veganism with the norm, for example, with the 'material substitution' of fake meats (Twine, 2018). While this arguably offers increased options for vegans and could improve the ease with which they can navigate the lifestyle, it has repercussions for the meaning of the lifestyle and its purpose for those who are vegan for ethical reasons and oppose meat conceptually.

The experience of finding and sharing vegan alternatives with others, even if these do replicate the norm, has been described as evidence of a new community of practice (Laakso et al., 2022). Within these communities, knowledge is shared and social learning takes place in a supportive environment, which solidifies the sense of veganism as a cultural movement and supports ongoing commitment. However, 'in-group' tensions and a sense of 'them and us' from within some vegan communities can also take place depending on the 'type' of vegan you are (Cherry, 2006). A range of other in-group distinctions can also serve as a dividing force across veganism, such as age. Wrenn & Lizardi (2021) describe the double-edged sword of being an older vegan, with age providing the strength of character required to commit to a challenging way of life, but also alienating older vegans from a community that is predominantly younger in age. In this sense, vegan families will require a community

of practice that not only aligns with their veganism, but also feels representative of other elements of their family identity.

Studies using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The previous articles have considered some of the ways in which veganism is interacted with and experienced by its followers, and how it is perceived externally. However, most closely related to my own research is lived experience and understanding what it is really like to be a vegan.

The following studies employ IPA or other phenomenological investigation in order to understand veganism. IPA is a qualitative approach to psychological research which prioritises the personal meaning of experience in the context of an individual's social world (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith, 2011). By providing an in-depth account of an individual's experience, as well as how their interactions with others play out (Yanchar, 2015), IPA is an extremely valuable tool in understanding the lived experience of veganism. While they cover similar themes discussed above, I wanted to separate out these studies from the rest of the corpus in order to assess the benefit of a phenomenological approach in gaining rich and unique accounts of experience. Of note is the fact that out of the entire search only five relevant studies existed, with only one applying a 'pure' IPA approach.

Testoni et al. (2017) propose the use of IPA to look at motivations for excluding meat, focusing on how individuals make sense of the slaughter of animals for food. On closer examination, their research is heavily reliant on thematic analysis in its approach. However, great value is gained from its phenomenological engagement with the physical process of eating meat, which has not featured in the rest of the corpus. By viewing veganism through the experience of eating meat alongside the death of the animal, participants almost experience embodied cognition (Gallagher, 2014) and imagine contaminants being passed through the body via animal meat. In being able to focus on these physical processes it is clear to see how a phenomenological approach could be beneficial to my own empirical research, as it gains much closer proximity to participants' sense-making than other methods.

Dibsdall et al. (2002) attempt to understand beliefs around food and health. Of significance was the attention given to both the inner self and social environment as reciprocal worlds, which was made possible due to the use of IPA. In their work they

highlight how beliefs are shaped through a range of lenses and interactions, and how unique interpretations are made by each individual. In doing so, they were able to demonstrate the heterogeneity that exists around food choices that was lacking from the previous papers. It is important to note that this study did not directly focus on veganism but was an important source to include in demonstrating the suitability of IPA as an approach.

Of particular relevance to my own research is McDonald's (2000) choice of heuristic research to examine the experience of becoming vegan. She acknowledges her own personal interests as a benefit to her data collection and analysis, and how her position as a practising vegan has impacted her approach. Instead of attempting to distance herself and assume neutrality, she takes a central role in the process. As a result, she avoids linear descriptions of the experience, or the application of rigid and constraining categories, and gains close proximity to the participants' individual journeys to becoming vegan.

Seeing how prior experience of a phenomenon can play out in research like this will be a valuable starting point for my own, given my experience with veganism which has fuelled a desire to meaningfully get to the heart of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world. Similarly, the work of Edwards (2013) made use of her own food experiences to approach her investigation of being vegan/vegetarian as a minority. The exact methods used are omitted from the paper, but the phenomenological findings demonstrate strong engagement with her participants' psychological processes and frustrations associated with being a minority that resonate with her own world.

Perhaps one of the most robust IPA studies that relates to my area of interest was conducted by Costa et al. (2019). They examined the role that veganism plays in women's relationships to food, again drawing on the personal experiences of the investigators as a starting point. By inspecting participants' relationships with food both through the self and in relation to others, they provide insight into the individual meaning of veganism beyond the external concerns that had featured heavily in previous research (the environment, animals and so on). By being able to pull out the psychosocial implications of veganism and its impact on self-image, they also demonstrate *how* a vegan lifestyle becomes part of an individual's identity. This will be an extremely important element for my own research when exploring how vegan identity further evolves when becoming a parent.

Part two: Review of media messaging

The need for a different perspective

From the review of academic literature, an in-depth understanding of what it is like to be vegan has begun to emerge. It has been demonstrated how the lifestyle plays out in the context of a non-vegan world, in which the individual must manage relationships with non-vegans who assume a position of supremacy. However, what is missing almost entirely from the academic corpus, is how veganism is experienced as a family.

Of note while I was reviewing the academic literature, was the attention being paid to veganism and vegan children through other outlets such as podcasts, radio, and television. In January 2020 alone I found numerous articles, podcasts and television programmes broadcast via the BBC, focusing on the topic. For example, *Veganville* (2020) about the tensions of veganism and non-veganism in families, and *All Hail Kale: "Should We Raise Our Baby Vegan?"* (2020). Mass media takes a very different approach to information and knowledge sharing when compared with academic literature. I therefore anticipated that it would likely to play a significant role in how the women involved in my own research made sense of their vegan parenting experience in the context of a non-vegan world. Below is an extract from Abigail, one of the women interviewed as part of my empirical study, who describes her experience of the media's role in representing vegan parents and children.

> *You've probably heard in the media things like, was it a couple of years ago, I think was it Italy? Somewhere a couple's child starved. I don't know if the baby died or not. But they were vegan and it was painted that because of their veganism, this child died. And it wasn't, it was because they hadn't fed this child properly. But I just think as well, the media likes to latch on to things like that, and paint veganism as this really awful, almost unethical diet or something that is harmful to children (Abigail, p.19, line 940).*

The presence of derisory vegan narratives is likely to influence how both vegans and non-vegans make sense of their approach to child-rearing. We understand our social worlds according to interactions with others around us, and our interpretations of reality, to a degree, are defined through media messaging (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1995). Further, lived experience is filtered through a range of other discourses, with

our consciousness existing through lenses of family, friends, past experiences, future experiences, and so on. And regardless of whether an individual engages with media messaging, interactions with other social actors will inevitably expose them to second-hand media messaging (Donohue et al., 1973; Kressel, 1987).

It is therefore important for the purposes of my research, to understand the media discourses around vegan parenting that exist in the worlds of my participants. Contextualising their social environments according to dominant discourses will enable me to make sense of their lived experience as a minority, as well as to understand more about how they themselves make sense of their experiences.

The below examination of media messaging takes a slightly different approach to the above academic literature review. I will critically examine a defined corpus of media articles, but my focus will be on understanding how the implicit and explicit messages may impact perceptions and attitudes. This summary of media messaging serves as a follow-on to the academic literature on vegan individuals that has been included above; having understood the position of a vegan individual in a non-vegan world, I now intend to understand through media messaging how vegan parenting may be experienced, before more rigorously examining this through my own empirical research.

Conducting the media review

I searched Lexis Library News, an online archive of up-to-date UK news sources which also includes 'comment' sections, 'opinion' sections, 'features', and other representations of the views of readers. I conducted a keyword search for "vegan parent*" "vegan mother" "vegan child*" "vegan pregnan*", removing any duplicate or irrelevant articles (for example, there are several vegan dishes which include 'mother' in their name and so returns for these were excluded). I removed articles that were not relevant to England, given the location of the women I intended to include in my own sample, but decided to include articles spanning any range of dates in order to understand how attitudes and attention to vegan parenting may have evolved over time. It is worth noting that from 2015 there was a sharp increase in reporting of vegan parenting and children, with articles focusing on vegan pregnancy becoming more prominent in 2018. This further reinforces the suggestion that vegan parenting is on the rise.

This approach was taken in place of manual archive searching. My intention was to almost emulate the experience individuals have with media, with attention being paid to headlines as the initial exposure to a message that could be subconsciously consumed, before ensuring the content of each article was relevant to my search.

The articles included in my corpus span from 1996 – 2022 and include the following sources:

- The Independent
- The Times
- The Sun
- The Guardian
- The Daily Telegraph
- telegraph.co.uk
- The Sunday Express
- Daily Mirror
- Daily Record and Sunday Mail
- The Sunday Times
- Daily Star Online
- The Sunday Telegraph
- The Express
- The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday
- The Observer

These sources represent a range of political leanings, intended readership, and concern with objectivity or neutrality. In order to examine the content across the corpus, I made a list of all of the article headlines/titles for inclusion and annotated each with a brief description. I then clustered them into themes that emerged from these descriptions. Two overarching themes became obvious containers for the rest, with articles either relating to the diet and health associations of vegan parenting, or the lifestyle and belief systems associated with vegan parenting. These themes can be seen in the below table.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes for the media articles relating to vegan parenting.

Diet and health	Lifestyle and belief system

Vegan parents as deviant	Vegan parents as a nuisance
A warning about raising vegan children	Experiencing vegan parenting
Support for vegan parents	Relationships as a vegan parent

I was mindful of 'positive', 'negative', and 'neutral' representations of vegans in the media that had been examined in past research (Cole & Morgan, 2011). However, my focus will be thematic, relating to the headline and content. In doing this, the true messaging within seemingly neutral articles that turn out to denigrate or provide warnings to vegan parents will be exposed.

The diet and health of vegan children

As has been discussed with the correct care it is possible to sustain a safe pregnancy on a vegan diet, and with the appropriate selection of food, vegan diets can be suitable for people of all ages(*British Dietetic Association*, n.d.; Sebastiani et al., 2019). However, with little data on the long-term impact of veganism for children, and layperson conjectures about the dangers of removing animal products from a child's diet, the decision-making process for vegan parents is likely to include a consideration of the diet and health implications of veganism for their children.

Of all of the themes, the focus on diet and health predominated media messages, which rings true of previous work within this field. That is, that knowledge exchange around vegan parenting was assessed through a health and wellbeing lens (Phillips, 2019). Given the previous academic literature, with diet being one of the most obvious factors in differentiating vegans and non-vegans, it stands to reason that it could be the most accessible thing that could be used to marginalise them as a group.

Vegan parents as deviant

The first theme, 'vegan parents as deviant', came up time and time again, with vegan parents stereotyped as 'criminal', both literally and through their moral judgments. Great attention was paid to the legal repercussions that took place in the event that the children of vegan parents were treated with neglect, creating a narrative of vegan parenting being criminal, as opposed to the reality that it is child abuse and neglect that is criminal.

Attention was also paid to the impact of a vegan diet. Common conceptions of vegan children as 'malnourished' and 'starved to death' were repeated across many of the sources, with many duplicate articles requiring removal, suggesting the strong desire to solidify the image of vegan children as unhealthy and the position of vegan parents as negligent. Headlines relating to the death of vegan infants included 'BABY DIET MURDER' (The *Mirror*, 2007) and 'BABY DIES ON VEGAN PARENTS' RAW FOOD DIET' (The *Daily Mail,* 2019).These articles ignored nuance and directly linked veganism to the death of the child, rather than to examine the responsibilities of the parents in ensuring their child was getting the nutrition they needed. One of the most striking things was how concern for the tragedy within the articles appeared to be overridden by the desire to derogate vegan parents.

Further examination also highlighted the distance between veganism and the reality of the stories. For example, the attribution of veganism to the following headline: 'Vegan parents 'nearly starve baby' by feeding him potato formula' (*Daily Star Online,* 2019). In fact, potatoes are not exclusively vegan and the article relates to an extreme and deficient diet that is not a representation of veganism, yet the deliberate attempt to include and demonise veganism is clear. Even searches for more measured and balanced sources within this theme pointed to the gratuitous focus on veganism. For example, 'Vegan parents risk jail for feeding children poor diet' (The *Times*, 2016) discusses the possible implementation of a new law surrounding jail sentences for parents who provide inadequate diets for their children. This jail sentence could apply to any diet deemed to be inadequate, yet the chosen headline focuses on veganism.

Other ways in which vegan deviancy was reported include the association between opposition to child vaccinations and veganism, which again is not directly linked to the lifestyle but down to personal choice (and could easily be the personal choice of a non-vegan). Clear agendas exist within the journalism to provide negative attention to vegan parenting, representing the social context within which the women who participated in my research exist and make sense of their experience in relation to.

A warning about raising vegan children

Diet and health messaging also included warnings about the dangers of raising vegan children. Against the backdrop of the vegan parents who had 'gone too far' already in neglecting their children's diets, this seemed to be positioned as an admonishment 'before it was too late'. An article by The *Guardian*, 'What's missing in this pile of food?

Meat, and without it children are damaged, say scientists' (The *Guardian*, 2005), refers to what children need nutritionally. Ultimately, the piece suggests that veganism is not an appropriate diet for children, which could both cause concern for vegan parents, as well as to reinforce the views that vegan children are nutritionally deficient.

In addition to the warnings about vegan diets for children, veganism in pregnancy was also called into question. The article 'Should you stop being vegan when pregnant for the sake of your baby's health?' (The *Daily Telegraph*, 2019) was relatively measured in its core content, yet it presents a loaded headline which questions the safety of vegan pregnancy that could easily be consumed by a reader without following-up with the rest of the article. 'Nutritionist's warning over vegan diets in pregnancy' (The *Daily Mirror*, 2019) suggests that the health impacts of a vegan diet on a pregnant woman will extend to the child too. Focusing on pregnancy as a critical period, and laden with messaging that emphasises the responsibility of the mother to her child, expectant vegan mothers become positioned as irresponsible. Yet, the responsibility for measured reporting appears not to extend to those in power, with the headline 'LENTIL BLOCK: Vegan diet can 'hurt kids' mental ability' (The *Sun*, 2019), which trivialises health concerns for vegan children through the headline pun. This article references the impact of nutritional deficiencies on women of childbearing age who exclude animal products, with little context or discussion around vegan alternatives, thus reinforcing the idea that it must be impossible to do safely.

Support for vegan parents

It is worth noting that the sources of articles with particularly provocative and anti-vegan rhetoric were largely right-wing tabloid papers, which are notorious for spurious claims and tenuous connections with the truth. This is likely to impact the experience of vegan parenting in different ways, not only according to which media sources vegan parents consume themselves, but in terms of their interactions with others and the types of outlets and messages that those others are accessing. Nonetheless, a continuous stream of anti-vegan discourses is bound to have an impact on how vegan parents experience and approach child-rearing, regardless of how they engage with media.

Where more impartial articles were available surrounding diet and health, these tended to be present in outlets providing more investigative journalism and those which claim to hold power to account. They felt more experiential than the 'science

backed claims' surrounding the dangers of veganism for children that had been presented in the tabloids. One of the few pieces that seemed to offer useful information and support to vegan parents was seen in The *Guardian*: 'If they're not eating any vegetables, you panic': the families raising vegan children Veganism is going mainstream - so what do you feed your baby?' (The *Guardian*, 2018). This piece provided an opportunity for vegan parents to feel represented through a presentation of the journey of another vegan mother, her transition, and some of the experiences she had when raising a vegan child.

Even when articles were perceived to be supportive of vegan parenting, often the content did not marry up with the headline. For example, 'The One Show's Alex Jones stuns guests as she says turning vegan 'got her pregnant' (*Daily Star Online*, 2022) appears as almost promotional for vegan diets and pregnancy. Yet, nothing offering concrete evidence in support of the headline's claims was contained within the piece. In addition, 'supportive' articles were also able to reinforce veganism as inferior and vegans as outsiders. A response piece from a reader, defending vegan parenting, received the headline 'Good enough for gorillas' (The *Daily Telegraph*, 2005). This positions vegans more closely to gorillas than humans, and there appears to be a sense of mockery surrounding the (vegan) person who has questioned previously anti-vegan content. By applying this headline, the point of the piece – that in fact vegan child-rearing can be safe – becomes lost.

<u>Perceptions of the vegan lifestyle and belief system</u>

When the articles were not focused on the diet and health aspects of being vegan, comment was passed on the ethical elements of the lifestyle. This broad theme generated a lot of questions for me regarding how my own research could be framed, particularly in relation to how vegan parents are criticised when attempting to navigate a space that is not setup to meet their needs.

Vegan parents as a nuisance

Many of the narratives surrounding 'who' vegan parents are, pointed to their inability to join in with the majority. When they did, they were characterized as spoiling the fun of others, burdensome, and difficult in social situations.

According to a story in The *Times*, 'Nursery drops vegan-only menu after parents revolt' (The *Times*, 2019), there was outcry from non-vegan parents when a vegan-only menu was introduced at an (omnivorous) nursery, to the extent that animal products were then reintroduced. The vegan menu was introduced largely for ease in catering for all children attending the nursery, rather than to give preferential treatment to vegans. The piece actually details the angry responses from non-vegan parents rather than any demands from vegan parents, reinforcing the position of the majority in maintaining the status quo and sending a strong message to vegans. Examples like this point to the lack of inclusivity available to vegan children, leaving parents to continue to find their own alternatives and reminding them that their needs do not matter.

Food provision at nurseries also came up in another article by The *Times*, which likened vegans to Margaret Thatcher (and her association with the removal of free milk at school for children over the age of seven). The headline 'Vegans try to finish Thatcher's work' (The *Times*, 2020) actually provides some nuance to the story. It points to a vegan campaign for the replacement of cow's milk with fruit and vegetables, and in doing so it recognises that vegan children need to be catered for outside of the home. Again, the article's unfortunate headline does not do anything to support vegan parents unless the audience engages with the full content.

There were also other articles relating to vegan parenting and school incidents. 'School targeted by animal rights activists after vegan parents criticise decade-long pig rearing project' (The *Daily Telegraph*, 2018) refers to a story that positions vegan parents as ruining the fun of a longstanding project involving the rearing of a pig on school grounds. It is possible that a project like this could be inappropriate for a number of reasons, for example due to the relationship between pigs and humans in certain religions (Simoons, 1961). Yet, focus is placed on the objection from a parent who is highlighted as becoming vegan only three months prior to his complaint, and the desire to relay the negative impact of veganism on the majority is clear.

Experiencing vegan parenting

To a degree, the experience of vegan parenting was represented within the corpus through thought pieces as well as more general reporting articles. The *Guardian* published the following story, which could provide the type of neutral narrative vegan families need in order to feel accepted and legitimate within media discourses: 'Meet

the parents raising vegan babies: the rapid rise in veganism in the UK has been driven by young people. Here, four parents explain how to raise a vegan child safely' (The *Guardian*, 2016). However, despite the potential of the article to position the families as role models, within its presentation of some of the experiences of vegan parents it was not without warnings about the dangers and complications of raising vegan children. Not only this, but even this neutral or positive focus on vegan parenting highlights the distinction between 'normal' parents and 'vegan parents', by placing veganism at the forefront family identity.

Another example of vegan experience being represented in the media is seen from the following piece: 'Can vegans ever be good parents?' (The *Daily Telegraph*, 2016). Despite using a loaded headline, the article provided a relatively measured consideration of the vegan parenting experience, suggesting its gradual entry into the mainstream and recognising the intentions of vegan parents to provide a better way of life for their children. This perhaps represents the readership that the tantalising headline was speaking to in order to engage people with the contents of the piece.

When vegan parenting was supported or defended, this was often done as part of a features section or though readers' responses. In the 'Features' section of The *Express*, the experiences of three vegan women who were raising vegan children were shared in the following piece: 'BANNING FOOD FROM BABY'S DIET' (The *Express*, 2002). Again, there appears to have been a need to use a provocative headline to garner interest in veganism, but this proved to be one of the very few articles that not only defended the lifestyle, but shared personal advice and information that could be helpful to others. Whilst vegan parenting was not celebrated within the article, it was written about with a sense of normality and as a way of life that appeared possible to achieve for others.

Relationships as a vegan parent

There were far fewer representations of relationships with or between vegan parents across the articles. When they did appear, veganism was highlighted as a source of conflict for parents, as can be seen in the following headline which sums up the content of the article: 'My ex-husband fed our vegan daughter McNuggets without telling me' (The *Daily Star*, 2021). With reference to my own research, this piece points to the type of challenges that could be faced within families, that were also touched on earlier by Beardsworth & Keil (1992).

Relationship conflict was also present with non-family members, as is demonstrated by an opinion piece in The *Guardian* 'May I have a word...about what constitutes a community: The shifting patterns of English' (The *Guardian*, 2018). Although the title is ambiguous, this article covers the responses to the aforementioned school pig rearing project, choosing to focus on the vegan versus non-vegan tensions that arose. As a result, it is particularly significant in representing more sinister views about how vegans are permitted to exist in a non-vegan world. The author writes, "there are few more thrilling encounters than a red-blooded spat between vegans and carnivores, rich as it will be in anthropomorphism, compassion, welfare, health concerns, wellbeing and a generous leavening of bile." In introducing the event in this way, he demonstrates his interest in reinforcing opposition between vegans and non-vegans, highlighting the inequitable battle that vegan parents are up against in an attempt to navigate a non-vegan world with ease.

Immersion in media discourses is part of everyday life, and it would be impossible for vegans or non-vegans to be completely immune to the above-mentioned messaging. Of key importance is that this range of messaging continues to exist, and so in order to understand what the experience of being a vegan parent is like, I will need to understand what it like for them to be on the receiving end of these messages.

Additional sources

As has been seen, veganism and vegan child-rearing is considered a non-normative lifestyle choice. Within the field of psychology there are a range of theories that may be used to examine individuals who choose to adopt an alternative way of life, such as Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT resonates most with this work, as it aims to understand the relationship between social groups and identity formation.

Central to SIT is the way in which people generate identity according to their social group (Haslam, 2018). In spite of a person's unique attributes their membership to social groups plays a pivotal role in their self-definition, as well as their perceptions of others (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Thus, group identity becomes internalised to the extent that an individual may define themselves through their group membership over their individual characteristics (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Haslam et al., 2009).

According to Haslam (2018) a process of 'self-categorization' also takes place whereby the positioning of different social groups alongside each other helps to strengthen the meanings an individual attributes to them (and their members), as well as their own identification with their adopted group. Consequently, comparison takes place at this group level, often resulting in positive associations with one's own group with individuals gaining a strong sense of self, and self-worth through group affiliation (Haslam et al., 2018; Haslam, 2004).

Social identities therefore underpin our perceptions and social behaviours (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). In this way, SIT offers both a social and psychological lens through which to view the lifestyle choices the women in my study have chosen. This will be helpful, having already identified uncertainty around the motivations for, and maintenance of this non-normative way of life.

A number of other sources came to light that did not fall within either the academic literature or media articles, but served to reinforce the emerging findings and felt relevant to include.

For example, in January 2021 there was a piece in *The Psychologist*, the monthly publication from the British Psychological Society, quite literally titled '*Vegan in a non-vegan world*' (*The British Psychological Society*, n.d.). The article detailed a reader's surprised response to the positive portrayal of, and range of vegan articles that had been included in the previous issue. When I then went to access the issue in question, '*A Vegan Future?*', I found that it comprised of a range of articles surrounding the role of psychology in veganism. They related to its history and cultural relevance, through to meat eaters' responses to veganism, its impact on relationships, and uptake of the diet, demonstrating the traction veganism is gaining in the field of psychological sciences.

There also appears to be an increasing online space for vegans who are acknowledging their anguish in a space that they feel they do not belong. Clare Mann, a vegan psychologist and existential psychotherapist, has even developed a new term, 'Vystopia', which she describes as:

> *Existential crisis experienced by vegans which arises out of an*
> *awareness of the trance-like collusion with a dystopian world. It's the*

> *awareness of the greed, ubiquitous animal exploitation and speciesism*
> *in a modern dystopia (Mann, n.d.).*

Whilst self-published and perhaps lacking objectivity, it is very possible that her views are shared to some degree by other vegans, who find that the practices of the majority do not align with their own ethics, and struggle to make sense of the actions of the non-vegan majority. A range of similar pieces are also emerging, including other self-published books such as *Vegan Freak: Being Vegan in a Non-Vegan World* (Torres & Torres, 2009). I would argue that this points to a need for more robust evidence-based research to showcase the experience of vegans living in a non-vegan world. In any case, being aware of the presence of such communities may provide a good foundation for understanding the experiences of the women taking part in my own work.

Summary of key features

The purpose of this review was to uncover what literature already exists in my field of study: the experience of being a vegan parent in a non-vegan world. As discussed, vegan families are relatively absent in literature pertaining to experience. For this reason, I chose to examine literature that was closest to my methodological and substantive interests and focus on understanding what it is like to be a vegan individual in a non-vegan world. Following on from this, a review of media discourses highlighted common conceptions of vegan parenting, pointing to some of the ways that the lived experience of veganism as an individual may evolve when children are introduced.

Through my review of the qualitative literature, I have demonstrated that the experience of being vegan goes beyond dietary choices. Of key significance to the vegan experience is:

- How individuals identify with veganism is incredibly complex, nuanced and unique, to the extent that I felt compelled to qualify my reference to it as a 'lifestyle' for fear of crude homogenisation.
- Food consumption is incredibly meaningful, having the power to bind and divide communities, and reveal information about a person's belief system.

- The experience of being vegan can vary enormously according to motivation and identity, and how this is made sense of by others. For example, whether an individual identifies as vegan for ethical or health reasons.
- Purpose is an important determining factor in the ongoing maintenance of a vegan lifestyle.
- There is an 'in/out' group mentality within the vegan community, as well as for vegans living in a non-vegan world.
- Identity management plays a significant role in social interactions between vegans and non-vegans.

Whilst these elements of vegan experience relate to the individual, it is likely that they will become amplified with the inclusion of children, as interactions with new institutions and social networks increase. What can be seen from combining the academic literature and the review of media messaging, is that veganism becomes a very emotive topic when a baby or a child is involved.

<u>Research questions</u>

Through my own research I will add to the body of academic literature on veganism by examining what happens when veganism and child-rearing converge, and demonstrate how some of the widely held beliefs that are present in media messaging impact the lived experience vegan families. Using the following questions, I will characterise what it is like to be a vegan parent in a non-vegan world:

- What are the factors involved in parents making the decision to raise their children as vegans?
- How do vegans experience raising children in a non-vegan world, both within the family unit and with wider networks?
- How does the experience evolve as children grow older and social pressures and self-agency become more pronounced?
- What are the dominant discourses surrounding vegan child-rearing and how do they impact experience?

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

<u>Introduction</u>

In the previous chapter I presented findings from two distinct corpuses: academic literature and media texts. I chose to present academic literature concerned with the experience of being vegan, which demonstrated how this lived experience could be understood through qualitative research methods. I then presented examples of media coverage relating to vegan parenting, which served as a starting point in how knowledge may be accessed and shared. This also demonstrated reliance on the reader taking an active role in generating meaning from a range of messages. In this chapter I build on this to highlight the importance of understanding how knowledge and meaning is accessed, to inform how I will conduct my own empirical research.

I will begin with how my own epistemological position has shaped the direction of this thesis. This will be followed by an overview of the evolving nature of epistemology in human sciences, which led to the approach my own research takes: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The purpose of this chapter is to critically engage with theories of knowledge, and to consider how these may impact my position as a researcher approaching my own empirical work. My intention is to provide insight into how I came to primarily adopt IPA whilst also demonstrating the value of alternative approaches which may have been employed.

<u>Epistemology</u>

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge, which aims to identify what and how we know what we know (Langdridge, 2007). Understanding how individuals make sense of what exists is integral for my study, not only in generating the most useful findings but in order to inform the most appropriate method to use when carrying out my research. In this sense, reflecting on my own epistemology from the outset enabled me to apply rigour to my methodology and help to identify the tools needed to generate robust and trustworthy results (Willig, 2013).

I would describe myself as a critical realist, an approach initially developed by Roy Bhasker when trying to understand social reality. I identify with critical realism due to its distinction between the real and the observed world, with the following explanation

taken from the work of Zhang (2023). I believe that reality exists independently of our own perceptions but cannot be considered as an observable structure (or structures). However, these unobservable structures do lead to observable events, meaning that reality is accessed through our own perceptions. In this way, the exact meaning I am able to make will be impacted by my own personal experience and context, despite the fact that what I am observing is happening independently and 'by itself'.

Acknowledging that reality is mediated through my own perceptions will be important to how I approach and present my own work, that is, my own context will underpin the entirety of my study. For that reason I want to revisit the experience with my mother that I shared in Chapter one. At the time, I was left in disbelief having not considered that the phenomenon of the Christmas meal carried very different meanings for both parties. On reflection, what was eaten – and more specifically, what was shared – represented the central point for my mother. For me this 'same' experience meant something very different, with the food carrying little significance. Framing this experience in the context of critical realism, it feels much clearer to see how my mother's upset – which caused me so much confusion – may have been due to a range of perceptual factors that I did not consider at the time. As an example, where I had seen the experience of sitting and eating at the table as an opportunity to connect, she may have made sense of our different plates as a divide, or even a rejection of her own beliefs and way of life. Ultimately, had this experience not taken place, I may not have been led to this study. In recognising this, I point to both the value of personal interests in generating new avenues of research whilst at the same time ensuring that these personal interests do not impact the credibility of the work, as will be discussed in more detail later.

Positivism

According to Willig (2013), "positivism suggests that there is a straightforward relationship between the world (objects, events, phenomena) and our perception, and understanding, of it. Positivists believe that it is possible to describe what is 'out there' and to get it right" (p.17). In this sense, how and what we know is seen as independent of our own consciousness. Positivism draws on experimental science and suggests that the natural world is 'measurable', in part due to the notion that there is a single reality. Having emerged during a period of great enthusiasm for the role of science, positivism therefore became extremely popular in human sciences (Klein, 2015).

However, a critical stance on the realist notion of a single, measurable world, is that access to this world does not take into account interpretation or context (Moules, 2015). My reason for not fully subscribing to positivism is my belief that whilst humans may inhabit one single physical world, the meaning of this world and its contents will be different for each person, which will vary according to a range of influences. I will put this in the context of food philosophy in the Western world, where an omnivorous diet is seen as the norm and the majority of individuals consume a range of animal products. For a vegan, this space may be viewed as hostile, challenging, and as lacking a sense of belonging. However, within a vegan community who share the same belief system and automatically understand the needs of one another, the experience of the world becomes very different (Kaplan, 2020)

Whilst I am not disregarding the value of positivism, I believe there is a need to recognise nuance, and be careful when reducing human behaviour so as not to limit what is possible for us to know (Langdridge, 2007). This is discussed further by Moules (2015), who views positivism as insufficient as a means to accessing the human world, where lived experience is dependent on a conscious, intentional human. By moving beyond singular meanings, and placing more focus on the consciousness of humans who are able to act with will when interacting with structures or objects, a greater number of explanations become possible (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology

In response to a need for the unique and variable experiences of individuals to be recognised in the acquisition of knowledge, and for these to be examined in a systematic way, phenomenology arose (Spinelli, 1989). In this sense, phenomenology may then be seen as an extension as well as an alternative to positivism. Put simply, it is the science of phenomena with the meaning of phenomena derived from the experience of the individual (Aho, 2020). Focus is placed on the individual's conscious experience, their 'subjective reality', when accessing meaning, which emphasises the importance of the agency of the individual in generating meaning over the structure or object itself (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology transcends positivist ideas about what we know emerging from pre-existing meaning within objects, to ask the question about *how* we might know something according to our own context. This makes possible an extension of static

and universally held knowledge, uncovering new meanings and understandings. As an example, I want to revisit the definition of veganism:

> *Veganism is a philosophy and 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; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals (The Vegan Society, n.d.a).*

This unitary definition – or meaning – of veganism is valuable to have. However, veganism as lived experience cannot be universal. It is dependent on pre-existing knowledge, experience, location, time, relationships with others and so on. As a result, not only is it variable between people, but it is also fluid and changeable within a person.

Arguably, phenomenology removes the positivist constraints that have been previously placed on knowledge and meaning (Banister, 1994). Whilst these constraints, or in some cases categories, may be valuable for generalisability and replication, their removal allows greater potential for understanding how we might know something, which at the same time will expand what we know. Removing these constraints may also promote greater freedom in human life (Van Manen, 1990), with the idea of freedom emerging as a central feature of vegan parenting, as will be discussed.

Acknowledging the existence of different knowledge and meaning, and that different ways of being can be equally valid, may also be particularly helpful in creating harmony within pluralistic societies. For example, I would suggest that in understanding the differing meaning that animals have according to cultural context – whether they have been socially constructed as food, a member of the family, of religious significance – greater acceptance of vegans in non-vegan spaces may be possible (Alsdorf et al., 2010; Ryder, 2011). In this way, phenomenology supports understanding the experience of an individual over an attempt to provide a universal explanation for what is 'really' going on (Willig, 2013).

Where variation exists in lived experience, it also exists in phenomenological approaches to how it can be examined. For this reason, I will outline below the key phenomenologists associated with the tradition, drawing on their differences as well as their shared understanding of how we make sense of our social worlds.

Husserl and transcendental phenomenology

Husserl (1859 – 1938) is considered the founding father of phenomenology, with his development of the 'science of phenomena' arising from reflections on the capabilities of scientific inquiry in relation to himself (Smith et al., 2022). Of key concern for Husserl was human consciousness and how it connects a person to the world. For him, human experience tells a story of the world from which a person's qualities emerge, referred to as 'transcendental phenomenology' whereby lived experience transcends the structures of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Spinelli, 1989). In this way, humans make individual connections with the world, known as intentionality. This is explained by Langdridge (2007) as follows:

> *Intentionality is not being used in its usual sense, of intending to do something such as go to the gym or bathe the cat. Instead, it refers to the fact that whenever we are conscious (or aware, if you like), it is always to be conscious (or aware) or something. There is always an object of consciousness, whether that is your cat, another person, or an idea (p.13).*

Broadly speaking then, intentionality for Husserl denotes how humans are drawn towards particular phenomena, our 'natural attitude', which is why those things will exist in the individual consciousness of some but not others. This is not to say that they do not exist elsewhere, but highlights that our intentionality is an essential part of individual experience (Moran, 2000). As an example, the suffering of animals is more frequently present in the experiences of vegans living in a non-vegan world, particularly given the ways in which they are required to navigate spaces that do not serve them. The same cannot be said for non-vegans whose conscious awareness may not be impacted by non-vegan practices in the same way.

Managing prejudices

In order to be scientific in his examination of experience, Husserl saw a need to 'bracket' the natural attitude of an individual in order to get to the 'essence' of the

phenomenon, with this process referred to as the phenomenological epoché (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This refers to the detachment of individual assumptions, preconceptions and judgements in order to appreciate the phenomenon independently of our own reality (Warnock, 1985). In thinking about how to apply epoché to my own research, it would appear that it does not fully align with my chosen approach of IPA. According to Smith et al. (2009), in IPA the influences of an individual on meaning can be resolved differently. That is, by acknowledging the potential for contamination at the outset, and engaging with the position of an individual, possible influences can be accounted for on an ongoing basis. By assuming that it is possible for potential biases to be put to one side, there is a danger of these influencing the meaning of a phenomenon if for whatever reason this suspension was not absolutely possible. As an alternative, IPA attempts to be more 'modest', favouring the ability to understand 'particular experiences' for 'particular people' over the essential meaning or 'eidos' of phenomena (Smith et al., 2022). Whilst the possibility of essential meaning feels comforting to me, I would argue that in the absence of full 'eidetic reduction', my findings will be more meaningful in exposing the multiple and evolving ways that phenomena exist, as will be discussed in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer later in this chapter.

With this in mind, it feels like an opportune moment to acknowledge that I am not without my own prejudices as a researcher. As has been discussed, it was my own experience that led me to conduct this research, and it is argued that pre-existing knowledge arising from experience may be of benefit (Caputo, 2018). To attempt to completely bracket off this experience in an attempt to be neutral, and not to impact the true essence of phenomena, could mean that I miss the opportunity for full access to my participants' experience and resulting meaning-making (Willig, 2019).

According to Dahlberg et al. (2008) 'bridling' may be used as an alternative to a full suspension of judgment, as it attends to pre-understandings throughout the course of the research process. Doing this fosters reflexivity and transparency, enabling phenomena to 'present itself'. In this way, Husserl's view of bracketing our prior assumptions is not completely disregarded, but renegotiated so that instead of trying to avoid the influence of our judgements on experience, we acknowledge and examine how they may be impacting meaning.

The reason this alternative view is important is due to the fact that actually, absolute bracketing may not be possible. According to Halling & Dahlberg (2001),

> *The particular relationship one has to a phenomenon prevents one*
> *from seeing it from a perspective that would be more clarifying. For*
> *example, one might become so familiar with or intimately related to the*
> *phenomenon that other ways of seeing are obscured or concealed*
> *(p.17).*

In this sense we may not see or be able to know the full extent to which our preconceptions could impact meaning in order to be able to bracket them. But by acknowledging that prior judgements do exist, and attempting to reflect on what they are, it may enable us to uncover potentially obscured or concealed understanding. The prior beliefs and values of the researcher therefore become a beneficial part of the research process; 'ontological and epistemological reflexivity' can prompt the researcher to recognise how they respond to participants and filter findings, and can be constitutive to robust findings (Berger, 2015; Willig, 2019).

The idea of putting to 'good use' my own prior experience was of comfort when concerns arose about the authenticity of my research in light of my own sympathy for veganism. It meant that rather than to try and ignore my own experience, I used elements of prior knowledge to shape lines of inquiry and gain access to parts of the women's world I thought existed. Being aware of this starting point then meant I could be reflexive throughout, and transparent with any readers of my research who may wish the bear my position in mind when making their own interpretations of my findings.

The lifeworld

With the idea of my own lens shaping my approach to knowledge and understanding, I will now introduce the concept of the lifeworld. Whilst this has been interpreted and presented in different ways by a range of philosophers and social scientists, it was popularised in the later work of Husserl through his application of reduction:

> *The lifeworld is the general structure which allows objectivity and*
> *thinghood to emerge in the different ways in which they do emerge in*
> *different cultures. Although different societies have different outlooks*
> *and different ways of understanding nature, Husserl believed that a*

> *more basic interrogation of these cultural differences revealed the*
> *invariant structure of the life-world (Moran, 2000, p.182).*

In this way, the lifeworld acts as an unconscious lens for an individual's experience, filtering their activities through a loose framework to shape the meaning they make.

The lifeworld is made up of a number of features believed to provide this meaning to an individual, several of which depend on the involvement of others. These features have been developed by other writers to include: temporality, spatiality, intersubjectivity, embodiment, and mood (Galvin & Todres, 2013). The combination of these features then guide an individual's sense-making but due to its grounding in lived experience, the lifeworld of each individual will be different (Zahavi, 2019). That is, whilst some parts of the lifeworld could be shared – such as raising a vegan family – there will be aspects of it that are unique to the individual. For example, a vegan parent's lifeworld may involve passion and satisfaction with the alternative way of life they have chosen; for someone else, feelings of sacrifice and burden may feature more heavily in the experience.

With a focus on experience in the context of everyday life, "the lifeworld is the world as concretely lived, which should be the foundation for all phenomenological psychological investigation" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 23). In fact, the concept of the lifeworld represents a useful tool for examining how individual filters may generate very unique understandings, thus highlighting the need to appreciate experience as subjective. As a result, I intend to demonstrate how the lifeworld can be used as an analytic tool within phenomenological research, as will be discussed in Chapter six.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

With context in mind, it is an appropriate point to introduce the work of Heidegger (1889 – 1976). Critical of some of Husserl's assertions, Heidegger moved away from transcendental phenomenology and its concern with the internal state of consciousness, towards a concern with the impact of contextual factors on how individuals understand phenomena (Moran, 2000). As a result, he began to integrate theories of interpretation – or hermeneutics – into his phenomenology. However, Heidegger is perhaps most known for his concern with existence, underpinned by 'Dasein', which shifted the focus of phenomenology towards existentialism and the desire to answer the question of human existence (Aho, 2020). Dasein, meaning 'presence' or the experience of 'being there', is specific to the existence of humans

and was later used as reference to the subject so as not to obscure how human existence could be understood (Langdridge, 2007). That is, the features of Dasein were seen by Heidegger as underpinning how we are embedded in the world, rather than how our human existence is made up and then connected to the world.

Like Husserl, Heidegger suggested that we are immersed in an existing world, however, he believed that this world became fulfilled in the presence of others, which is not the same as Husserl's point about individual consciousness connecting a person to the world. In this way, we are not disconnected from a pre-existing world, and we do not make sense of the world externally to it; we make sense of the world from within it and in relation to others (Caputo, 2018). Because of this, Heidegger placed emphasis on the active role of the individual 'in the moment', when considering how they understand and make sense of their world. Meaning is therefore generated through what is important to the person's purpose at the time, suggesting that essential meaning, or essences, are not possible (Aho, 2020).

The issue of essential meaning

This calls into question Husserl's ideas that the essences of experience can be revealed through reduction. Instead, Heidegger's phenomenology places greater emphasis on the impact of cultural and historical context on meaning. Langdridge (2007) explains how this does not represent a need to completely reject the idea of underlying structures or essences. Where essences may exist, rather than assuming they can be reduced to display meaning, instead their meaning is accessed via a process of interpretation. This therefore highlights the importance of acknowledging how subjective meaning can be, and prioritising interpretation over description of experience.

As an example, a non-vegan may struggle to access the vegan experience of visiting a cake shop that serves vegan options. On the surface the non-vegan may see the vegan go into the shop and choose a cake, and assume they are satisfied, or even grateful that there is something that meets their needs as a vegan. By viewing the event in this way, the essence or essences so far could be seen as 'essential'; the shop sells cakes for people to buy, it has vegan options, and the vegan has purchased one. However, this does not attend to many other possible meanings of that experience that will have been influenced by how the vegan's existence has been shaped to date. In fact, the vegan may have left the cake shop with reinforced feelings

of being an 'outsider' if there was only one vegan option available out of the entire selection of cakes. This is something that will be important for me to bear in mind when attempting to understand the experiences of my participants, given that I have prior knowledge of veganism but not of being a parent, and highlights the need for an idiographic approach to my work.

The aforementioned feature of the lifeworld, temporality, also has significance to the work of Heidegger. As a feature of Dasein, temporality – or the experience of time – is at the heart of what it means to exist (Langdridge, 2007). According to Heidegger's existential temporality, Dasein is part of time whilst looking ahead to the possibilities of existence in the context of the past, present and future (Caputo, 2018). This is of particular interest to my area of research, given the fluctuating relationship between veganism and the social world according to what we know (that meat eating is normal), as well as the evolution of wider discourses around child-rearing. Not only this, but past experience as a non-vegan will impact how veganism and parenthood is made sense of by my participants.

Writing after Heidegger, and employing hermeneutics to his approach to phenomenology, Gadamer (1900 – 2002) offered further insights into the highly interpretative and emergent nature of knowledge (Smith et al., 2022). His work reinforced how the presence of others influences how we make sense of phenomena, and he started to bridge the gap between methodology and method. Ultimately, he highlighted the need to think practically about how phenomenological research is conducted, with particular attention paid to the impact of the relationships that researchers have with their social worlds (Gadamer, 1960/2004).

Gadamer's hermeneutics therefore speaks to the aforementioned concept of 'bridling'. His focus on subjectivity in meaning-making moves beyond the individual making sense of the phenomenon, to the context of the researcher making sense of the research. Gadamer referred to the historical and cultural contexts that individuals bring to meaning-making as 'effective history', suggesting that we are all affected by our past and so can never truly be impartial (Langdridge, 2007). However, for Gadamer, acknowledging this at the outset is not always possible and so the influences of prior experience may arise during the process of engaging with a new object (Smith et al., 2022). This points to the cumulative nature of knowledge and therefore research, with no fixed or finite understandings but findings that are open to revision and further interpretation.

The work of Gadamer lays strong foundations for my chosen approach, given his more applied use of hermeneutics. In his explanation of meaning-making as cumulative and open to renegotiation, he points to a process that takes place as one person seeks to find meaning in the words of another. The extent of this meaning-making is both enabled and limited by our own pre-understandings (Langdridge, 2007). This process is described as a 'double hermeneutic' which features heavily in IPA, during which the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's account, who is at the same time attempting to make sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2022).

The hermeneutic circle

However, cumulative meaning-making is also cyclical, with this process of understanding referred to as the 'hermeneutic circle'. Described by Smith et al. (2022), the hermeneutic circle is

> *Concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look at the whole; to understand the whole; you look to the parts (p.22).*

The hermeneutic circle underpins a number of aspects of theory and practice. When understood through the relationship between the researcher and their subject of enquiry, I see it as supportive of the idea that preconceptions may be 'put to good use', and representative of a 'way in' to the phenomenon at hand. For example, I had personal experience with veganism – so 'part' of the phenomenon – which informed the idea for this study, and allowed me an element of access to the 'whole'. Through understanding more about the parenting aspect of veganism from the women (another 'part'), I then understood more about vegan parenting as a whole. This cyclical and infinite process is outlined by Moran (2000) below:

> *Our questioning really is a kind of light which casts a certain pattern on the phenomenon, while also filling in our expectation in a way that allows us to formulate further questions, and thus to advance our understanding (p.237).*

The hermeneutic circle therefore represents a significant part of hermeneutic phenomenology, and will form the basis for how I approach the data collection and analysis for my own work.

Like Gadamer, Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) also began to put forward ways in which interpretative phenomenological research could be carried out. He posits an approach to understanding, using the 'hermeneutics of empathy' and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', which is outlined as follows. When applying the hermeneutics of empathy or 'meaning recollection' (Langdridge, 2007) to research, meaning arises from what is evident in the participant's account, with interpretation taking place from what has been shared – either directly or indirectly. It is not overly reliant on description, but attempts are not being made to construct meaning from what is absent. By contrast, the hermeneutics of suspicion serves as more of a deconstruction; it can be used to go beyond what is shared, stretching the idea of context in thinking about what may exist 'beneath' the meaning that arises (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). In approaching phenomena in this way, the researcher is able to interpret both what is explicitly said and also what is 'behind' a participant's words. My reasoning for adopting IPA as an approach to my own work relates to this dual concern with understanding both what has and what has not been directly communicated. However, as will be discussed, FDA represents an additional tool to further deconstruct the context of experiences.

Existential philosophy

Existentialism was later developed by writers such as Sartre (1905 – 1980). Whilst his work was phenomenological, he was heavily concerned with "theorizing existence itself" (Langdridge, 2007). Sartre also rejected the notion of individuals being fixed in their essence, in favour of a more evolving existence, viewing humans as 'free'. That is, humans are not fixed in their 'being', rather, their existence is an ongoing process of 'becoming' (Aho, 2020). This feels particularly relevant to the topic of veganism in child-rearing, given the argument about whether infants are intrinsically omnivorous or if it is something they are socialised into within a dominant meat-eating culture (Kaplan, 2020). It also relates heavily to 'facticity', a feature of Heidegger's Dasein which is described below:

> *Although we create ourselves, there are limits to these choices, since*
> *we are thrown into a world that predates us and that limits our possible*
> *ways of being: the facticity of our existence. Physical, psychological*

and social factors, our historical situatedness, will all serve to limit our possibilities, but even here these factors do not determine what Dasein might or might not be, since Dasein can make of this facticity what it chooses (Langdridge, 2007, p.30).

Facticity and the dilemma of choice was heavily present throughout the narratives of the women in my study, and a push and pull around decision-making emerged as a result of the non-vegan world that the women experienced child-rearing within. This will be discussed in the context of power later in this chapter, and permeates this entire thesis.

The final existential phenomenologist I want to mention is Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961), whose particular interest in the body speaks to how subjective individual experience is. Not completely disregarding Husserl's view on essential meaning, he considered that the 'ingredients' of experience represent a starting point from which a phenomenon can be understood (Dahlberg, 2006). That is, in the same way that the lifeworld includes features that shape a person's experience, the same could be said about the components of phenomena. For example, a specific feature of veganism is the exclusion of animal products. The reasons for this may vary – as has been discussed with reference 'health vegans', 'environmental vegans' and 'ethical vegans', – but the exclusion of animal products is integral to its meaning, without which you are not vegan.

Embodiment

The idea of accessing the essential meaning of experience is closely related to the role that the body plays in generating knowledge. Merleau-Ponty sees bodily experience as embedded in human existence (Langdridge, 2007), suggesting that we can never fully understand the experience of another person given that they do not share the same body as us (Finlay, 2006). An obvious example of this relates to the perception of pain, and how we cannot feel or have embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005) for the pain of another person. This also highlights the proximal position of ethical vegans to animals, where greater consideration is given to what takes place in the production of meat.

Moran (2000) discusses Merleau-Ponty's view that individuals are unable to gain objective knowledge about their own bodies, despite the fact that we use them to make sense of our experiences. "Our insertion into the world is through the body with

its motor and perceptual acts" (p.403), and so as a unified system of perception with our consciousness, we are unable to step out of our bodies to try and understand them. This calls into question the earlier concept of intentionality which suggests that it is our conscious awareness that provides access to phenomena (Langdridge, 2007), and points to the need for the body to be included when trying to understand experience.

The body becomes even more central to understanding when practices that are experienced through our bodies are challenged, which in turn challenges how 'we are our bodies'. Kaplan (2020) distinguishes food epistemology from 'ordinary' epistemology due to the distinctions between the body and consciousness in how we experience phenomena. With regard to food, he states that "we not only perceive, know, and judge it, we also smell, taste, and feel it" (p.38), and so eating food represents a unique experience that draws on multiple systems at the same time and poses a significant challenge to the idea of essential meaning. However, veganism subverts "knowledge acquired by the mouth" (Kaplan, 2020, p.39) for those that have previously enjoyed the taste of meat, and bodily experiences (such as salivation when smelling certain meats being cooked) become out of sync with the meaning that is attached it. Accordingly,

> The key differences between ordinary and food epistemology are that
> experiences of tasting and savoring are appreciably different from our
> experiences of seeing and hearing. The kind of information that we
> have is different, what we can know is different, and the way we make
> and verify truth claims is different (Kaplan, 2020, p.50).

Of significance to the inclusion of children in veganism, is that the narratives around food that they will receive at home will support the meaning attached to animals as 'not for food', and the rationalisation of meat eating being 'wrong'. Depending on external influences from the non-vegan world, they may develop less association between animals and food than their parents did, but their bodily responses to the smell or taste of meat may still contradict those understandings.

Embodied experience is also of significance to the phenomenon of child-rearing given the increased social pressures on, and interest with, pregnant bodies. The body becomes an even more pronounced feature of sense-making for vegan mothers though. Adams (2015) explains how dairy cattle are artificially inseminated in order to

expedite the cycle of milk production. Their calves are then removed from them shortly after birth – often for slaughter – so that their milk can be sold for consumption by humans, and this is one of the reasons why ethical vegans reject milk. For vegan women during pregnancy and the early years of child-rearing, this process arguably causes a deeper reflection on their decision not to consume dairy, due to the new experience of their own bodies in bearing and feeding children.

Descriptive phenomenology

As an alternative to the hermeneutic phenomenology discussed above, the work of Amedeo Giorgi should be considered. Giorgi (1992/1997) attempts to provide a detailed account of those conscious experiences that have been theorised by previous academics, moving from the analysis of meaning to a description of meaning. In doing so he places greater focus on the phenomenon rather than the individual, in order to be able to make generalisations. Emphasis is placed on the essential essence of phenomena in order to be able to make generalisations (Giorgi, 2010; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008), thus reintroducing Husserl's epoché and its concern with removing an individual's interpretative lens, which I have already considered to be a barrier to findings in my own work.

Despite having demonstrated the need for a hermeneutic and existential approach to my work, and therefore choosing to adopt IPA as my primary approach, I want to be clear that this does not discount the value of descriptive phenomenology, and the possibility of accessing 'truth' via essences will be a continuing theme throughout this thesis. In fact, IPA and descriptive phenomenology are both 'part of the same family', in that they are both concerned with phenomenology but just approach it in a different way. And in discussing the above writers' approaches, I hope that I have demonstrated that they have similarities as well as differences, and that 'doing' phenomenology is nuanced, with no 'right' or 'wrong' way (but a more or less appropriate way, depending on the nature of the research in hand).

As an example, Ashworth (2016) takes a more descriptive stance on the abovementioned lifeworld, a fuller explanation of which will be covered in Chapter six. Whilst his work is based on individual experience, this is then extended to generate more generalisable, measurable meanings. This does not represent an absolute deviation from interpretation and he still remains mindful of individual meaning, but it does suggest that there are a range of ways to apply phenomenological psychology,

with IPA not wholly discounting the value of a descriptive approach either (Ashworth, 2003).

Further, the work of Darren Langridge provides a good example of how phenomenology can underpin psychological research in a range of ways. Referring to himself as 'phenomenologically informed' rather than subscribing absolutely to a particular phenomenological approach, he is concerned with the power at play within language. His approach, Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), arose out of an engagement with the earlier mentioned work of Paul Ricœur, and demonstrates how the interrogation of structures may reveal the impact of ideologies on accessing meaning and understanding experience (Langdridge, 2007). He acknowledges the value of CNA when power and politics are at play, and advocates for other phenomenological methods, further reinforcing the value of considering a range of approaches depending on the needs of the research. It is this perspective that prompted me to consider other methodological approaches to my own research, and led to my decision to adopt a dual-focus.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

There is demonstrable value in the range of approaches to human experience discussed above, and the nuances within the phenomenological tradition provide a range of opportunities for methods that do not have to rely wholly on interpretation *or* description. Phenomenology has also influenced a range of disciplines beyond its beginnings in philosophy, and so the ways of 'doing' it are also likely to evolve (Halling, 2008). As discussed in the introduction, my epistemological position acknowledges both a reality that exists beyond my perceptions, but one that cannot be universally described and is reliant on interpretation. With this in mind, IPA appears to be the approach most coherent with my world view and the aims of my research, and will be the primary method used in this study.

Hermeneutic commitment

A key feature of IPA is its commitment to interpretation, with researchers concerned with how individuals make sense of phenomena, as opposed to uncovering essential meaning or the essence of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). This is done via the double hermeneutic whereby the researcher makes sense of the participant making sense of their experience, whilst acknowledging how their own experiences may

impact interpretation. As has been discussed, this will be a valuable asset to my own research where I am able to draw on my own experiences in order to gain greater access to those of my participants, whilst utilising reflexive awareness (Willig, 2019) to ensure my own assumptions are not imposed on the narratives of the women.

Idiography

According to Eatough & Smith (2017), in order to provide a detailed account of experience focus should be placed on the individual rather than the general. This means that lived experience needs to be examined through real life or 'concretely lived' situations as described by an individual, with focus on a particular phenomenon in a particular context required for sufficient depth of understanding. For example, it would be insufficient to attempt to understand how a vegan parent makes sense of a mealtime without having an exact mealtime in mind – who was there, what was being eaten, were others present vegan or non-vegan, and so on. When considering the number of factors involved in specific individual experiences, it becomes clear how impossible it would be to gain meaningful understandings without first attending to a specific individual context.

Therefore, IPA is also concerned with the 'particular' and does not attempt to make claims at a general level. A scientific approach is applied and through the use of small, homogenous sample sizes the researcher is able to conduct a close reading of each individual narrative (Smith et al., 2022). Value is placed on the idiosyncrasies of 'insider' or 'first-person perspective' which ensures that an inductive process of understanding takes place for each participant's experience, and that rich and layered accounts of meaning are possible (Larkin et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

In fact, this focus on the particulars of individual experience is necessary in order to draw out the aforementioned 'hidden' meaning from what has been said. It enables an understanding of actual experience that has taken place as opposed to a general picture (Eatough & Smith, 2017), which is particularly important for the phenomenon of vegan parenting for which little experiential research currently exists. That said, the idiographic nature of IPA does still allow for findings that can be applied elsewhere, and may illuminate the experiences of others in a similar situation. For example, the comparison of cases to identify shared aspects of experience through convergences and divergences can be particularly meaningful to understanding phenomena (Smith et al., 2022) and speaks to the rejection of essential meaning discussed above.

I would argue that elements of essential 'truth' or essences do exist in the lives of the women, such as their existence in a non-vegan world. In this sense, whilst the idiographic commitments of IPA will be important in understanding their particular experiences according to their particular context, this context – the shared 'reality' of a non-vegan world – actually represents an important area of examination. As will be discussed shortly, the phenomenon of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world could therefore benefit from a closer interrogation of how 'truth' is constructed, shared and interacted with, beyond what IPA can offer.

Language

Not only does IPA place emphasis on what is explicitly said by participants, but also what is communicated by alternative means such as the use of metaphor, pauses, emphasis through repetition and so on (Smith et al., 2009). This highlights the integral nature of the interpretative researcher in 'getting behind' language to reveal the participant's authentic meaning in spite of their own pre-understandings (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Moules, 2002).

However, IPA has received criticism for failing to sufficiently acknowledge the role of language in making sense of experience. Whilst explicit attention is paid to language in IPA, due to the way in which it is attended to differently to discourse analysis it may be possible to assume it is overlooked. Gadamer placed particular emphasis on the role of speech and language in bringing understanding to life, seeing it as integral to the way in which understanding is gained and then agreed through the interpretations that take place during conversations (Moran, 2000). However, this points to the active role of individuals in making sense of the language of others, without acknowledging how it might be being used. As an example of this distinction, in hermeneutics, language *discloses* an experiential world to us whereas in discourse analysis language *constructs* a world for us (Joseph & Roberts, 2007).

That said, IPA's commitment to the cultural and historical context in which phenomena take place means that language is not addressed independently of others. For example, during analysis, specific and unique references that the women used suggested how integral language could be in constructing a shared frame of reference for vegans that excluded non-vegans. Further, "language makes it possible for human beings to narrate their lives, to contextualize and organise life in story form"

(DeRobertis, 2017, p.58), and so IPA is predominantly reliant on language as a way to access the accounts of the experience in question. With this in mind, and in light of the conceptualisations of vegan parents seen from the media messages in Chapter two, I intend to introduce a more interrogative approach to language within my analysis through a dual-focus approach that I outline below.

Discursive psychology

Social constructionism

Social constructionism is a theory used in discursive psychology that takes a critical view of 'taken for granted' understandings of the world (Burr, 2003). Complementary to the epistemologies I am concerned with, social constructionism suggests that knowledge does not arise from a direct perception of reality. That is, the way we see the world is not 'derived from the nature of the world' but is historically and culturally specific. In this way, knowledge is constructed through social interaction and cultural practice, and multiple versions of reality exist (Burr, 2003; Georgaca & Avdi, 2012).

Of particular relevance to my study is the below quote, which demonstrates the construction of childhood. It highlights the temporal nature of context-dependent understandings, suggesting that versions of reality are constructed and sustained between people:

> *The notion of childhood has undergone tremendous change over the centuries. What it has been thought 'natural' for children to do has changed, as well as what parents were expected to do for their children (Burr, 2003, p.3).*

Discourse analysis (DA)

One approach underpinned by the orientation of social constructionism is Discourse Analysis (DA). In discursive approaches language is more central to meaning-making than in IPA, and is considered an essential part of how knowledge is constructed (Burr, 2003). Language is seen as a 'social performance' which constructs meaning and knowledge (Willig, 2015). Accordingly, the discourses within language represent context-dependent systems of meaning which 'operate regardless of the speaker's intentions' (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012, p.147). In this way language is considered to

construct rather than 'mirror' reality, being seen as 'social action' used to achieve personal goals (Georgaca & Avdi, 2012).

DA then, is a social constructionist approach that examines how language is used to construct reality. In addition, and as a further complement to IPA, DA is also concerned with the emergent nature of meaning and the possibility that understanding is open to alternatives (Willig, 2015). This is illuminated by the quote below:

> *A basic tenet of discourse analysis is that people use language to construct versions of the social world; that language is not a neutral and transparent medium through which people are able to express themselves, but is constitutive. Identity is not seen as a fixed entity, but as constituted and reconstituted through discourses and descriptions (Burck, 2005, p.248).*

However, compared with IPA, social constructionism considers individuals to have less agency, and discourses present limitations on what is available to them in terms of their social world (Burr, 2003). An example of this can be drawn from the previous chapter, within which vegan parents were constructed as 'deviant' or a 'nuisance' within the media discourses. This suggests that the association of a positive identity with vegan parenting may be unlikely for the majority of people.

It is for this reason that an examination of the discourses that exist around vegan parenting, as well as how they are responded to, will be an important additional aspect of my research. Not only will it provide deeper insights into the experiences of the women, but it also paves the way for understanding more about how wider social conflicts arise, which will be discussed later in the context of 'culture wars'.

Embodiment revisited

Embodied practices are also given attention in discursive psychology and so I wanted to revisit this concept here. As with language, nuance exists between the way phenomenologists and discursive psychologists view the role of the body, with both being particularly relevant for my area of research given the role of the body in eating and child-rearing. Wiggins & Potter (2008) point to the examination of physical orientation, gestures and other expressions as a complement to the analysis of

language. They describe the nature of 'embodied practices' through the expression of bodily pleasures associated with eating as follows:

> *Rather than being treated as simply expressions of a putative gustatory experience, this research examines the sequential and rhetorical positioning of these expressions in the unfolding interaction; they are thus shown to be highly collaborative utterances attending to other activities in the talk, and resisting any simple dualism between body and talk (p.80).*

This interactional or intersubjective nature of the body is relevant to the experience of sharing the same food, which emerges as a central part of the vegan experience and is discussed more fully in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

Whilst there are a range of approaches to analysing discourse, I am most concerned with FDA. This is because it examines the impact on experience of the discursive context (Willig, 2015), bringing it into alignment with the experiential orientation of IPA. Further, FDA is particularly concerned with the *availability* of discursive resources and consequently how reality may be shaped by dominant discourses (Willig, 2015), which is important in the context of my research with participants who represent a minority group.

According to Parker (1994), discourses construct both objects and subject positions which influence how individuals see the world. That is, language constructs the 'things' that exist via one or more discourses, as well as the positions that are made available to individuals in their social world. As a result, the way in which we see and experience the world is dependent on these constructions (Willig, 2015). In this way, discourses are powerful in shaping reality, through both the facilitation of as well as the concealment of what is available (Parker, 2014). Where in IPA a researcher is interested in what is 'hidden' in the accounts of a participant, this focus tends to acknowledge factors such as consciousness and agency, and facilitates deeper insight into their meaning-making. However, due to the concern of FDA with power, the absence of certain discourses represents more absolutely what is available or unavailable for the participant.

Power

According to Foucault (1982), power is exercised via discourses that serve as gatekeepers to the reality that is available. It shapes what we can know through the privileging of realities that normalise existing ways of being, to the extent that they become 'common sense' (Willig, 2015). The perception of 'truths' within discourses also significantly influence the way individuals see their social world and live their lives within it (Foucault, 2010). This conceptualisation of power is particularly relevant to this research, where non-veganism is legitimised through dominant discourses, and subject positions for vegan parents are limited. However, it is important to note that power is not something that people 'have', more something that is exercised; free will and agency still play a part in the social worlds of individuals, and resistance to discourses can facilitate the renegotiation of knowledge and identity (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Burr, 2003).

This speaks to existential ideas about choice and freedom, and I would stress that the power of discourses cannot take away from the agency of the women who took part in my research. It is perhaps worth considering the level of freedom humans have in a literal sense, given that for the most part we exist in particular societies and cultures with their own expectations and social norms. Sartre considers the impact of others on our freedom, suggesting that the choices we make are mediated by our context (Smith et al., 2022). He sees human freedom and choice as given meaning by the self, which is demonstrated by Aho (2020) in the following example:

> *It would be absurd, for instance, to say that the slave in chains can do anything the master does, because the slave inhabits a situation that limits his actions in specific ways. But, for Sartre, the slave is just as free as the master in terms of the meanings and values he ascribes to his situation (p.77).*

Whilst numerous instances will be discussed later in this thesis, for now, a pertinent example from my own research relates to the choice of vegan parents to prepare and take vegan-friendly food to social occasions for their children. If we consider the media messaging from the previous chapter, on the surface it could be considered that the women do this as a response to the negative discourses that surround them (that they are a nuisance to non-vegans). However, it is also arguable that they are using

agency, responding to the challenges of the non-vegan world by ensuring that their child is provided for and showcasing the possibility of successful vegan parenting.

In this way, the vegan women in this study can determine the effect of living in a non-vegan world, as opposed to the discourses around vegan parenting causing them to behave in a particular way. Their experiences arise from the choices they are able to make as vegan parents in the context of the non-vegan world, and the meaning that is generated in how they respond to these choices. This will be an important component to bear in mind when managing the interplay between the discursive and experiential approaches that I plan to take.

A dual-focus approach

The aim of my research is to illuminate how at different times, in different contexts, and through interactions with the practices of others, the experience of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world may take on different meanings.

As has been discussed, IPA is a psychological approach, paying specific attention to the individual and their internal understanding and sense-making. It is concerned with the context within which experience takes place, but focuses on free will and agency in an attempt to understand subjective experience. FDA also avoids broad understandings of experience and places emphasis on context. It takes a more critical view in an attempt to unpack how individual meaning is generated, acknowledging there may be more structural reasons for what is experienced or known.

Multiple crossovers between IPA and FDA exist, with both paying attention to the cultural and historical contexts of individuals and their interactions with others. These concerns lead to a shared view that meaning and knowledge is fluid, and as a result no absolute reality or essential meaning exists. In different ways, both approaches address the use of language to make sense of the experiences of individuals, meaning that analysis may be performed on the same data from in-depth, flexible interviews. Where IPA will identify subjective experience within the text, FDA can offer alternative insights. That is, by identifying the additional discursive context within which subjective meaning-making takes place, a different perspective on the experiences of participants is possible.

Therefore, the combination of IPA and FDA provides an extremely strong foundation from which to understand the experience of vegan parenting while attending to the impact of a non-vegan world. The two concerns of each approach not only complement my epistemology, but point to the interplay between language, historical and cultural context, and experience discussed above.

I will be conducting my research with the position of a vegan sympathiser, acknowledging the impact this may have on how I approach data collection as well as analysis. In paying close attention to each participant's unique individual experience in the moment, I do not seek to quantify or compare my participants' entire experiences, or even parts of them. Instead, I aim to see how the experiences of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world may at times converge, and elicit meaning from divergences which also occur.

CHAPTER FOUR – METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the practical considerations for my empirical research. I outline the steps taken at each stage and reflect on the suitability of my approach, highlighting the challenges I overcame and what this meant for the direction of my work. I will demonstrate how the choices I made were informed and driven by need, both in terms of developing an unresearched field of study, and responding to what was possible at the time.

Of significance to my overall experience was the need to deviate from my original plans due to the outbreak of COVID-19, which took place at the beginning of my fieldwork. The repercussions of the pandemic on social contact presented a number of obstacles to my study, but also demonstrated how a challenging research process can evolve for the better. As a result, this chapter takes an intentionally reflective tone to help guide the reader through the development of my work.

Design

As illustrated in Chapter one, inspiration for this study arose from the findings of my Psychology Master's dissertation. The women who shared their experiences gave accounts of deep commitment to a vegan lifestyle, which wavered when considering the inclusion of children. At the time, the scope of my research did not allow for a deep understanding of why this was the case, but my findings did uncover their concerns around the small evidence-base that existed for vegan child-rearing, both in terms of physical wellbeing and experiential insights. Their experiences as individuals illustrated challenges in navigating a non-vegan world which would likely increase with the added demands of parenting, yet little was known about what this was actually like for those who were already raising vegan families.

In order to understand the phenomenon of vegan parenting I needed to find out how the experience of child-rearing takes place for individuals, whilst also revealing the context within which it takes place (a non-vegan world).

Scoping

The women that I spoke to for my Master's had already given thought to vegan children, suggesting that the decision-making process for vegan families starts early on. I decided to capture experiences from parents as early on as pregnancy, given the number of important decisions that arise during that time which could be in conflict with the lifestyle.

I spoke to three non-vegan mothers who had experienced pregnancy in the past two years, two of which already had young children. I wanted to speak to women who had been through pregnancy relatively recently and may have a clearer memory of the experience; my aim was to understand what pregnancy was like without the challenges or restrictions of veganism, in order to inform the type of questions I would ask the participants in my study.

The women were recruited via word of mouth through my own social networks and I did not use a set schedule of questions. I asked them to talk me through the stages of pregnancy, with particular focus on interactions outside of the home (such as with medical professionals) and available support. For the two women with young children, I asked them to share some of the key milestones they had experienced, including weaning, interactions with other children (such as nursery) and any memorable input from other family members. The discussions lasted for about 30 minutes each, during which I took brief notes which I used to support the formation of questions for the first iteration of my interview schedule.

To test my interview schedule I had another exploratory discussion with one vegan woman who I had recruited via a peer from the IPA Research Group at Birkbeck, University of London. As a vegan herself, with vegan children and vegan grandchildren, I asked for her input on my proposed questions as well as to reflect on the changing landscape of veganism. The notes taken from this discussion were used to amend and develop my interview schedule, particularly in encouraging the women to reflect on the impact of their environment on their experience (and how this can fluctuate).

During this phase of my research I also immersed myself in the literature surrounding my topic, as well as studies with a similar methodological focus. I joined relevant groups such as the Vegan Society Researcher Network; consumed related news, podcasts, radio broadcasts and television programmes which covered veganism and vegan parenting; spoke about my research to friends and family, who regularly

signposted me to relevant media that had made them think of my work. During the life course of my PhD, an incremental focus on vegan parenting took place and it became increasingly important for me to remain keyed into wider discourses as well as focused on the academic side of my research.

Original proposal

I originally intended to conduct three complementary studies to examine the experiences of vegan parents with children at different stages of life, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In doing so I aimed to capture a range of experiences using a consistent method, as well as the interactions and influences that take place as children develop. My plans were as follows:

- Study one: how is vegan pregnancy experienced? IPA interviews with pregnant vegan women, examining the decision-making processes involved in deciding to start a family, and how the interactions with medical professionals are experienced as a vegan.
- Study two: how is vegan child-rearing experienced? IPA interviews with vegan women, capturing experience at key stages of child development, particularly when the child's interactions outside of the home increase.
- Study three: how is vegan parenting experienced when the child's self-agency, peer pressure and other social influences become more pronounced? IPA interviews with parents of secondary school aged children (11 years +).

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Birkbeck, University of London. I also gained approval from the College Ethics Committee, which was a requirement of the funding of this project. Subsequent changes to participant materials, sample, or modes of conducting the study were submitted as amendments to the original application.

Materials

I created participant materials to support informed consent from all of the women. These included:

- Recruitment flyer outlining the purpose of the study and how to express an interest in taking part. This document can be found in Appendix 1.
- Information sheet including full details of what involvement would include, as well as how what was shared would be kept safe. This included: anonymity through the use of a pseudonym and removal of any identifiable information (specific locations, names, places of work); interview content to be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of the study (within written reports, and for any related presentations or publications); all data relating to participants to be stored safely and securely (interview recordings would be deleted following transcription, with transcripts saved on a password protected device); interview data shared only with my supervisor or IPA Research Group members; the right to withdraw without the need for explanation. This document can be found in Appendix 2.
- Consent form to confirm participants understood what participation involved, and agreed to take part. This document can be found in Appendix 3.

No information regarding the study was withheld from participants and they were free to ask questions before, during and after their interview. No special equipment or visual stimuli were used and the women all received the same participant materials. Amendments to materials were made only to accommodate a need to extend the inclusion criteria for my sample, as will be discussed. No incentives or reimbursements were offered for taking part.

COVID-19

In March 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 meant that restrictions were placed on fieldwork. Having begun my PhD towards the end of 2019, at this point I had planned my fieldwork, developed the materials needed and gained ethical approval. I was about to start recruiting for the first set of interviews with vegan women experiencing pregnancy, which I had intended to take place in London. I had also secured membership for a vegan coworking space to support recruitment and to conduct interviews for from, and as an opportunity to network with others in a relevant environment.

While the world was adjusting to a new way of being, I refocused my attention to the literature. However, as social distancing measures continued, given the timelines of my PhD funding I eventually committed to carrying out study one online. Incidentally,

during February – March 2020 I had taken a short break from my PhD to carry out an IPA study with 12 team coaches, alongside Professor Jonathan A. Smith. The coaches were based across the UK and USA and interviews were carried out virtually, meaning I had gained some experience in this mode of data collection and felt confident using the same approach in my own research.

Recruitment

I recruited opportunistically through online forums and community groups, and via social media. I also shared my recruitment flyer on my own social media platforms and with friends and family to share with their networks.

With the internet providing greater reach than physical spaces, and by using targeted groups for vegan parents, I anticipated that generating sufficient interest in my study would be relatively straightforward. However, I faced challenges in recruiting women for a number of reasons. To begin with, my target population was already very small. According to Ipsos MORI, despite rising numbers year on year, in 2022 only 2% of the population were vegan. This meant that an even smaller proportion of these people were experiencing pregnancy or were parents at the time of this study. As I also discovered from some of the women who declined to take part, the commitment of a long interview was overwhelming for new and expectant parents who were already in a particularly busy stage of life.

I was also naïve to the challenges that many of the women were experiencing as a result of COVID-19. Having less opportunity to leave the house did not leave them with additional time on their hands, but instead left them with a lot to manage, including the rapidly changing plans for the in-person appointments that they needed at the time. Further, it appeared that pregnant vegan women were largely absent from the spaces I was attempting to recruit from. I later found out from discussions with the women who did take part, that membership to these spaces tended to happen after the birth of their child when a lack of support and shared experience became more pronounced.

After I had been struggling to generate interest for some time, I requested to join a new vegan parenting group that I had found. A moderator for this group volunteered to take part, and kindly offered to encourage others in the group to participate. At the beginning of her interview, I learned of the regular unprovoked verbal abuse that took

place within online vegan spaces, as well as market research requests from organisations whose commercial interests were at odds with veganism. This led many members of these groups to view new or unknown members with caution, and to treat requests for research participation with suspicion. Subsequent literature I found pointed to the concept of 'online personas' whereby 'trolling' and 'flaming' against populations such as vegans took place due to the anonymity of the online environment (Jowett, 2015). Whilst this gave me insights into why I may be struggling to recruit, it was frustrating given that my opportunities for offline recruitment were limited. However, it became an interesting finding in itself when I began to explore more of the context within which vegan parenting takes place.

Sample

IPA works well with small homogeneous groups of participants for whom the research question is meaningful, and can also be suited to case study research (Eatough & Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2022). Homogeneity is arguably subjective (Smith et al., 2022), and practical issues may prevent access to very distinct populations. For example, those who naturally have less subcategories, such as vegans who already represent a very small group of people. Therefore, as I continued to struggle with recruitment for my first study, I relaxed the criteria for my sample with confidence that participants would still share sufficient characteristics for my findings to be meaningful.

As discussed, the original criteria for my sample were three groups of vegan mothers who were experiencing pregnancy or had children of a certain age. Other inclusion criteria dictated that the women lived in London and had been vegan for at least two years in order to have gained sufficient experience of the lifestyle. I opened this up to include participants form outside of London, and included women with children up to primary school age as I believed that at this point their parents would still have the majority of control over what they ate and the activities they took part in. As I learnt more about the challenges of vegan parenting, I also relaxed my expectation that the children of the women would all be vegan too, with one woman in my final sample raising her daughter as vegetarian.

Mothers, specifically, were chosen to represent parenting. Aside from my commitment to homogeneity, this is because women are most likely to be responsible for childcare responsibilities whether in a partnership or a lone parent (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

I conducted a small pilot study, interviewing two women who met my broader inclusion criteria in order to test the interview materials and ensure I was capturing sufficient depth and breadth of experience. Following these interviews, minimal amendments were required to the interview schedule and I agreed with my supervisor that the data met the quality required for inclusion in my final sample.

<u>Participants</u>

My final sample consisted of twelve vegan mothers whose data I used for all three empirical studies in this thesis. Instead of examining the experience of vegan parenting at different stages of childhood as I had originally intended, I decided to approach the accounts of vegan mothers from different perspectives, as will be discussed later.

At the time of the interviews, all of the women had been vegan for between three and nine years and had at least one child. The children were between the ages of four months and six years old. Most of the women had experienced a vegan pregnancy, and all but one of the children were being raised as vegan. Despite being discussed as variables within the literature, factors such as age, religion, ethnic background and socioeconomic status were not controlled for.

The women's demographics can be seen in Table 2 below. Further details about the women are provided in pen portraits that can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 2. Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Number of children	Age of children	Length of time being vegan	Child's diet	Vegan partner
Abigail	2	4 years / Infant below 2 years	7 years	Mostly vegan since birth	No
Barbara	1	Almost 1 year	4 years	Vegan since birth	Yes

Camilla	1	18 months	4 years	Vegetarian	Yes
Daisy	1	5 months	6 years	Vegan since birth	Yes
Denise	1	3 years	3 years	Vegan since early infancy	No
Ella	1	4 months	3 years	Vegan since birth	No
Florence	1	3 years	5.5 years	Vegan since birth	N/A
Jill	2	6 years / 2 years	6 years	Vegan since birth	N/A
Kylie	2	6 years / 3 years	6 years	Vegan since early infancy / Vegan since birth	Yes
Margot	1	13 months	7 years	Vegan since birth	No
Matilda	3	5 years / 3 years / 18 months	3 years	Vegan since childhood / Vegan since childhood / Vegan since birth	Yes
Mia	1	2.5 years	9 years	Vegan since birth	No

<u>The interview procedure</u>

COVID-19 rules surrounding social distancing oscillated for the entire duration of time I had allocated for fieldwork. As a result, and in order to maintain consistency across my interviews, they were all conducted online.

Once a woman had responded to my request for volunteers, I sent them the information sheet and checked that they met the inclusion criteria of my sample, using The Vegan Society's definition of veganism to screen participants. I answered any questions they had and confirmed that they were conversant with using Microsoft Teams or Zoom for the online interview. Once an interview date had been agreed, I sent the women the consent form to read, sign and return before the interview.

The interviews

The women were asked thirteen questions with prompts to encourage them to expand on their experience. In line with what is recommended for an IPA project of this type (Smith et al., 2022), the interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. I used pre-defined questions to support the framing of the topics, rather than to serve as a constraint to the women's stories (Smith et al., 2022). Using open questions encouraged my participants to answer in a way that felt most meaningful to them according to their own unique context (DeRobertis, 2012). It also supported me not to over-empathise with the women or 'understand too quick' what they were saying (Dahlberg, 2006); I was already in control of the topics to guide the interview, so it was important for my own lens not to cloud the experiences of the women too.

The interview schedule was informed by learnings from my Master's, relevant literature, and the abovementioned scoping work around pregnancy and early years. For example, my preliminary discussions with women who had recently experienced pregnancy highlighted the inconsistency of a designated medical practitioner, particularly during the formative stages of pregnancy. This meant that any deviation from what is considered 'normal' would be revisited with each new person. This made me consider how vegan parents would need to continually 'disclose' their veganism and what this would be like for them.

The women also shared a sense that medical advice during pregnancy and early years – such as food safety or vitamins required for mother and baby – appeared to be provided as a 'one-size-fits-all' recommendation. I considered if and how the women I interviewed would have access to tailored vegan advice and support. In fact, the women involved in my scoping work also felt that much of the advice they received came from peers and family, which spoke to the idea that a vegan woman may be at a disadvantage with limited access to others experiencing the same phenomenon on a comparable level.

The scoping call that I had with an experienced vegan mother pointed to the changing attitudes towards veganism and the increased involvement of a wider network of people in pregnancy and parenthood. Since she had been a vegan parent, she also felt that proximity to others' experiences had increased through social media. I noted that finding out about who, why and how others were involved in the vegan parenting experience would be important to discuss with the women.

I ordered the questions chronologically and began by inviting each woman to share their transition to veganism as an individual. I hoped that by beginning with a descriptive account they would build comfort in sharing their experiences. It also meant I was able to start forming a picture of their social world, historical context, and the important relationships and structural elements in their life. For those that had, had a vegan pregnancy, I asked questions around their approach and the factors that informed their decision.

I then moved onto asking the women about the decision-making processes involved in raising their child(ren) as vegan, asking them to elaborate on how this was experienced with the involvement of others, including partners. For each question I asked for concrete examples of experience, probing for how easy or difficult they found things, and where appropriate, asking 'what happened?', 'how did you feel?' and 'what would you change?' to encourage them to engage with how they felt in the moment and what it meant to them.

I wanted to find out how the women approached vegan parenting and how their child fitted into their own vegan lifestyle (for example, how things had changed since becoming a parent, any particular challenges or even benefits). In order to understand the context within which the women experienced vegan parenting, I also asked questions about the management of their children's veganism outside of the home, including how and when they disclosed that they were a vegan family. I wanted to know how they made sense of veganism in relation to others, and so needed to find out how and to whom they shared their lifestyle with (and if they chose not to, why). Not only did this help me to see how veganism may be viewed more widely, but also how the women then positioned themselves in the wider world.

By asking the women how easy or difficult they found vegan parenting, as well as to consider how they would feel if their child decided to reject veganism in the future, I

hoped to gain an understanding of their sense of self, and how much veganism was a part of that. I ended by asking the women to step outside of their worlds, to look back on experience and to look forward to imagine the future. This was intended as an opportunity to reflect on the place of veganism in their family, but also to consider how the spheres of veganism and non-veganism fit together.

The schedule was tweaked on an ongoing basis, and kept flexible during the interviews. Doing this meant that I could respond appropriately to the women, pursue unexpected findings, and enable the interviews to be led by the women in line with the idiographic focus of IPA (Reid et al., 2005). The most significant changes to the schedule were made on account of the shift in my intended participants. Questions evolved from focusing on the current or recent experience of pregnancy, to the experience of early years child-rearing. A copy of the most frequently used interview schedule can be found in Appendix 5.

Interviews took place between May 2020 and August 2021 and the twelve women took part in one interview each. On average the interviews lasted slightly over one hour and were recorded using a Sony ICD-PX333 voice recorder. I chose not to record via the video conferencing software I was using due to concerns around the security of the data. However, the women were informed when I was switching on the recording device, which I confirmed along with their verbal consent to participate at the beginning of each interview.

Safety

Due to the virtual nature of the interviews, safety measures did not extend beyond my ethical commitments to the women's psychological wellbeing. At the beginning of each interview, introductions were made and I provided a verbal overview of the study. I confirmed each woman understood what their participation involved, and invited questions.

Beginning each interview informally supported rapport, and I could begin to build an understanding of each woman. For the majority of interviews, I had to interrupt the women during this stage as they were already beginning to share experiences that I wanted to capture for analysis. Smith et al. (2022) suggest that this relationship-building process is one of the most important things to consider at the start of an

interview. Indeed, it assisted me in gauging the women's levels of comfort, which as will be discussed, I found more challenging to do online.

None of the women exhibited any signs of distress during their interviews. There were a small number of occasions when some did express levels of discomfort, which largely surrounded their recall of upsetting or stressful interactions. During these times I reassured them that they did not need to rush their answers and that they did not have to continue. I was prepared to offer to pause the interview, or stop altogether, but this was not necessary for any of the women.

At the end, I asked each participant how they felt about the interview and checked that were feeling okay. I conducted a short debriefing session during which I reminded them of the next steps for how their data would be used, and reiterated their right to withdraw (which none of them did).

After each interview the audio recording was immediately uploaded to my laptop and saved with a password, and then deleted from the recording device. I wrote down my initial thoughts about the interview, including anything particularly striking about what had been shared or how it may impact the direction of the study. I then made a note of any amendments or additions to consider for the interview schedule.

Transcription

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, during which identifiable information such as names or specific places were removed, and each woman was assigned a pseudonym. Each transcript was formatted with line numbers, double spacing, and wide margins to allow for the addition of notes during the initial analysis stages.

I formulated a short transcription key to denote important nuances, such as hesitations, laughter, deliberate attempts to emphasize words or feelings. I also included explanatory comments, such as where something had been said sarcastically. Examples of how these were recorded within the transcript can be found in an extract from Camilla's interview (Appendix 6) and are detailed below:

- (.) 1 second pause
- (2) 2 second pause (number indicates duration)

- [additional explanation added by researcher] OR [identifiable information edited out] OR to denote an action, such as [laughter]
- [xxx] doubtful transcription
- '…' sentence unfinished

<u>Analysis</u>

IPA analysis should be flexible but systematic, and performed at the case level first to ensure sufficient attention is paid to each participant (Smith et al., 2009). It then follows an iterative process whereby the researcher is immersed in each participant's data separately, before attempting cross-case analysis. I had originally intended to commit to the principles of the hermeneutic circle, approaching the analysis of all women together, building the 'whole' (phenomenon of vegan parenting) as a reference point as I attended to each 'part' (the individual transcript). However, the interviews took over a year to complete. In in order to meet the timeframes I had committed to, I used the time between interviews to read more widely around the topic and methodology. This meant I was able to fully commit to each woman's individual story, whilst building the 'whole' through emerging literature and wider discourses. In the end, it was this process that ended up informing my third empirical chapter. Below, I set out the stages of analysis and the steps I took. These are based on a combination of the original guidelines by Smith et al. (2009) as well as updates to the method made by the same authors in 2022.

Initial noting and exploratory comments

Once each transcript was complete, I printed it and read it thorough several times. This was to help generate a fuller picture of each woman, make sense of the relationships in her life, get a sense of the timelines of her experience, and so on. I made notes in the margins of the transcript for any immediate thoughts, and once I felt satisfactorily immersed in her world, I wrote a pen portrait for her to help me remember key elements of identity and experience.

I then moved each woman's transcript to a table in a new document with three columns, with the interview data in the middle. I made 'exploratory notes' in the right hand column in the three ways: descriptions of experience; notes about specific use of language (for example where I had recorded repetition, hesitation, or things which

may emphasise feelings or meanings attributed to particular experiences); thoughts about what was being said at a more conceptual level. At this point the comments were tentative, and acted as the first stage of interpretation.

Experiential statements

In the left hand column of the same table, I developed 'experiential statements', beginning to distil the exploratory comments and draw out more latent meanings. An example of the table of exploratory comments and experiential statements for Camilla can be found in Appendix 7.

I then examined the experiential statements for connections in order to create themes that emerged organically from clusters of experiential statements. I did this by printing out all of the experiential statements and cutting them up individually. By laying them on a flat surface I was able to cluster and re-cluster the experiential statements, with the need for some to be discarded, until I was satisfied that the new themes were representative of the woman's overall experience as well as the experiential statements within them. These themes were then labelled with a new description.

Developing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

The next step was to develop Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) to structure the themes, the end result being a smaller number of overarching themes that captured the women's experiences holistically. Whilst systematic, this process was also 'messy' in that it involved a lot of working and reworking of the themes before reaching my final set of PETs. The process often led me back to the transcripts and initial notes I had made, to sense-check the development of the PETs against the women's original narratives. According to guidance from Smith et al. (2022), there are a number of organising techniques available. I used the following most heavily when developing the final PETs for each woman: 'abstraction' to combine and rename similar themes; 'polarization' whereby themes within a PET represent contrasting ideas. There were also PETs that emerged from themes that were so significant to the woman's experience overall, that they became a PET. An illustrative example of a PET from Camilla's interview, with themes and experiential statements, can be found in Appendix 8.

Developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

The analysis at group level was done in a similar fashion; I was looking for patterns across the cases and used similar organising techniques to ensure that the group level themes still encompassed all of the women's unique experiences. I printed and cut out each woman's set of PETs, and again used a flat surface so that I could organize and re-organise them in different ways. Through this process I developed a single set of GETs which form the basis for all empirical chapters in this study. An illustrative example of how a GET is made up of themes and PETs can be seen in Appendix 9.

This process felt quite straightforward at first, given that many similarities existed between the women's experiences. However, any attempt to achieve a sort of 'average' experience would defeat the aims of IPA. At times I also struggled to let go of some of the women's PETs that did not have a place at the group level. In order to honour the women's unique stories, I focused on areas of divergence as well as convergence, aiming for comprehensive but succinct representation of the women's experiences without losing the their unique experiential detail. The final table of GETs can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Group Experiential Themes for all participants

GET 1: Reciprocal rejection: the experience of being vegan in a non-vegan world
Group level themes for GET 1: The consequences of disclosure Seeking a sense of belonging in an inhospitable world The need for effective coping strategies Preserving veganism within majority culture
GET 2: Feelings of despair lead to reflections about raising vegan children in a non-vegan world
Group level themes for GET 2: Fatalism about the world they are alienated from but trapped within

Feelings of guilt over choosing veganism for their children
Developing agency in their children as vehicles for future change
GET 3: The construction of identity through lived experience as a vegan parent
Group level themes for GET 3:
Veganism as a symbolic structure
Veganism as an inseparable part of the self
Autonomous parents who are not defined by veganism
GET 4: The impact of being a vegan parent on the women's sense of self
Group level themes for GET 4:
The evolving vegan self
The loss of bodily autonomy
Balancing veganism with child-rearing
GET 5: A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation
Group level themes for GET 5:
Choosing between compromise and exclusion
The irreconcilable nature of veganism and non-veganism
Recognition and respect for vegan beliefs leads to feelings of inclusion

As discussed, my original plans to interview and analyse three groups of vegan mothers according to the age of their children, did not go ahead. My final sample consisted of twelve women with shared characteristics that best suited analysis as a single group. For this reason, I decided to present their data in different ways across the chapters. The first empirical chapter (study) presents all GETs for the entire sample of women. For the second and third studies, I revisit the original analysis to

deepen my interpretation of the women's experiences, and context within which this takes place.

<u>The empirical studies</u>

Study one

This study represents my development as an IPA researcher learning the approach. I present the data in a transparent way to tell the stories of the women through the GETs that I constructed. All themes for all women are included, making this study the longest of the three and representative of the 'gestalt' of experience.

As the entry point to presenting empirical findings for a PhD, this study felt the most challenging. In order to be bold in my interpretations and do justice to the women's experiences I needed to break away from quantitative training I had undertaken as part of my career. I required continuous engagement with the methodological literature as a reminder that experiential research is informed by many strands of understanding, which can look different for each researcher. I had to make peace with the fact that the meanings emerging from the data would be unique to my own understanding and not represent objective truth, and that they would evolve further when filtered through the lens of the reader (Gadamer, 1960/2004).

This, teamed with a larger quantity of IPA data than I was used to felt overwhelming at times. I struggled with my desire to present every experience for every women, concerned that the removal of any data would significantly impact the meaning of my themes. I also found myself getting lost in the data, needing to step away for periods of time in order to regain perspective. During this process I revisited the original data, adjusting the labels of my themes to tweak how I communicated their meaning. It was not until I had constructed the entire narrative of the women through this study that I was happy with the final iteration of my themes, which led to how I approached the next empirical study with a new filter.

Study two

During times that I struggled with the interpretative elements of study one, I sought guidance from my supervisor who suggested that I might use the features – or 'fractions' – of the lifeworld as a way to think more conceptually about the women's experiences. This 'way in' to the data highlighted how I could deepen my original

analysis as well as to illustrate the different lenses with which experience may be viewed. As a result, for my second empirical study I wanted to demonstrate more of the technical components of IPA analysis, and invite the reader to see the journey that takes place between data analysis and presentation. I decided to provide further analysis of a smaller section of the data, showing how new interpretations could emerge when viewing the data through the fractions of the lifeworld.

Given the extensive analysis I had already conducted, I took one of the original GETs to develop further. I revisited my initial notes about the women alongside their PETs, and selected the GET which was most heavily present across the women's overall stories: *A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation*. Elements of this theme also spoke to the wider discourses that were emerging around my study, such as the divisive nature of veganism that was present in the media messaging discussed in Chapter two.

I reviewed the women's PETs that related to my chosen GET, and collated a list of the experiential statements within each. I then highlighted where the lifeworld fractions were demonstrated within the data for those experiential statements. I looked for the most frequently occurring fractions across the women's data and selected three to present within the study: project, embodiment and sociality. A diagrammatic example of the experiential statements that denote the fraction of project within the chosen theme can be seen in Appendix 10. I attempted to avoid duplicating the data from my first study, but where this was unavoidable I provided a new interpretation of the data. In doing so I understood more deeply the sentiments of Gadamer concerning the evolving nature of hermeneutics, and the value of returning to phenomena to generate meaning with new perspectives (Caputo, 2018). This process of revisiting the women's data – this time with a different lens – provided greater depth of understanding whilst highlighting the limitations of viewing interpretation as a standalone event.

For the purposes of this study it is important to note Ashworth's (2016) point about the 'mutually entailed' nature of the lifeworld fractions, which should not be considered as independent lenses through which to understand experience. By focusing on each fraction separately I had concerns that I may be inappropriately portraying the lifeworld as composed of distinct categories. This was particularly the case when I was required to reject other fractions that were evident in the data I was presenting.

However, I felt this was necessary to illustrate how the lifeworld fractions could be applied to data in order to deepen understanding.

Study three

Having identified negative vegan discourses during my review of the literature, I became increasingly alive to the way in which the women described their interactions with the practices of non-vegans. I realised that I lived in the 'same' non-vegan world as the women, and was noticing an increasing amount of vegan-related discourses myself (most of which were not in support of the lifestyle). The analysis I had conducted so far had identified what it was like for the women to live and raise children in a non-vegan world, but there was an obvious space to examine this further. It is for this reason that for the final empirical study, I revisited the data again to perform a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA).

Acknowledging the complexity of both IPA and FDA in their own rights, I reviewed other studies that had applied a dual-focus approach to see how systematic rigour could be maintained when combining the two. Dual-focus IPA and FDA studies such as Colahan et al., (2012) and Black & Riley (2018) factored both approaches into the design and implementation of their empirical work so that the two approaches permeated all aspects of the findings. However, literature existed to suggest a more flexible approach could be taken when applying more than one methodological lens (Cosgrove, 2000; Willig, 2011), pointing to the possibility of including FDA principles in my research at this later stage. According to Willig (2015), IPA and FDA interviews share the same approach in encouraging participants to speak freely about what is meaningful to them, so I could be confident that the data I already had would be appropriate to use.

I searched for guidance on how to carry out FDA and decided to follow the stages provided by Willig (2015), who offers a compact approach. This felt most appropriate for my data at this stage, given that I had already carried out comprehensive analysis using IPA. She suggests that the researcher follow the below stages:

1. Discursive constructions: map out the way in which discursive objects are constructed (in this case, how vegan parenting is constructed through the women's narratives, with or without direct reference to the phenomenon).
2. Discourses: review how those discursive objects are constructed in relation to wider discourses, including how the same object can be constructed in

different ways (such as vegan parents being considered deviant because wider discourses denote non-veganism as the norm).

3. Action orientation: identify more closely the discursive contexts of the objects. Consideration should be given to what is gained from the way in which the object has been constructed; what is its function; how does it relate to other objects in the surrounding text (this could relate to the justification of suspicion that is applied to vegan parents on account of their deviance).

4. Positionings: consider how subjects are also constructed by discourses and what positions those subjects are offered (the subject position of the women was widely acknowledged as the 'other', with non-vegans as the majority).

5. Practice: connect discourse with practice by examining how the discursive constructions – and subject positions within them – provide or prevent opportunities for action (for example, the legitimisation of vegan children not being catered for at nursery or Birthday parties hosted by non-vegans).

6. Subjectivity: consider the relationship between discourse and subjectivity, and how the adoption of certain subject positions impacts experience (this is the point at which the women have almost internalised the discourses, and accept the additional duties they must perform to ensure their children do not feel left out in a non-vegan world).

Conducting a full FDA on my raw data was not possible within the constraints of my overall programme of work, and so a modified FDA that focused on the subjectivities of my original analysis felt most appropriate. I returned to the media messaging discussed in Chapter two, reviewing the full articles, and considered how the discursive resources illustrated above had been used within the texts. Two of the themes I had developed from the media messaging also represented discursive constructions that had already emerged from my women's narratives, as well as through the discourses that I was increasingly noticing in my own world: '*Vegan parents as a nuisance'* and '*Vegan parents as deviant'*. By mapping these discursive constructions across the women's narratives, I could identify how a non-vegan world was constructed and employ the Foucauldian element required to understand how power was exercised and by whom. I could then use IPA to examine how this impacted the women's experience. I felt that this would offer something methodologically different as well as to demonstrate the reciprocal value of IPA and FDA.

To do this I revisited the data relating to my original GETs and related experiential statements. With the components offered by Willig (2015) in mind, I took each discursive construct separately and coded the data within the experiential statements for their presence. A diagrammatic example of the experiential statements that denote the discursive constructions can be seen in Appendix 11. Any data that did not relate to either was discarded. I was also mindful that my GETs represented the experience of vegan parenting for the group of women, but data not included in these may express the constructs I was examining. Davies & Harré (1990) suggest that:

> *Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (p. 46).*

As a result, I went back to the original transcripts and notes I had made about the women to look for further examples of the presence of the constructions in their experience. This also helped to avoid undue duplication of data extracts used in my first two empirical studies.

This novel approach to combining FDA with IPA was challenging. In a new and distinct way, I attempted to emulate the approaches taken in the dual-focus studies I had reviewed, which made me acutely aware of the potential for the outcome not to be entirely successful. Had I planned a study of this kind from the outset I would have liked to have spent more time with the women's raw data, employing a more comprehensive FDA coding process to ensure that the discursive constructions of vegan parenting emerged organically from the women's interviews. However, I was deeply immersed in the women's narratives from the in-depth analysis I had already conducted, and felt confident that the constructions I had identified from the media messages were appropriate to review with the women's experiences. Furthermore, the increasing amount of attention being paid to veganism independently of my research made it impossible to ignore the value that FDA could add to my existing analysis, which made the final empirical study an exciting one to write.

Reflections on the interviews

Earlier in this chapter I outlined some of the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted this PhD. Periods of 'lockdown' and social distancing measures were in place for a large proportion of my programme of work which not only impacted how I conducted my research, but likely influenced the findings too. However, the experience of conducting fieldwork online was a valuable one, and this new way of collecting data for IPA research could be considered as a way to advance future studies. I share below some of the learnings that arose from my experience of 'virtual' interviewing, and points of caution for future interviews which are increasingly moving online.

With some previous experience conducting IPA interviews online I was versed in supporting the women to prepare in advance. For example, in how to mitigate challenges with technology, accessing the video conferencing software, and how best to setup their space for the interview. Challenges with the online nature of this study related more to the women's ability to commit exclusively to the interview whilst at home. As new parents or parents of children who would ordinarily have been at school, time was particularly scarce and they were often multitasking between the interview and childcare.

In theory, conducting interviews online should not impact their length (Jenner & Myers, 2019) but my experience suggests that the high levels of interruptions and distractions led to shorter interviews with the women. Most obviously this surrounded a need to care for children who were present in the home; I found that if this took place when they had been speaking for some time, they would often begin to give briefer responses and start signalling that they wanted to close the interview. I did also wonder at times if the empathetic bond (Seitz, 2016), which felt weaker online, may have been a reason for some of the women to feel less inclined to offer as much of their time.

In-person interviews tend to carry a sense of significance because both parties have made a journey to attend. Meetings outside of the home are also somewhat shielded from the competing priorities of work or family life. I had naively assumed that reducing the need to coordinate childcare and saving time on travel may make it easier for the women to volunteer their time for my interviews (Archibald et al., 2019; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). However, some of the women appeared able to commit to the full length of the online interview on the basis that it was not the sole focus of

their attention (for example by managing incoming messages from work during the call).

Ethical issues also arose from the women being interviewed from their own homes (Brown, 2018). Despite literature suggesting that participants find this most comfortable (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Jenner & Myers, 2019; Seitz, 2016), the sense of anonymity that the virtual space can provide may lead participants to share or behave in ways they would not usually (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017; Sipes et al., 2022). For example, during several of the interviews the women breastfed and changed nappies. I did not find this inappropriate or uncomfortable, but I felt unsure as to whether I should offer to pause the interview.

During some interviews the women made reference to challenging situations and reflected on relationship tensions relating to their lifestyle choice. The 'barrier' of the screen made assessing participant body language and comfort with what they were sharing more difficult (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Seitz, 2016; Sipes et al., 2022). Simultaneously attempting to monitor participant wellbeing whilst actively listening to their story required more focus than an in-person interview and felt more taxing. I also found silence less easy to manage online, where body language could not fill the space. At times, the use of non-verbal cues, encouragement to continue, or words like 'yes' to suggest I had understood, appeared misplaced or disrupted the flow of the interview (Krouwel et al., 2019; Seitz, 2016).

It was important for me to consider my own environment when preparing for the interviews. Whilst I could be in control of practical concerns like finding a confidential space, other interruptions were out of my hands. For example, during one interview post was delivered to my home and my dog started barking to alert me. When transcribing this interview, I realised that the woman had spoken about her disgust at 'lockdown puppies' before she would have heard my own dog bark. I wondered how she may have felt about what else might be 'behind my screen' after this had happened, and whether it would have had any impact on the thoughts and feelings she subsequently shared (Shaw, 2010).

Ending the online interviews could also feel uncomfortable. When meeting someone in-person, the practice of gathering belongings to leave the venue together, or showing a participant out if you have hosted, brings the meeting to a gentle close (Weller, 2017). Even with time to debrief the women and discuss next steps, when the

call ended it felt quite abrupt; this was particularly the case if the women were attempting to end the interview quickly in order to attend to something else. The absence of a separate venue also prevented the opportunity for me to 'shake off' and leave the interview behind by travelling elsewhere afterwards. Support from my supervisor and opportunities to discuss the interviews informally with colleagues from the IPA Research Group at Birkbeck were very valuable, and led me to consider that future online interviews should be conducted outside of my own home.

Of significance to the overall feel of the women's interviews was a sense that things could be 'fixed' with the findings from the study. For example, when I asked about the convenience of vegan-friendly children's products or foods, some of the women identified what was missing and provided me with a call to action. Whilst this left me feeling uncomfortable and somewhat guilty, it reinforced my understanding of what parenting must be like for them compared to non-vegans.

<u>My position</u>

In the previous chapter I introduced my affinity with critical realism, acknowledging how the presence of my own context and perceptions shape how I understand the things that happen 'by themselves'. I also illustrated the ways in which my own biases may be 'bridled'; striking a balance between my prior experience providing a 'way in' to the phenomenon, whilst maintaining sufficient distance to be open to new ways of understanding it (Caputo, 2018; Dahlberg, 2006; Halling & Dahlberg, 2001).

However, I wondered how much of my own context I should share with the women when attempting to elicit in-depth accounts of experience while also maintaining integrity of the data (Shaw, 2010). I wanted to avoid any sort of response bias (Smith et al., 2022), however, knowing about my own empathy towards veganism may encourage the women to feel more relaxed and open to sharing without the fear of being judged. According to Smith et al. (2022)

> *There are many reasons why one might choose to be open with participants about one's own experiences or perspectives (not least ethical reasons). But in interviews such as these, where the aim is to enter into the participant's lifeworld, such disclosure probably belongs outside of the interview per se (p. 63).*

In the end, I chose not lead with my personal experience of veganism but did answer truthfully when asked about my own vegan journey.

Over the following three chapters, I present the findings from my analysis, demonstrating the range of ways in which data can be used and how different perspectives on experience can be gained.

CHAPTER FIVE – RECIPROCAL REJECTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING VEGAN IN A NON-VEGAN WORLD

"My choices, which I know are right in my mind, it makes me feel like they don't matter to society. And it makes me feel like I have to work twice as hard to live the life I want"

The following chapter presents the experiences of the twelve women who took part in my first empirical study, the aim of which was to understand what it is like to be a vegan parent in a non-vegan world.

From the analysis of this study, five Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and associated subthemes emerged, capturing how the women made sense of and navigated the non-vegan world they lived in. These GETs and subthemes are presented in the below diagram (Figure 1) and the following interpretations of the women's narratives.
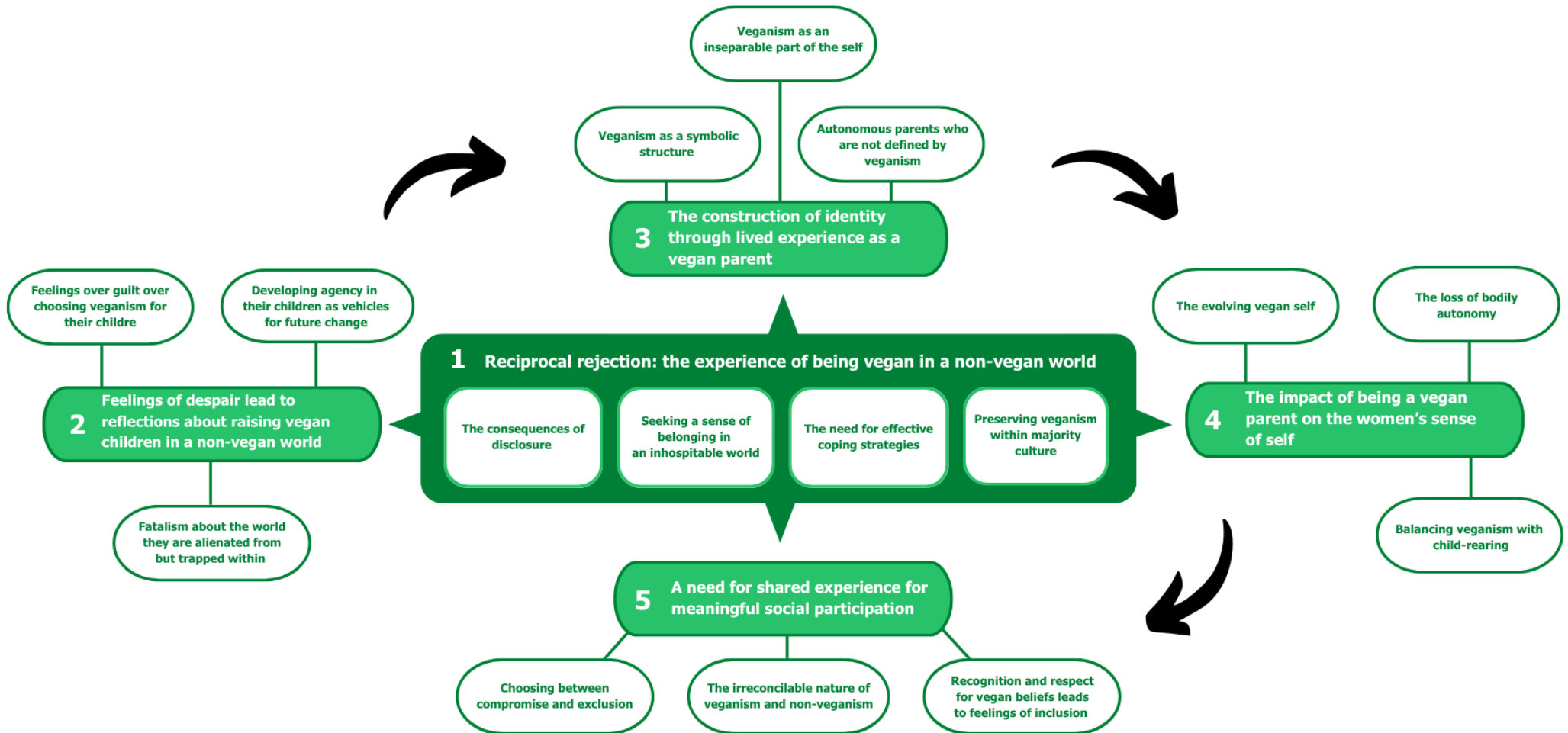
Figure 1. Group Experiential Themes and subthemes for study one.

GET 1 is represented by a central dark green box, with its subthemes in white boxes within it.

GETs 2 – 5 are represented in light green boxes with their subthemes connected to them in white boxes.

GET 1, 'Reciprocal rejection: the experience of being vegan in a non-vegan world', serves as a representation of the world that the women live in, focusing on the way in which the dominance of non-veganism restrains the women. The subthemes within this GET demonstrate the key components of what living as a vegan in a non-vegan world is like for the women. The diagrammatic representation is intended to demonstrate the nature of GET 1 as the central, shared context within which the women's individual experiences exist.

The following four GETs and their subthemes present the women's exploration of their experience within the non-vegan world, focusing more on their sense-making processes when reflecting on their individual experiences: 'Feelings of despair lead to reflections about raising vegan children in a non-vegan world'; 'The construction of identity through lived experience as a vegan parent'; 'The impact of being a vegan parent on the women's sense of self'; 'A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation.

As GET 1 represents the contextual 'backdrop' from which all other GETs come into play and are influenced by, I have dedicated the first part of this chapter to it entirely. GETs 2 to 5 are presented in the second part of this chapter and represent more heavily the parenting aspect of experience.

Part one: The non-vegan world as a container

Reciprocal rejection: the experience of being vegan in a non-vegan world

A reciprocal relationship emerged between the women's rejection of the non-vegan world, and in turn, the non-vegan world's rejection of them. Whilst divergence existed across the women's narratives, their experiences converged to portray a more universally understood conceptualisation of being a vegan in a non-vegan world. This world involved the women's rejection of dominant culture alongside their need to belong.

The women describe their experience as marred by their fear of exposure and potential alienation when 'coming out' as vegan. This led some of the women to overcompensate for their sense of deviancy, experiencing greater burden as vegan parents than their imagined non-vegan counterparts. Their fears about being 'outed' became realised for many of the women, cementing their position in the world as the 'other', with their needs and beliefs often dismissed.

In response to this conceptualisation of their world, the women implemented personal strategies to exist inconspicuously and avoid attack, or developed personal armour to defend themselves from attack. This led the women to view the non-vegan world as dangerous, observing it as a space that could easily contaminate their identities as vegans, and positioning their home as a safe space for protection from the external world.

The consequences of disclosure

Within their narratives the women explored the anticipation of, and management of disclosure. The fact that they were required to divulge their lifestyle choices positioned them as deviant, and left their choices open to scrutiny by the non-vegan majority. For Daisy, the idea of coming out as vegan loses its significance the more she does it, and the more she gains confidence in the lifestyle:

> *Because the coming out thing is definitely a thing, right? Especially when I first went vegan, I think I've been vegan long enough now that I don't actually care, like, so. If I say to people, I'm vegan. I haven't had it for a long time, but some people will still kind of tease me or, you know, will say, but then I just like, give them facts. It's very difficult to argue with some of those facts. So, um, but I think new, especially when you're new, and that coming out thing can be really, really tough. So I guess as a mum, if you're not very sure, or you're fairly new to it will be very, very daunting, you know, especially when people then give you things to tell you things like, where your, where's your baby's calcium going to come from? (Daisy, p.7, line 272)*

She considers the way in which her veganism is responded to by others in two ways: with elements of playfulness, and with elements of concern. She acknowledges that 'some people will still kind of tease me', suggesting that when they learn of her veganism as an individual they take it as an opportunity to bait her into a philosophical debate, during which she 'gives them the facts'. When learning of the vegan status of Daisy's daughter, they are more uneasy, and their responses directly relate to the practical implications this could have on the infant. This is perceived by Daisy to compound the experience of new motherhood as 'daunting', by drawing attention to the possible harm her vegan choices are causing to her daughter. Further, it solidifies Daisy's position as a vegan parent as deviant and something that requires interrogation. Daisy also describes the disclosure of veganism as 'a thing', explicitly suggesting that 'coming out' is an event, but also positioning veganism as 'a

thing', as something separate to the practices of the majority and as different. By responding with 'the facts' that represent her own reality, she reinforces how that reality is not shared with the non-vegan majority.

Abigail's expectation of disclosure aligned with the sentiments expressed by Daisy. As a result, she shies away from sharing that she is vegan:

> *It was lucky that the main dish served was halwa and, and the, the Afghani halwa is basically flour, oil, sugar and cardamom. So it's vegan anyway. Um so last year was fine. I didn't have to tell anyone because it was it was, you know, it was vegan anyway, I didn't actually have to tell anyone (Abigail, p.9, line 416).*

Here, she refers to an event she attended at which a meal was provided. On this occasion she was 'lucky' that the dish served for everyone happened to be vegan and she is relieved that 'last year was fine'. This points to the continuous anticipation of disclosure; another time she may have to disclose her veganism, which feels ominous. Her repetition that 'I didn't have to tell anyone', 'I didn't actually have to tell anyone' also adds weight to her resistance to vegan disclosure. Abigail will only share that she is vegan when she has to, which implies that the consequences of doing so are great.

She goes on to explain further:

> *So, I, I generally do try and keep my veganism a secret like I won't tell strangers. Unless it's absolutely necessary, like at this wedding reception the other day, and there was an elderly couple next to me. And they because they, they had their bacon roll, and I had my vegan burger and they were like 'ooh what have you got there then?' And then I was like, oh it's the plant based option thinking oh god don't quiz me. And they're like, oh are you veggie, then. I was like, yeah, yeah, and then quickly changed the subject (Abigail, p.17, line 825).*

Abigail had been willing to request a vegan option when submitting dietary requirements as part of her response to a wedding invitation. She is able to distance her veganism, choosing a meat free meal in the context of a normalised option, and avoid being confronted with the response of a pejorative non-vegan narrative. However, at the wedding the distance is removed, and she finds herself in a space she feels belongs to non-vegans who expect her

to provide an explanation. She maintains distance from her philosophical standpoint, by referring to her meal more innocuously as a 'plant based option', highlighting how loaded the term veganism is.

Camilla mirrors how the focus on dietary choice can help mask philosophical beliefs:

> *So, generally, I've noticed people say vegan, veggie, and meaty. It seems to be like the Holy Trinity. So it's, we don't even have to disclose that we're vegan a lot of the time. Um outside of outside of [location removed]. Yeah. I feel quite neutral about it really, because, because there's a lot more, there's a lot more acceptance around the fact that you know, people say dietary requirements, let me know about dietary requirements. Like if you go to a wedding or something, you know, there's always that option to sort of disclose your dietary requirements (Camilla, p.11, line 468).*

She begins by stating that 'we don't even have to disclose that we're vegan a lot of the time', suggesting that the avoidance of exposure provides greater access to a non-vegan world. Her use of metaphor for describing dietary preferences, 'the Holy Trinity', demonstrates the power of a non-vegan world in deciding what is permissible for vegans to identify with, without causing disruption. The normalisation of 'dietary requirements' that is implicit in her example of attending a wedding, shows how the disclosure of food choices can feel safer than the disclosure of veganism as a philosophy. This directly mirrors Abigail's experience at a wedding, where she avoids using the word 'vegan' due to its connotations in a non-vegan world.

Ella shared reflections on the responses she received when disclosing she and her baby were vegan:

> *I find it interesting that people who follow traditional diets where, you know, maybe they're eating McDonald's all the time, or eating really bad processed foods, no one comments on how they eat and how that affects their baby. But as soon as you eat more vegetables, and you try and eat a more plant based diet, everyone seems to have an opinion. And so it kind of felt like I really had to justify every decision I made and almost have like a fact database stored in my, in my mind for anytime someone said to me, or someone kind of questioned my, my approach (Ella, p.3, line 81).*

Ella's reference to McDonald's speaks to the loaded concept of food and she positions herself as the judge. She also chooses not to avoid disclosure, and instead finds ways to respond to opinions about her son's veganism in order to defend the lifestyle. She felt forced to have a 'fact database' to refer to, to legitimise how she cared for her baby within the dominant discourses of health and wellbeing. When explaining that 'I really had to justify every decision' she refers to the way she is expected to respond to questioning about her son's diet, but it has further meaning. In theory, she does not 'have to' justify her decisions, but in order to gain acceptance from the non-vegan world in which she exists, she chooses to do so. Her above account suggests that majority rule allows non-vegan mothers to raise their children without question when following a 'traditional diet'. By rejecting the status quo, she highlights her position as external, and is left frustrated at the resulting hypocrisy of non-vegans towards the healthier way of life she has provided for her baby.

Barbara felt a similar sense of injustice to Ella, that her parenting would be called into question if her son were to become ill, just because she was raising him in a way that did not fit with the expectations of a non-vegan world:

> I do think, like, if [name removed] ever got ill, if he got a cold, or if he broke a bone or something, then I think people would be, like, 'cause his bones are brittle, 'cause he's vegan. Or, or he's got a bad immune system, or something. So you, I definitely think we've, we've got to really think and plan his meals. We've got like a weekly meal planner to make sure that he gets the iron. Like, normal kids, normal parents would not worry about this stuff, and I think they should (Barbara, p.3, line 134).

When hypothesising about potential reactions to her son having health issues, Barbara ruminates on her sense of difference leaving her open to attack. She says 'we've got to really think and plan his meals' as if she is collating a body of evidence to prove that her son's veganism is not the cause, should he become unwell. Like Ella, Barbara both overcompensates for her veganism in preparation for interrogation, whilst reflecting on the lack of interrogation of normalised practices. She assumes that 'normal parents would not worry about this stuff, and I think they should', positioning herself as superior, as well as different. It is interesting that both Ella and Barbara mirror what Daisy raised at the beginning, about being questioned around a baby's nutrition and this being daunting for new vegans. They too demonstrate that disclosure can be more easily managed once a vegan parent is

experienced and their confidence established, which could be helpful for new vegan parents to know.

During Matilda's interview, she explained her approach to communicating her views with others who already knew her as vegan. She reinforced the sense of difference that the above women described when disclosing their veganism, and suggested that the presentation of the lifestyle needs to be managed on an ongoing basis:

> *We don't sort of, we're not too outspoken about what we think. So we haven't sort of alienated ourselves from anyone. But I suppose maybe we are a bit nervous of saying what we think because we don't want to lose friends (Matilda, p.13, line 519).*

She fears that being unreserved about her vegan views could lead to an absolute rejection of her and her family. Whilst she has transcended some of the other women's reticence to disclose their veganism at all, she is mindful of how much of her family's belief system would be tolerable to non-vegans and so an element of concealment still exists. Matilda's fears seem to provide an answer to what Abigail was afraid of in her decision not to disclose her veganism at all. The tension between veganism and non-veganism here is stark, and the suggestion that it could be a reason for her to lose friends reinforces the instability of her position as vegan in a non-vegan world. She implies that social connections are reliant on her willingness to dilute her beliefs, and in yielding to this conjecture she demonstrates the strength of her desire to find belonging within a world that does not accept her.

Matilda's anticipated fears of rejection and alienation are fully realised by Kylie when another mother takes umbrage with her approach to sharing her veganism:

> *One of the mums said something to me. I can't remember what and she said, oh, the last thing we need is bloody vegans pushing their views on us. And I said, how do you even know I'm vegan? I've never told you (Kylie, p.14, line 678).*

This interaction took place after a recurring school activity had been changed to accommodate veganism. The other mother singles out Kylie for being vegan and the instigator of the change, defending what she perceived as an attack on the status quo, and reaffirming the non-negotiable position of the dominant non-vegan world. She asserts

dominance, referring to 'we' as the non-vegan majority, ostracizing Kylie unless she is willing to heed to majority belief systems. The other mother refers to the views of vegans as 'the last thing we need', identifying these views as unwanted changes, and by association Kylie is cast aside as unwanted. When Kylie responds 'how do you even know I'm vegan? I never told you', she provides a clear example of the reason why so many women were mindful of exposing their veganism.

In this theme, all of the women shared a fear of, or challenges with disclosure. However, they responded in different ways. Daisy appeared confident in her position but outlined the loaded way in which a vegan parent may be responded to, with Abigail actively concealing her lifestyle due to fear of this kind of response. Whilst Camilla felt neutral about disclosure, she too acknowledged how the removal of 'vegan' from food choices made them less value-laden. Ella and Barbara prepared for the type of scrutiny raised by Daisy, by having explanations ready to hand. The final two women both provided examples of the repercussions of disclosure.

Seeking a sense of belonging in an inhospitable world

This theme examines how the women are perceived by others in light of the complexity of disclosure identified above. The non-vegan environment felt hostile, not setup to accommodate the needs of vegans, meaning that the women were forced to carry additional burdens in order to live the life they wanted, or to succumb to non-vegan practices.

Jill's experience of non-vegans' responses to her lifestyle varied according to location. Below, she describes how her son's veganism was addressed when she was abroad. This suggests the pervasive nature of the non-vegan world, and reinforces the sense that there are few spaces that will validate her reality:

> *Well, when we were in [location removed], it was dismissed a lot because that's just the mentality of that community, of that, you know, social group of people. Um, it was just like, okay, whatever, silly child (Jill, p.11, line 490).*

She put the dismissal of the other child's interest in veganism down to 'the mentality of that community', diminishing her vegan identity. The suggestion that the child may have a genuine interest in veganism is almost laughed off, demonstrating the insignificance of veganism to them. The reference to 'silly child' is almost a direct reflection of their views on veganism: as 'silly', or even absurd. The lifestyle does not make sense to them and is

removed as a viable option for a child who lacks the agency to make their own decisions. By association, Jill becomes dismissed too; her beliefs as a vegan are absurd and the identity of her family is disregarded.

Denise also experiences feelings of being judged:

> *And it comes up and they go, oh, is your daughter vegan as well? And that's a hard one. That's one that I've found really difficult over the past six months. I've found it tugs at my heartstrings a bit, it makes me feel like, I'm definitely judged for it, 100%, for having a vegan child. I'm really judged for it (Denise, p.7, line 302).*

Here she refers to the responses of others when they learn of her daughter's veganism. Rather than this being interpreted as a value-neutral enquiry, Denise is adamant that she is being judged, repeating 'I'm definitely judged for it', 'I'm really judged for it'. This sense of judgment positions non-veganism as righteous and empowered to discern the choices that Denise makes for her daughter. For Denise, exposing herself as a vegan adult feels very different to the disclosure that her daughter is vegan, which leaves her vulnerable. She presumes that the lifestyle choice is less tolerable to non-vegans when it is made on behalf of a child, and the question implies scrutiny of her role as a mother that she feels unable to defend. Denise is moved by the experience which feels uncomfortable in the moment, but the feelings of guilt she alludes to when she says 'it tugs at my heartstrings' may relate to the reproach she anticipates her daughter could receive in the future when she is old enough to be judged herself.

Whilst different, the experiences of Jill and Denise both demonstrate how little regard they felt existed for veganism within a non-vegan world. Similarly, Mia recalls a how her veganism was ignored to the extent that her daughter ended up eating a non-vegan biscuit:

> *She brought out these biscuits and I told her 'no, no, please don't'. But she still brought them out and offered them immediately. You know, before I could even realise what was happening she was offering it to my daughter and my daughter, you know, so then with that, that was a standard packaged cookie. And for her it would be, it looked exactly like you know, the vegan ones that I would bring. So she also went for it. And I knew that if I would stop her, there*

would be a massive meltdown. So I did let her have that, that non vegan
cookie (Mia, p.8, line 291).

The underlying intention of the host was to be welcoming, but this was layered with a disregard for Mia's beliefs and the vegan status of her daughter was tarnished. The thoughtlessness of the situation when the biscuits were offered 'immediately' highlights the invisible nature of veganism, even when Mia has gone through the challenging process of 'coming out'. Mia's identification of the biscuit that 'looked exactly like you know, the vegan ones that I would bring' demonstrates the way in which vegans can connect to non-vegan symbols, whilst the unintentional sabotage in this instance reminds her that existing within a non-vegan space can be perilous for vegans. When Mia weighs up her daughter eating the non-vegan biscuit with the consequences of not allowing this, she provides insight into her willingness to allow her veganism to be deprioritised for the sake of an association with the non-vegan world.

In the below extract from Ella's interview, she states more explicitly how her beliefs are disregarded by a non-vegan world and introduces how power relations underpin choice:

I guess, fundamentally, it makes me feel like my choices, which I know are
right in my mind, it makes me feel like they don't matter to society. And it
makes me feel like I have to work twice as hard to live the life I want at a quite
stressful and important time (Ella, p.4, line 132).

Ella has confidence in her decisions, and highlights the frustration she experiences at having to battle against the constraints of non-veganism. The fact that she knows 'in her mind' that she is right, points to her entrapment in a world that dismisses her identity. She is caught between her righteousness as a vegan and her need to navigate a non-vegan world, but ultimately feels that with additional work, she will manage.

In contrast to Ella, Camilla succumbed to the challenges of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world. In the absence of choice for vegan-friendly convenience foods, she is now raising her daughter as vegetarian:

Yeah, it's tiring actually, it is tiring. I would never I would never revert to eating
meat or fish. And I just wouldn't I wouldn't give [daughter] meat or fish either.
Yeah, I think possibly. Now I know I think about it, maybe choosing
vegetarianism for her was an in a large part, recognising and acknowledging

> *the convenience factor because you know, where, where chicken isn't an*
> *option, at least cheese is (Camilla, p.14, line 600).*

Her repetition 'it's tiring actually, it's tiring' alludes to her sense of defeat. Being a vegan parent is tiring because of the constant battle in the face of hostility and misunderstanding, and so vegetarianism for her daughter is a liveable compromise. As a result, she made the difficult decision to rely on the convenience of a vegetarian diet for her daughter, which provided her with a greater number of options at an already challenging time as a new parent. She is also 'recognising and acknowledging' how challenging being a vegan parent in a non-vegan world is, adding an element of justification to her decision. Her environment is setup for the needs of non-vegans with fewer choices provided for vegans, especially vegan children. As a result, Camilla reclaims her sense of agency and takes another option altogether, and chooses to reject veganism for her daughter.

Florence also shared an experience of compromise, albeit more serious. Where Camilla's choice to compromise veganism related to convenience, for Florence this related to a life or death situation when her daughter received the valve from a pig's heart during an operation:

> *They were like we will try and give her, erm, a donor's valve, because she*
> *had a valve replacement, but if not it's gonna be a pig. And obviously I would*
> *love to be able to be in a position to say no, but they don't know 'til they get*
> *down there and she needs it, and unfortunately it was a pig's heart, erm a*
> *valve, but, you know, that's, that's what I had to… Yeah, I wouldn't ever put*
> *her at risk, if that makes sense? But it is hard, like, and then… I mean, I've*
> *had people be like oh that's so vegan of you. And I'm like well it's not a*
> *choice, it's not a choice, like, I would have… If I could choose and there was*
> *two there I would've 100% gone for that (Florence, p.6, line 285).*

Florence seems able to speak pragmatically about her experience, viewing it as 'that's what I *had* to' do when the wellbeing of her daughter was at stake. Her extract demonstrates the nature of her relationship with a non-vegan world, and the level of agency she is able to maintain. That is, in circumstances where the consequences of her choice to reject non-veganism are high, she has less control. Florence felt completely powerless in this situation where her daughter needed a heart valve transplant, and there was a possibility that this could come either from a human donor or from a pig. Her powerlessness was twofold: she had no control over the situation due to the uncertainty of where the valve would be sourced

until the procedure took place, and she was also powerless to influence medical procedures that relied on the use of animal parts. As a result, she is caught between her rejection of non-vegan practices and her need to rely on and benefit from them. This becomes clear as she protests 'it's not a choice, it's not a choice', as if she is trying to free herself from the guilt she feels about her involvement. This particular experience demonstrates an extreme example of the many ways living in a non-vegan world poses a challenge to her beliefs, permeating almost all aspects of her life.

Kylie experienced a more intentional attack on her lifestyle choice, which left her paralysed and unable to respond:

> *We went for dinner at my in a family home. And there wasn't any food for me and my baby. And that honestly, all we had was a boiled potato. And I was so upset. I didn't, I didn't actually, it was the one time I didn't make a scene, a fuss or anything. I was so shocked that, I know it's my family of [information removed to protect anonymity] they just don't. Well now it's changed but you know, I know they thought veganism was stupid, she just doesn't like cheese and, oh, she's English. You know, it's kind of all these things and, and they had no understanding (Kylie, p.6, line 285).*

Kylie was not only upset, but shocked. She reacted with such strong emotion due to what the boiled potatoes represented: a punishment for stepping outside of 'normal' dietary conventions. She and her daughter had been excluded from the offering of food, which is often described as an act of love and care, causing feelings of hurt and rejection. When she says 'I was so upset', she expresses sadness not for the lack of food, but about the meaning of the gesture.

The above interactions serve to reinforce why these women may have preferred to conceal their lifestyle. In the earlier example given by Abigail, when she chooses not to disclose her veganism, the events that inadvertently cater to her are seen as a bonus. However, at times when she is not catered for she retains ownership over her experience and avoids any sense of rejection from being knowingly overlooked. For Kylie, she has shared her lifestyle choices with her family and they have been disregarded, leaving her feeling abandoned. She is stunned into silence and accepts that she has not been provided for, choosing not to advocate for her veganism at the time. The fact that her family 'had no understanding' represents the position of the

non-vegan world more generally, as a hostile system that is deliberately ignorant to the belief systems of vegan 'others'.

On a different occasion, Kylie experienced a more positive family meal. This gave her a new perspective on how her veganism could be responded to, and ignited her vegan integrity:

> *And then the next night I went to eat at a different Aunt's house and she had made almost the entire meal vegan for me yet her brother goes and hunts rabbits. You know, it just didn't make any sense. It was so nice of her. She was one I never expected it from but yeah, that was yeah so I put at the back of my mind that meal it was I felt so sad. Just not a word. Sad, really sad. Just was like I didn't feel ashamed I just didn't wanna make it any worse and move past it as quickly as I could. I made sure I didn't ever find myself in that situation again (Kylie, p.7, line 306).*

Juxtaposing the pursuits of her Aunt's brother who 'goes and hunts rabbits' with the preparation of an 'entire vegan meal', restores her conviction that her veganism has a place in the world and need not be overlooked. It is significant that she describes the strong display of care and consideration demonstrated through the meal as 'for me'; the present experience seems to help Kylie to make sense of her belonging as a vegan in a non-vegan world. She is then empowered to situate her other family members as outliers in their careless approach to veganism during the previous meal. When Kylie reasserts that she did not explicitly respond during the previous meal, 'just not a word', she asserts control over the situation and moves past her sense of hurt on her own terms, avoiding opening herself up to attack by drawing attention to the lack of provision in the moment. In this example Kylie also asserts her agency, 'I made sure I didn't ever find myself in that situation again', using past experiences to inform how she will navigate the non-vegan world in future to protect her sense of self.

This theme presents examples of the types of events that may come up for vegan parents trying to participate in a non-vegan world. The common thread between them all is the sense of powerlessness that all women share, but in very different ways. For Denise and Jill, this relates to how they are made to feel by non-vegans because of their lifestyle. Mia's extract demonstrates more practically what can happen when sufficient sensitivity to the lifestyle is not offered, which meant she allowed her daughter's veganism to be compromised. Ella explicitly picks up the concept of choice, and that hers do not matter to non-vegans. For Camilla, she makes the difficult decision not to raise her daughter as vegan, and Florence

accepts that her daughter must take the heart valve from a pig in order to save her life; both women demonstrate their powerlessness by recognising that these do not feel like choices. In Kylie's extracts, we see how she is punished by her family for choosing veganism, but through a subsequent event she takes back control and chooses not to be affected by anti-vegan hostility in future.

The need for effective coping strategies

The women made an uneasy peace with the world they lived in, and developed a range of ways to manage the rejection of their beliefs. Matilda's approach is to create positive meaning from interactions that could have left her feeling dismissed:

> *So I think for our family, maybe it's been slightly harder. My parents sort of live in rural [location removed] and sort of farming communities. And it's really difficult for them to get their head around still, that we're vegan. Every time they see us they'll bring things in the house that are not vegan and say, would you like this? And we're like, no, you're just not really getting it, and they still don't really get it. They're not doing it maliciously, it just, it would take a long time to get your head around it (Matilda, p.3, line 90).*

She draws on her empathy to identify the challenges that her family may experience when trying to understand her veganism, suggesting 'maybe it's slightly harder for them'. By reasoning that the way they live and the area they live in may pose a barrier to their understanding, Matilda is able to remove a sense of malice or lack of care from their approach to her, redirecting the sense of difference back to them. Repositioning their consistent offers food as habitual, something that is done 'every time', suggests that their actions are less conscious, again removing the sense of intent as 'they're not doing it maliciously'. When Matilda reasons that 'it would take a long time to get your head around it', she makes peace with their behaviour and is able to live in the present more contently.

Margot too prefers to avoid confrontation, prioritising relations with her family:

> *But my dad is, he's Russian. And he's, you know, a big, a big meat eater, and he hasn't met him yet [her newly born son]. We're going in a few days. But he will just make comments like, oh, you know, we'll take him fishing. And I don't say anything yet. Because I mean, we haven't even been to Russia yet. You*

know, and COVID and whatever, so, so, I don't, I don't say anything. Yeah.
And try not to be confrontational (Margot, p.9, line 351).

In this extract from Margot's interview, she demonstrates her desire to maintain social connections. Like Matilda did with her parents, Margot compromises her veganism by not rising to her father's non-vegan intentions with her son. She pre-empts challenges such as the suggestion to take her son fishing, excusing her father in advance by describing his cultural background and socialisation into meat eating. Margot is keen to avoid a disagreement that could mar the time spent with her father, and in doing so navigates the situation to ensure it does not revolve around vegan conflict. She explains that her father has not yet met her son, suggesting the significance of the upcoming meeting. Rather than her refrain appearing to be a display of retreat, it serves to curate a space that allows both her and her son to enjoy an experience that is not focused on difference. In considering all possibilities in advance, she can reduce potential feelings of being on the backfoot and address any challenges as they arise.

Barbara describes an experience during which she also manages a non-vegan interaction with her father, but in a more direct way:

> *And, um, [son] was having breakfast, and my dad was having breakfast as*
> *well. Obviously having, like, cow's milk and Weetabix, and [son] has a*
> *Weetabix every morning, and I turn around and my dad was just giving [son],*
> *like, a spoon of his Weetabix. I was, like, Dad, what are you doing? I was,*
> *like, that, there's milk in that. He was, like, oh, it's fine, it's just a little bit. I*
> *was, like, no, don't do that. Like, are you serious? Like, he's never done it*
> *since and he, I don't, like, it's fine. I still class [son] as vegan despite a little*
> *tablespoon or less of milk. Dad genuinely didn't mean anything by it. He just*
> *didn't, it didn't even cross his mind that because it wasn't, like, a glass of milk,*
> *it was just milk, like, in the Weetabix (Barbara, p.4, line 186).*

Barbara excuses the actions of her father and whilst clearly distressed by the situation, removes the feeling of intent to disrupt her way of life. By describing her father as 'obviously' having cow's milk, she positions this as needless for explanation, and frees herself from responding in a way to feed her sense of difference. She does, however, respond when her father shares cow's milk with her son. Rather than to ignore his lack of understanding for what he had done, she pulls him up on it and positions herself as in control, turning the

tables and questioning the actions of a non-vegan in *her* world. By approaching the situation with righteousness, her beliefs are protected from destabilisation when he responds 'it's fine, it's just a little bit' and the outcome of the event becomes 'fine' for her too. Barbara's compromise is to accept the situation and contain it by making sense of her father making sense of what veganism is, and she is able prevent it from serving as an assault on her beliefs. By taking the position of authority, she is then also able to prevent it from affecting her son's vegan status, 'I still class [son] as vegan'; she becomes the gatekeeper of the meaning of veganism and so it cannot be derailed by the actions of others.

Florence tried to distance herself from non-vegans who attempted to discredit her choices, not allowing their judgment to impact the meaning of veganism to her. In this example, Florence is referring to an interaction with a facilitator at a weaning class who she had approached for advice about alternatives to cow's milk for her daughter. Instead of answering the question at hand, the woman focused her attention on Florence's choice to raise her daughter as vegan.

> *Yeah, there's something like that in rice milks, and I knew that, so I was like what would be the best milk? Erm, and obviously again it's the whole will she take something that's not sweet, because breastmilk's quite sweet. Er, and the woman was very much like well you, you know, what might be a good diet for you doesn't necessarily mean it's good for your baby. And I said okay you're one of those. Erm, and just didn't, like she didn't really help me. And I think luckily I am quite strong minded and being like I'm not going to let that upset me, um... (Florence, p.5, line 214).*

Florence takes control of the interplay and in turn does not respond to the woman's attack; in the same way that her daughter's veganism had been dismissed, Florence dismisses the woman's judgment. She disregards the woman entirely as 'one of those', condemning her to the position of the 'other' and is able to maintain a sense of entitlement to exist in the space. Instead of ruminating on the interaction, Florence is 'strong minded' and does not digest the woman's judgment or allow her a position of power by denying an offer of support. Approaching interactions in this way enables Florence to navigate a non-vegan world without being prone to feelings of dismissal and rejection.

When Jill was confronted with what she believed to be misplaced beliefs about her veganism, she vowed to take matters into her own hands:

I actually combatted the anaemia just by, um, introducing black molasses into my diet. I didn't tell my doctor. I had my blood test and the count was really low. She gave me some iron tablets that I didn't take 'cos the constipating was awful. It made me feel sick. And then I'd introduced black molasses, went back for my blood count and it was normal. Now she was just like, oh, those pills are working. And I was like, yeah, okay (Jill, p.6, line 275).

Jill describes her approach to medical advice that she believed to be misguided and erroneously bound up with her veganism. Through her rejection of prescribed pills, and in using vegan means to improve her blood count, Jill makes a surreptitious attack on the authoritative position of the medical professional and takes matters into her own hands; she 'combatted' the anaemia as well as the pejorative assumption of the doctor that her veganism was the cause. In doing this, Jill also combats the impact of non-vegan narratives on the stability of her beliefs. That is, when the doctor assumes her health is at risk due to veganism, she uses (vegan) black molasses as a weapon to disprove the conjecture and validate her veganism. Jill demonstrates how she does not feel the need to explicitly fight with the doctor; she is in combat, but wants to exist harmoniously in the space without her sense of difference as a vegan being the main feature of her interactions.

Abigail was also reticent during interactions with medical professionals. Rather than this signalling her distrust or dismissal of them as in the case of Jill and Florence, she sought to manage her presentation of herself:

I don't think I can, I think I would have felt confident asking for advice from my midwife. Although she was supportive I don't think I would have, I probably would have felt that if I myself looked like I had doubts that would give them ammunition to try and persuade me against it. So I never wanted to sort of present myself as someone who was had worries themselves because that would, that wouldn't look good (Abigail, p.4, line 185).

Abigail avoids asking her midwife for advice about the vegan nature of her pregnancy for fear of leaving herself open to scrutiny, undermining her position as self-assured. Her fear is that seeking advice would be interpreted as a weakness in her dedication to veganism, with her reference to 'ammunition' suggesting that her veganism would be attacked. Whilst this limited the resources she gained and highlighted her disadvantage in a non-vegan world, she was also utilising her agency to protect her own interests and ensure her veganism was

not destabilised. Having identified the midwife as supportive of her vegan pregnancy, she asserted control over the relationship to prevent a reversal of that support, using silence to manage the interaction. When Abigail did not want to 'present myself as someone who had worries', she describes her ownership of the situation through the presentation of the self; she avoids focus on her deviancy and manipulates how she is viewed.

Whilst all the women managed non-vegan interactions in different ways, what was common amongst them all was that they all avoided confrontation, which was at the expense of their vegan needs. For example, the compromises Matilda and Margot make with their families, excusing their behaviour as being generational or cultural. For Barbara, she directly responds to her father's mistake before rationalising his behaviour in the same way Matilda and Margot did with their parents. Florence, Jill and Abigail all share experiences involving a lack of support from medical professionals and the need to take matters into their own hands. Whilst Florence and Jill avoid conflict by disengaging with ill-informed advice, Abigail repeats her sentiments from earlier and avoids disclosure to avoid any attempt from the midwife to derail her vegan pregnancy.

Preserving veganism within majority culture

This future oriented theme examines how the women envisage their children will fit into a non-vegan world as they grow older. The women's experiences point to their fears about the non-vegan 'outside world' and how they intend to manage reduced control over their children's choices.

Mia's daughter's is too young to make her own food choices, but her curiosity around food began to pose challenges for her veganism in instances when she was exposed to non-vegan options:

> *So yeah, I I'm raising her vegan. She doesn't know or understand it as much for her, but that's just the food that we eat at home. I, you know, I think so far she's now coming to an age where probably she will be more aware of what other people are eating versus just what I'm eating. So yeah, social situations can, um, get tricky. There have been times now, you know, when her dad will have something with cheese when we're out. And what I will, if she starts wanting it because she just wants a sandwich I have had to pick her up and walk away to distract her so I will leave the table and go do something else until everyone's finished eating all they need to eat (Mia, p.7, line 282).*

The distinct difference between the experience of vegan parenting inside and outside of the home is made clear in this example from Mia. She and her husband, who is not vegan, have an understanding that he will only eat non-vegan food when he is out, and so her daughter's interest in different foods at home is unproblematic. However, when moving outside of the home, her daughter becomes vulnerable to the dominant practices that exist in the external world because 'she doesn't know or understand', suggesting she is innocent and vulnerable. The veganism of Mia's daughter is directly challenged by the external environment, representing a dangerous place full of temptation and Mia feels compelled to protect her. Mia's home is a sanctuary from non-veganism and her husband respects this by fulfilling his non-vegan desires outside this space. In the current situation she feels powerless and has no option but to 'walk away' from what is happening; she is unable to stop it. In order to preserve the vegan status of her daughter as a young infant, her only option is to control access to external environments and 'distract her' from realising the reality of non-veganism.

For Margot, the challenges she anticipates in managing her son's increasing curiosity exist within her home, and she lacks a truly protected space from non-vegan influences:

> I'm not quite sure how we will navigate it because if he just brings home fish and chips and [name removed] is old enough to realise that oh, Dad is eating something that I'm not allowed to eat. I'm not quite sure how we'll get through that (Margot, p.6, line 249).

Margot refers to her partner's introduction of non-vegan food into the home. She is unsure how 'we' will navigate it, in which she may be referring to a joint approach with her partner but could also be referring to the affinity she shares with her vegan son, concerned about how together they can move past the non-vegan intrusion within their home. The idea that her son will consider that 'Dad is eating something that I'm not allowed to eat' represents the point at which her son becomes more aware of his surroundings, and non-veganism starts to represent a threat. Like Mia, Margot controls her son's access to the non-vegan world until he is old enough the make decisions for himself and she is 'not quite sure how we'll get through that'. Here, she may be referring to her part in the journey her son will take as he becomes more aware of what and why they eat the way they do, and what this means in the context of others. She may also be referring to how her son's veganism is managed at home, and what this means for her and her partner. In both senses there is a powerplay between veganism and non-veganism that becomes amplified when brought into the home.

Ella experiences similar concerns about the future of her son's relationship to veganism and the role of the home in managing this:

> *Well, I would accept it and say you can eat, if you want to eat it, you can eat outside of the house, but I don't want to cook it for you. I'm not buying it for you. Here's why I don't want to do that. But again, it's kind of going, going towards the idea of in our house, this is typically what we do (Ella, p.15, line 598).*

When looking to the future and the possibility that her son may decide to eat meat, Ella considers the way in which she will make sense of this decision. Her reference to accepting 'it', her son wanting to eat 'it', cooking 'it' for him, not buying 'it', and that she does not want to do 'that', is significant. She avoids defining meat or engaging with non-vegan actions, placing distance between herself and non-veganism. In refusing to buy, cook, or allow meat in her house she grapples with her desire for her son to have the freedom to make his own decisions (outside of the home), and her ability to maintain control (within her home). She avoids forbidding him to eat meat, but implements as many barriers as possible so that his decision must be an active one, rather than letting himself be subsumed by the norm of non-veganism. By prohibiting meat within her home she also preserves her vegan self, maintaining the walls of her home that have always protected her from non-veganism.

The desire to provide choice for their child was mirrored by Camilla:

> *If she wants to eat meat at school, and if she wants to go out and have, I don't know, burgers, or sort of like pepperoni on her pizza with her mates when she's older, that's fine. But she lives in a plant-based. You know, she's from a plant based family and lives in a plant- so we will eat vegan at home. Yeah, I think that's it, we won't, we won't. We won't cook non-vegan or non-veggie (Camilla, p.12, line 492).*

Unlike Ella, Camilla engages much more actively with the ways in which her daughter may reject veganism. Her reference to 'pepperoni on her pizza with her mates' conjures up the idea of the enjoyment of meat, and this idea of her daughter taking pleasure in eating meat is 'fine' for Camilla. She describes her daughter as 'from a plant based family', suggesting that there is an element of this ethos that is

within her, and a hope that her daughter will be unlikely to fully disengage with its principles. The vegan home in Camilla's example becomes a place to return back to, to re-join veganism, rather than a place to ward off non-veganism. The sense-making that Camilla does in the present, 'yeah, I think that's it', points to hypotheticals that may become difficult situations. Food is such a loaded concept, with veganism positioned as deviant; because she is a vegan parent she will be required to consider this in future.

Instead of accepting that her daughter is likely to succumb to the practices of the majority, Daisy aims to set her daughter up for success as a vegan when making her own food choices outside of the home:

> So it's um, yeah, just making sure that I've raised her confidently that she feels good about who she is. And veganism being part of that. So she does get to a point where she feels confident about doing that. I think that's a struggle (Daisy, p.14, line 603).

Daisy feels that with the right parenting, she will be able to mitigate the lure of the non-vegan world that awaits her daughter. She wants to ensure she raises her daughter 'confidently', interpreted both as confidence in her own decisions and abilities as a parent, as well as instilling confidence in her daughter to avoid yielding to the pressures of the majority. Daisy wants veganism to be a part of her daughter feeing 'good about who she is', the implication being that this will be more effective in preserving her daughter's vegan status than veganism being something that is imposed on her. On the surface, the extract places emphasis on Daisy's daughter making her own way in the world and feeling empowered to make her own decisions. However, by introducing veganism as part of 'who she is', Daisy maintains an element of control in her daughter's decision-making outside of the home, setting her up to reject veganism herself and feel 'confident about doing that'. Daisy recognises that the strength needed to live as a vegan in a non-vegan world is 'a struggle', which is a reflection on her own experience and points to the hostility of the external world.

Through their narratives the previous women have alluded to the nature of the external non-vegan world as a threat to their family's veganism, and how they manage that threat. Denise demonstrates this more explicitly, reflecting on the enormity of the threat as something that is not worth trying to fight:

It's, for me, it's one of those things that I've just accepted that it's a really
difficult battle. And not a battle because it's against people that are battling
you on it, but because it's a battle against the norm. So, the norm is, you
know, Peppa Pig collecting fricking eggs to eat the eggs, because the norm is
to eat eggs. So, for me, it's just such a, such a big variation from the norm
that it's something that I try and deal with in the home (Denise, p.9, line 412).

There is a strong sense of resignation in this section of Denise's interview, using the idiom 'one of those things' which identifies non-veganism as something that she is unable to change. She has 'just accepted' it, not because she wants to, but because the dominant culture of non-veganism is a 'really difficult battle', a force that is impossible to overthrow. Denise recognises that non-veganism is not an active attack on her, but veganism is a 'battle against the norm'. That is, dominant discourses exist across all aspects of the outside world, and in being reinforced within messaging to children too, are unavoidable for her daughter outside of the home. Consequently, as her veganism is 'such a big variation from the norm', Denise has to literally extract herself and her daughter in order to exist purely as vegans: 'it's something that I try to deal with in the home'. It is as if she needs the shield of her own home to provide space to be able to share veganism with her daughter, without it being infected by the forces all around her in the external world. Unlike the other women who attempt to continually manage elements of their children's interactions, Denise approaches non-veganism with a defeatist attitude and accepts what her daughter may be exposed to outside of the home.

Margot feels similarly, and appears to accept the possibility that her son may assimilate with dominant discourses:

And him, you know, going with what the majority of people are currently
doing, then I can't really blame him for that. And that's just, you know, I have
to just accept it. And, of course, I would feel a little bit sad (Margot, p.14, line
584).

Implicit within this extract from Margot is an element of hope that non-veganism will not always be the norm. She refers to 'what the majority of people are *currently* doing', suggesting the temporal nature of non-veganism. However, she recognises the strength of non-veganism as a force, demonstrating the challenges she has faced herself as a vegan to the extent that she 'can't really blame him' for choosing a more conventional path. Like Denise, Margot is resigned to the pressures of a non-vegan world and by saying 'I just have

to accept it', she hands over future responsibility to her son for making his own decisions. In saying 'I would feel a little bit sad' she refers directly to sadness at her son being non-vegan, but perhaps also to the idea that as long as they live in a non-vegan world, they will be at the mercy of the practices of the majority.

The women had children of varying ages, but when looking forward to the future management of their vegan families they shared similar fears: the 'outside world' represented a direct threat to veganism. For example, Mia references hard to manage times when she and her daughter are outside of the home, and it is significant that Margot's partner 'brings home' fish which feels like an invasion. Ella and Camilla had the protection of their home as a strictly vegan space, a haven from non-veganism, due to more invested support for veganism from their partners. Where other women accepted their children may yield to non-veganism, Daisy and Denise recognised the struggle of pushing against the forces of convention and used the home as a fortress, nurturing resilience in their children before being exposed to the non-vegan world.

Part two: Navigating the container of a non-vegan world

The following four GETs illustrate a shift from the macro to the micro, focusing more on the experience of parenting as a vegan within the hostile world set out in part one. The themes are intended to demonstrate a journey, moving from a reflection on the world as it exists, to conceptualising veganism as a response to this. In turn, veganism impacts the evolution of the women's sense of self and identity, according to what they believe to be the social norms of the external world. The final theme examines how they then make sense of their identity through social interactions in a non-vegan world.

Feelings of despair lead to reflections about raising vegan children in a non-vegan world

This theme captures the women's meaning-making process about the world they are bringing their children into. Many of the women had been vegan for some time before they became pregnant, but by introducing a new life into the world they now examined it with a different lens. By being vegan their children may experience similar challenges to them, but may also adopt the position of agents of change to improve majority discourses.

Feeling trapped was an aspect of many of the women's experiences. Daisy felt great responsibility to protect the planet and seemed confident she could shield her daughter from the violence involved in animal agriculture:

I can't imagine actually subjecting my baby to be part of such violence in a way like it's just, you know, it is it is incredibly violent and incredibly destructive industry and the meat and dairy industries and it is just destroying the world it really is like they pl- with ploughing down loads of the Amazon forest, to grow soya as feed for animals. It's as simple as that. It is. I don't know that I can look her in the eye and go I didn't give a shit. I'm just gonna do what I want to live my life and you'll have to end up with my problem down the line (Daisy, p.13, line 547).

Daisy exemplifies her sense of responsibility here from different temporal perspectives. Her concerns around 'subjecting my baby to be part of such violence' demonstrates the immediate impact of the non-vegan majority. She does not want her daughter to witness the normalised practices of the meat and dairy industries, which she sees as violent; veganism provides a more peaceful alternative. She then delves deeper into her conscience, describing the conservation of the planet as an investment in her daughter's future. Her extreme sense of responsibility to be vegan for the good of her daughter's future is demonstrated when she says 'I don't know that I can look her in the eye', almost as if the decision to be vegan has been taken out of her hands if she is to be held to account for having her daughter's best interests at heart. Implicit in this is also the disdain she feels to other non-vegan parents, and how they could justify their harmful actions to their own children. In both of these instances, Daisy rejects non-veganism, distancing herself and her daughter from non-vegan practices in pursuit of a better world. Despite not being part of the conceptualised non-vegan world, she remains trapped within it, with both her and her daughter at the mercy of industries she describes as 'destroying the world'.

Daisy had described hope and optimism for her daughter's future that could be accessed via her veganism. Individually as a parent, she demonstrated resilience and righteousness against the non-vegan majority. However, when reflecting on the changes that had been made collectively by the vegan movement, she felt a sense of resignation that efforts were insufficient to support the kind of world she felt her daughter deserved and now her daughter was trapped within the non-vegan world too:

If you just look at the number of vegans around the world, and how much it's just increased over the last few years, it's phenomenal, actually. And there's a lot more activism as well and various things. But unfortunately, I just don't

> *think it's gonna be enough and good enough, and it's gonna be too slow*
> *(Daisy, p.14, line 562).*

Her reference to 'phenomenal' suggests both the quantity of vegans, as well as her triumphant feelings about the increased numbers. However, this quickly turns to hopelessness, touching on her earlier literal statement about 'ploughing down loads of the Amazon forest'. It is as if this figuratively represents the efforts of vegans, desperately attempting to sow seeds for the future of their children, but this is 'too slow' and the actions of powerful non-vegans turn over the soil before the seeds have had a chance to grow.

The unyielding power of non-veganism was experienced by the other women, with feelings of frustration exacerbated due to the dietary advice that complemented veganism failing to substantiate the lifestyle. During pregnancy, Ella was advised to avoid certain non-vegan foods due to potential risks to her unborn child:

> *It just felt like another divide where, because most pregnant women are told*
> *to limit certain types of animal products and what I found as well that with a*
> *pregnancy, pretty much everything that's on the list of what to avoid or limit is*
> *an animal product. So it kind of like renewed in my mind, oh, no, this is*
> *definitely the right thing to do (Ella, p.2, line 67).*

Prior to her pregnancy, Ella experienced challenges in navigating a non-vegan world which did not always accommodate her vegan food choices. She found her vegan lifestyle divisive, and struggled with the non-vegan actions of others which were at odds with her own. Having been told to 'avoid or limit' many animal products during pregnancy, as she was doing previously as a vegan, she feels validated. However, this reassurance exists only in her own mind, she tells herself 'oh, no, this is definitely the right things to do', because her veganism is still not being observed as credible by the non-vegan majority. Like Daisy, she feels trapped within a world that does not share her views whilst she does the best she can for her child. In fact, 'it just felt like another divide', because her non-vegan peers were missing certain foods, and looking forward to reintroducing them following pregnancy. She still remained as an outsider, as the diet that others were joining her on was still being rejected. She was experiencing a sense of connection with other mothers who also excluded non-vegan foods that were now seen by others as potentially harmful to human health. However, she knew this feeling was temporary, that post-pregnancy she would experience the same sense of alienation again; she was waiting to be placed on the peripheries again, to feel

trapped in a world that had demonstrated the value of her beliefs and allowed a short-lived sense of belonging, but had the power to take it away again.

Margot mirrors feelings of entrapment, but for her this is more internal. Her beliefs are contained within her and she lacks the will to communicate these within the constraints of an unresponsive non-vegan world:

> *Um, you know, and yeah, it does happen all the time, all the time. In the shop, if someone is in front of me buying, you know, meats all the time, I can't switch it off. But I don't, you know, like I said, I don't like communicate it. It's just something internal, if that makes sense (Margot, p.12, line 500).*

Margot feels unable to communicate the way she really feels, whilst also unable to ignore how at odds she feels with the practices of others. Her repetition of 'all the time' highlights the regularity she feels this way in the first instance, but also a sense of resignation that this is her entire existence, all of the time. Margot is unable to switch off how she notices the non-vegan choices of others that are so jarring to her, and which take up mental energy during day-to-day activities. She is stuck within a world that does not share her values, and she is also unable to 'switch it off'; she is trapped in a state of high alert, waiting for the next encounter that will reinforce her feelings of difference.

A number of the women also expressed misgivings about the impact of veganism on their children, sharing feelings of guilt about including them in the lifestyle. Barbara described taking a measured and iterative approach to raising her son vegan, attempting to reconcile her commitment to veganism with her commitment to her son's health and happiness:

> *Without going into, like, the gory details, which no child needs to know, then we'll explain why we don't. And if he still wants to, well then we'll, we'll just keep taking our vegan cakes for him until he's, like, older, older to decide (Barbara, p.5, line 238).*

Barbara wants her son to understand the choices that are being made for him, despite not being old enough to choose for himself. It is her belief that he is too young to be exposed to the 'gory details' of animal slaughter as a reason for why he does not eat meat, but she is eager to make clear to him the decisions she has made on his behalf. Her transparency suggests a desire for her son to have autonomy from a young age, but also that veganism is not an absolute. She avoids challenges in

social situations by taking his own vegan cakes to parties for him and this has become normalised for them. However, taking 'our' cakes rather than 'his' cakes positions her son on the peripheries of veganism; he is not fully embedded in the lifestyle until he has made the choice for himself, and Barbara does not want to enforce veganism on her son.

For Denise, veganism is not absolute either. She manages guilt about positioning her daughter as different by prioritising childhood experiences over strict vegan rules:

> *And I also don't expect preschools to take like kids to a farm and go, and these are the animals we slaughter, and we eat. So, I don't expect them to go, so we don't eat these animals. If that makes sense. It's kind of just, there are some things I just think are such a big, progressive learning journey and absorbing things and learning through experience and all that kind of stuff. I just think, there's just some things that I just try and put in, in at home. Rather than expecting people to try and like model it to and her behaviour. So, I just think, she's a kid, she needs to be it rather than be restricted by things, I think (Denise, p.9, line 427).*

Denise recognises the enormity of veganism as a choice for her daughter; veganism is all-encompassing, a 'big, progressive learning journey'. For this reason, she permits non-vegan experiences – such as visiting farms – as a means to providing full meaning to the lifestyle, and she sees her daughter as 'learning through experience' whether this be vegan or non-vegan. She also recognises that the other children at her daughter's preschool do not share her vegan ideals. She therefore prioritises her daughter engaging fully in activities with other children over embedding veganism at every opportunity: 'she's a kid, she needs to be it rather than restricted by things'.

Denise is very conscious of imposing vegan principles on her daughter, aware of any detrimental impact this could have on early childhood experiences. She enables her daughter to access the experience of visiting a farm in a similar way to the non-vegan children, without singling her daughter out amongst her peers. In doing this, her daughter's understanding of, and relationship to veganism can evolve alongside different experiences, rather than it serving as a constraint on her ability to fully experience childhood.

Camilla also expressed concerns for the social wellbeing of her daughter in the context of veganism, with a common thread across her interview that focused on her daughter's ability

to socialise. She reflects on challenging experiences she had herself as a child, and prioritises her daughter's social participation over veganism:

And she'd go to birthday parties with a lunch box with vegan food in it, vegan party food, which she said, you know, that the host parent would put out for her. But I just, I just don't know. I mean, I think I was putting myself in well my own shoes as a child at birthday parties. And I think I'd feel really mortified. So I think I'm projecting a bit there, but I never liked feeling like the odd one out, as as a child. I thought yeah, I found it mortifying. I found it very difficult to explain myself as a child. So I suppose. In that sense, I was. Yeah. Keen not to make my daughter, I mean, this is so odd, because I'm suddenly sort of having these revelations while I'm speaking to you, but I suppose that's what I didn't want, you know, our daughter to go through (Camilla, p.2, line 68).

Here, Camilla describes the experience of a vegan friend who, as a child, was provided with vegan alternatives to take along to non-vegan Birthday parties. Camilla's immediate response is to relive her own feelings of being 'mortified' as a child when being seen as different. She associates veganism with difference, and therefore does not want her daughter to be associated with veganism. Like Denise, Camilla wants her daughter to have the opportunity to fully integrate socially. This sheds light on her own sociality as a vegan in a non-vegan world, and she adds weight to the feelings of difference vegans can experience by describing this as something she does not want her daughter to 'go through'. In the end, her feelings of guilt are too strong and she goes further than the other women and completely rejects veganism as a choice for her daughter until she is able to make an informed decision for herself. By doing this Camilla is able to avoid feelings of guilt for her daughter being singled out amongst peers, however, she then grapples with her own feelings of guilt for abandoning veganism. She remains torn, unsure whether this is the right decision when she says 'I just, I just don't know', acknowledging that she is projecting her own sense of self into the decision.

Despite feelings of guilt, some of the women also shared a common thread of hope and optimism for the involvement of their children in veganism. By committing to nurturing vegan values in their children, these women hoped that their children would become vegan agents, raising the profile of the lifestyle. Kylie took pride in her children policing their own food choices:

And, and he didn't speak at that age. But he just put it back and came and sat back with me. And I didn't really think anything of it. It was very just, I was caught off guard with it. And then later on the friend that was there and she's, she's a mother of three children. She was like, wow, your child is two. And he didn't even know kind of she thought how does he know? And I never really thought about it. But there we go. Obviously, something had worked (Kylie, p.8, line 359).

Kylie refers to a social engagement where her pre-verbal son made his own decision not to eat a piece of non-vegan cake. He had initially wanted the cake and Kylie had explained that it was not vegan, giving him the choice to take the cake or wait until they returned home when a vegan alternative would be available. Kylie's reference to 'he just put it back and came and sat back with me' is symbolic; he is choosing veganism, he is choosing her and his vegan family. Kylie's son demonstrates how his understanding of veganism led him to reject the cake of his own volition; Kylie's parenting 'had worked'. She relays her friend's reaction, 'wow' and 'your child is two', implicitly suggesting awe at his understanding and decision-making at such a young age. Despite Kylie's nonchalant suggestion that she 'never really thought about it', she shares that her friend is a mother of three children, adding credibility to the assertion that what her son has done is impressive. Kylie's pride in her son's behaviour is clear, as is her pride that he shares and represents the values of veganism that could extend beyond the family.

Florence's daughter also demonstrated an understanding of veganism:

So, like, she definitely understands that that's an animal and animals are our friends, like, that's what she says animals are our friends. And I've been very careful to, like, to teach her but not put words in her mouth, if that makes sense? So she doesn't like just repeat what I say (Florence, p.9, line 438).

Here, Florence explains that her daughter understands the connection between the animals that she sees, and the meat that is eaten by others. By suggesting that she does not 'put words in her mouth', that she is not overly influencing her daughter. This makes it more meaningful that her daughter truly understands and has the potential to help raise the profile of veganism as she grows older. The appreciation that Florence's daughter has for veganism also becomes more meaningful because she herself has chosen to share her mother's values. As was the case with Kylie's son, Florence's daughter is joining her, and their vegan values serve as meaningful and exclusive bond, and perhaps a lifestyle that she will

continue in her later years. The repeated sentiment that 'animals are *our* friends' presents her and her daughter as united, both as a family and as vegans.

Margot's son is slightly younger than the other two women's children, but she shares similar hopes for his sensibilities. Her approach provides insight into how Kylie and Florence may have engaged their children with veganism as younger infants:

> *So I will be, you know, educating him and I will be… continuously, you know, building his love for animals and showing him you know, why we're not vegan, why I mean, why we are vegan (Margot, p.13, line 543).*

Like the other mothers, Margot's son will be able to choose whether he continues to be vegan later in life, but it is her hope that by 'educating him' to equip him with a strong understanding of why they are vegan, he will decide to remain vegan because he has been taught it is for the best. In a similar vein to Kylie and Florence, Margot's emphasis is on her son choosing veganism for himself. Her conviction that veganism is the right choice for her son will be realised if, provided with sufficient information, he too feels it is the best path for him to take.

None of the women felt that they imposed veganism on their children, nor did they advocate forcing the lifestyle on children who were old enough to decide for themselves. Instead, they emphasised their desire for a shared vegan value system which demonstrated their children had adopted a compassionate and ethical approach to life, in the hope that this would support future positive change in a non-vegan world.

The below extract from Matilda is indicative of situations the other women may experience when their children are older, in terms of nurturing vegan children who could advocate for the lifestyle themselves:

> *And we think, you know, animals should live in the wild, or we shouldn't be keeping them the way we do on farms to, you know, take things from them. And they just seem to get that. And I think they do say that to their friends. And it has caused some problems at school, we've had to talk to the teacher a couple of times (Matilda, p.5 , line 185).*

Her children had championed veganism amongst their peers which had 'caused some problems at school', due to the school being non-vegan. This meant that she

had to manage the consequences of this, but also that her children were propagating a message that had been generated within the home. Some of the women discussed earlier had tried to avoid their children being conspicuous as vegans amongst non-vegan peers, but Matilda seems content that her children are taking on the role of minority influencers. She says 'we think' and 'we shouldn't', suggesting that the information her children have shared with their friends is an extension of the beliefs of the family unit. The actions of her children reinforce that they understand and engage with vegan values and in doing so they are raising the profile of veganism.

<u>The construction of identity through lived experience as a vegan parent</u>

The extracts within this theme demonstrate how the women's identities as vegan parents emerge and evolve through lived experience. For this reason, more than one extract is used for several of the women to represent the development of their identity.

The following women conceptualised veganism as a contained lifestyle, a philosophy to understand as a whole and to adhere to, and a process of 'learning how to be a vegan parent' took place. Camilla described an idealised vegan construct, initially romanticising vegan parenting as a wholesome and exemplary way of raising children. Prior to having her daughter she imagined veganism visually as a lifestyle, aspiring to the practical components of being a vegan parent as opposed to concern with the theory behind the practice. In doing so she became prone to feelings of failure by not achieving her imagined image of the lifestyle:

> *There's this very romantic idea that you know when they're on you know from six months once they're starting solids that you're going to be making beautiful kind of lentil based baby stews with lightly sort of flavoured by a nice bay leaf and gorgeous organic stock cubes from you know, [shop name removed] and stuff. I haven't got time to think about lentils, you know? So yes, it's a lot less glamorous than the kind of beautiful photography on Instagram with gorgeous little baby cutlery and stuff. I mean, that gets thrown on the floor. Yeah, so it's, it's, the reality is an awful lot messier and stressful than the kind of imagined, the idyllic wholesome vegan infancy (Camilla, p.5, line 198).*

Camilla found early vegan motherhood very different to the experience she had aspired to; she had to re-evaluate what vegan parenting meant to her, making sense of the experience

according to her own context, and making peace with the introduction of compromises and non-vegan alternatives. Describing the meals made for a child as 'beautiful', with 'gorgeous' ingredients, the focus is placed on the vegan context of parenting. In this way veganism is more than just a part of the parenting experience, it becomes an aspirational way of parenting as a whole. Camilla then goes on to describe her reality as 'a lot less glamorous' and 'an awful lot messier', distancing herself from what she feels is the ideal type of vegan parenting and suggesting an element of defeat. From her account, vegan parenting appears quite binary; either you accomplish a recognised conception of vegan parenting as a complete package, or you fail.

Abigail also conceptualised veganism as a way of life to adhere to, however, she saw it as at odds with her religion. She viewed her veganism and religion as two opposing 'structures', meaning that it was challenging to find space for both of them in her life. Her process of learning was similar to Camilla, in that she conceptualised binaries which meant she could potentially 'fail' at veganism (or religion) and had to find a new way forward for herself:

> *I've had to, like reconcile with the, the fact that my religion allows people to eat meat, like, that was a really tricky one for me. Like, it was like, how am I going to follow this religion that says, it's okay? (Abigail, p.6, line 276)*

Here, she reflects on the integration of religion within her vegan self, trying to reconcile how an identity as a Muslim – within which the slaughter of animals is permissible – can be accommodated by her identity as a vegan. She has reservations that by following a religion that 'says, it's okay' to eat meat, she condones it. Making sense of the coexistence of opposing belief systems within her own identity felt more difficult than the practical impactions of being vegan when attending celebrations that focus on the eating of meat, where the consequences were less symbolic. This thread was continued throughout her interview.

Below, Abigail provides further insight into how she feels her religion may constrain her ability to raise a vegan family (or vice versa):

> *And what is very clear is that food is very symbolic of things it has it carries a lot of meaning. Um, it's often referred to as like a vessel for culture. So it's a way of maintaining culture and cultural meanings, bringing people together and having those shared social boundaries, especially in like, religious settings (Abigail, p.10, line 450).*

Because Abigail sees food as having the power to connect groups of people by 'maintaining culture and cultural meanings', the exclusion of certain foods within veganism suggests that the lifestyle is at odds with other meaningful aspects of her life. Her religion is heavily based around meat, and the slaughter and consumption of certain animals is 'symbolic' to her religion but also symbolic of the tension between opposing parts of her identity. This means that veganism becomes a gatekeeper to full participation in her religion; it prevents her from fully accessing all parts of her social world. The use of the word 'vessel' in her account is interesting as veganism appears to contain her, preventing full immersion in her religion if she positions herself within a vegan framework, in the same way that she is also contained by the non-vegan world.

In the formative stages of her veganism, Denise expressed concerns about making mistakes and doing non-vegan activities with her daughter. She mirrors the challenges of Abigail, but instead of balancing the antagonistic commitments of veganism and religion, she balances the antagonism between veganism and activities for her daughter. In the below extract Denise shares how she evolves as a vegan parent when she lets go of the idea of rules, and trusts her own judgment:

> *I just, before, I used to be very much, oh, is this, is doing this vegan? Is like going to this particular like zoo with my daughter, is that vegan? Is going to an animal park vegan? Is doing this vegan? And now, I just make decisions based on what I believe rather than how I should be as a vegan, if that makes sense. It's taking me a while to kind of get to that point (Denise, p.5, line 227).*

Denise's reference to 'before', suggests an old self with a prior conception of veganism as rigid. As a new vegan she was unable to confidently rely on her own sense of agency to navigate parenthood and was outwardly seeking vegan validation, questioning 'is doing this vegan?', 'is that vegan?'. With greater experience adapting to and making sense of veganism, her decision-making becomes driven from within. By bringing veganism closer, she no longer aspires to something external, *she* is vegan and, therefore, so too are her decisions. Denise reflects, 'it's taken me a while to kind of get to that point', which demonstrates personal strength against the power of veganism as a one-dimensional structure.

Denise's reconfiguration of her vegan identity felt more empowering than the other two women. As her confidence continues to grow, she is able to think more existentially about her identity as a vegan parent. Veganism becomes a part of her but is not all of her:

> *And I think to be vegan for animals is a selfless decision. That doesn't mean that I'm a selfless person because I, I don't think those things like correlate. Just 'cause you're vegan, you can be a terrible person. I'm sure that there are people in prison that have murdered people that are vegan. So, I don't think it, it inherently makes you a better person. But I think it makes me proud that I've managed to put things aside that made my life much easier (Denise, p.13, line 633).*

One of Denise's reasons for being vegan is to avoid animal suffering, describing this as 'a selfless decision'. However, by distancing herself from being an entirely selfless person, she demonstrates that veganism is not all of who she is. Her analogy of a vegan person who has murdered someone else shows clearly how she views the capacity of a person to hold 'good' and 'bad' parts. For Denise, the goodness of veganism does not dilute or counteract elements of a person that are deemed to be bad, 'I don't think it, it inherently makes you a better person'. In this sense, veganism is not an inherent part of her identity and she holds 'vegan parts' and 'non-vegan parts', leaving space for her identity to evolve as a whole. By creating an element of distance between veganism and who she is, Denise is also able to identify sacrifices she has made, for which she is proud. That is, if veganism is intrinsic to who she is, the lifestyle would not be considered a sacrifice for her.

Veganism felt closer to the identity of some of the other women, appearing to shape their sense of self both consciously and subconsciously. For Florence, vegan ideals were more enmeshed with her sense of self but still represented a structure around her life that she recognised:

> *It's a lifestyle choice. But it's also, like I say, like, for me it's more it's like of just not just a diet. It's the whole way I value life, and plan it, and how I see other living beings and people (Florence, p.16, line 759).*

Veganism infiltrates Florence's general approach to parenting, 'it's the whole way I value my life'. Whilst in this way it becomes more embedded in her identity, veganism serves as a guiding force for her approach to parenting. Florence's description of veganism as a lifestyle

'choice', demonstrates an element of agency over vegan guidelines. However, she asserts that veganism directs how she values and plans life, and 'how I see other living beings and people', suggesting that is serves as an overarching system that she consciously engages with.

For Mia, the internalisation of veganism as a core part of her identity leads to feelings of personal rejection in instances where veganism is rebuffed. Where Florence engaged more actively with veganism as a fluid but overarching structure, veganism almost becomes a part of Mia:

> *Because I get really emotional thinking about it, having to explain why I'm doing it. I've also realised that, you know, a lot of times you give all these super powerful reasons with all that, you know, the UN has this data and it's, it's all there and… somebody will listen to all of it and then disregard it. That, that's like a huge slap in your face (Mia, p.9, line 353).*

Mia's emotional, embodied response suggests veganism is so much a part of her that she is having to advocate for her own value. When she experiences resistance to veganism, she feels like she is personally being cast aside. Her use of metaphor, 'huge slap in your face', demonstrates an attack on her physical body within which veganism exists, and highlights the enormity of her sense of rejection.

Similarly, veganism becomes a core part of Daisy and she is no longer able to distinguish its principles from her overall approach to child-rearing. It is so enmeshed with everything that she does, that it cannot be extracted from any of her projects. She therefore sees veganism as a direct reflection of the self and considers that her daughter's hypothetical rejection of veganism would be a personal failure:

> *But if she then decides, you know what, I actually really don't care about any of the stuff that I found. I will really… take it more of myself as like, how have I raised someone to be so uncaring (Daisy, p.14, line 586).*

Here, Daisy seems to suggest that her daughter would be rejecting her personally if she were to reject veganism. She considers imagining 'how have I raised someone to be so uncaring', positioning being caring as a direct representation of veganism. Daisy questions how she could raise someone so at odds with herself, but in doing so also calls into question

her own identity. She wants her daughter to experience the world through a vegan lens, to be an extension of herself, which she identifies as vegan.

For other women, a much more active engagement with integrating veganism with identity was taken. This is seen in the case of Jill, who demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy across many aspects of her life, including her approach to veganism. Rather than ascribing to a structure, Jill was discerning with which elements of the lifestyle she embraced:

> *I just followed loads of families, loads of, you know, vegan families on*
> *YouTube and just seeing how, seeing how they, um, kept themselves*
> *informed and healthy through pregnancy and having children. Um, and yeah.*
> *So, I didn't have anyone to speak to, but I just followed people and read*
> *articles. I didn't have any books either. Um, no, I didn't go that far 'cos I, kind*
> *of, just felt like I needed to know how to keep myself healthy and how to keep*
> *the children healthy and I, I just, yeah, I didn't bother going into it more (Jill,*
> *p.4, line 166).*

After making the decision to become vegan, Jill's primary concern was to ensure she kept herself and her children healthy. Earlier on, Camilla had described how she had become invested in the lifestyles of other vegan families that had been curated on social media. Jill also engaged with these narratives, however, she used them as sources to inspire her own journey rather than a model for her own life. She accessed this information to see how they 'kept themselves informed', looking for insights into approaches to vegan parenting, not for a prescription. She continues that she 'didn't go that far' with reference to reading books on veganism; she wanted to avoid becoming too embedded in a prescribed approach which could hinder her sense of independence. By saying she 'didn't bother going into it more', she positions 'it', or the concept of veganism as an entity, independently of her. Jill's veganism is part of many aspects of her identity which she integrates into her own world. It manifests in her actions but does not define them.

However, like Mia and Daisy, with time Jill also lost a sense of conscious engagement with veganism and it became an inseparable part of her identity:

> *Um, just, it's just a part of us. It's, kind of, been merged with our being. It isn't*
> *separate to us. It isn't like, oh, you know, we're, hey, we're a [name removed]*
> *family and we're vegan. We're just, we just eat what we eat. And it just*

> *happens not to be meat, you know. So, it's just very natural (Jill, p.21, line 956).*

Veganism has become part of her 'natural' instincts, and as a result appears as a latent component of her lived experience.

Kylie actively engaged with the sense-making process of becoming vegan and being a vegan parent. This meant that she had a greater sense of control over her identity:

> *I feel like I've really thought about stuff. And I've weighted it. And it's really there's a reason behind a caring reason behind everything I do. And I don't just do anything because I do it for a reason. I'm proud of myself for that (Kylie, p.19, line 914),*

She considered veganism in the context of her sense of self. She has 'thought about stuff' and 'weighted it', making sense of what is important to her as an individual as well as what she believes is right for other living beings. In doing so she now has confidence that her decisions and actions are underpinned by a 'caring reason', which already aligns with the philosophy of veganism. This means she avoids the continuous cycle of actively consulting veganism when navigating life and parenthood. In this sense, veganism manifests in 'everything' Kylie does, whilst she still maintains her sense of ownership over the decisions she makes. Recognising her own agency in driving her compassionate approach gives Kylie a sense of pride; the good that she sees in her actions is not attributed solely to the structure of veganism and she is able to absorb this good into her own self-concept.

Compared to all of the other women, Barbara seemed to distance veganism from her identity the most, almost rejecting it entirely. Rather than it being a structure to adhere to, or an inherent part of her, it was almost as if it was something that had happened by itself:

> *I don't think it's changed how I think about myself or anything, and when I see these people eating meat, I'm not, like, oh you're disgusting, because I ate meat for, like, nearly 30 years. Like, I'm not, I'm not a hypocrite, like, I get it. But I just think, like, like I say, I'm not a preachy one I would never… I think there's a few vegans who are preachy (Barbara, p.11, line 537).*

Barbara feels that veganism has not changed how she feels about herself, indicating that it represents a relatively small part of her self-concept. She assesses her veganism in a

temporal context, reflecting on the fact that she 'ate meat for, like, nearly 30 years'. In this sense, veganism is a part of who she is now, but it was not a part of who she was before, and she remains attached to elements of her old self which identify with non-veganism. Barbara is also careful to manage her self-image, ensuring that her social interactions are not impacted by her vegan identity. She claims 'I'm not a preachy one', ensuring that veganism is not at the forefront of her identity; veganism does not consume her identity, and she does not become lost through membership to a defined group.

The impact of being a vegan parent on the women's sense of self

This theme has a temporal feel and captures how the women make sense of vegan parenting through reflections on the 'past self' as a non-vegan, as well as from their lived experience following their transition.

Having transitioned, many of the women experienced times they had to renege on veganism for the sake of their children. For some, this was an active decision where they prioritised the wellbeing of their child over veganism, and for others the choice was taken away from them entirely. The below women demonstrate how the exercise of power can impact how compromises to the vegan status of their child are experienced.

Ella experienced emotional trauma immediately after the birth of her son, who she had intended would be a fully vegan baby:

> *So one thing that was stressful was, you know, I'm by myself overnight in the*
> *hospital ward, and my son hasn't fed for like, a few hours. It really stressed*
> *me because of course my first thought was I'm responsible for this little one's*
> *life and I can't feed him he's not feeding. So I had a lot more anxiety on the*
> *hospital ward where I then had to press the buzzer and say to the nurse,*
> *please, please, please, please do you have any formula or do I need formula*
> *my baby hasn't eaten, hasn't fed for a while (Ella, p.7, line 268).*

Ella had hoped to exclusively breastfeed her son, maintaining his status as a vegan baby even before he had begun to eat solid food. However, he initially would not breastfeed. At the time of these interviews, vegan baby formula was not available to the mothers and the only alternative to breastmilk was non-vegan baby formula. Without the support of other vegan adults, she starts to question herself. She says she 'can't feed him', making sense of the experience as her own failure, the inadequacy of her own body. She contacts a nurse in

desperation, 'please, please, please, please', to request formula but is also seeking reassurance, 'do I need formula', not trusting herself that she knows what her baby needs. Having eventually given her son non-vegan baby formula, she comes to terms with her decision:

> *I guess that's the key thing, trade-off, the trade-off was, you know, do I wait and see what happens and assume that my son won't feed for the first day of his life? No, that's not a trade-off I'm willing to make. Let's give him some emergency formula as soon as possible. But it did, it definitely added to the stress of being a new mum navigating how to breastfeed, you know, the fact that I then had to tell everyone, oh, you know, he's had formula on day one (Ella, p.7, line 277).*

Ella questions herself. She has to balance her responsibilities as a vegan with her responsibilities as a parent during the process of learning how to breastfeed. She must evolve as a vegan now that she is a parent, making non-vegan decisions for the good of her son and reconciling this with her sense of self as a vegan. She reconciles that putting her son at risk is not a compromise she is willing to make for the sake of preserving his vegan status, yet she still feels shame when she 'had to tell everyone, oh, you know, he's had formula on day one'. She upholds her decision but still struggles with the evolution of her self-image.

Jill's post-birth experience spoke to the trauma that Ella went through in relinquishing her desire for a fully vegan baby from birth. After giving birth, Jill and her son remained in hospital for two days during which time she was having difficulty breastfeeding and medical professionals insisted on giving him cow's milk formula:

> *And I just had these medical professionals obviously telling me I had to do this and I had to do that. I did give in and let them do that. But I also let them feed him the milk just so they would, um, leave us alone. Because I figured if I put up too much of a fight, they'll try and keep me in for longer. Um, so, I was just like, okay, let them do that for, like, two days and then we left (Jill, p.18, line 818).*

Whereas Ella had to make the painful decision to give her son non-vegan formula, it was an active and measured decision she described as a 'trade-off'. Jill's experience felt like a retreat, a retreat from the physical situation she was in and a retreat from her vegan beliefs.

She 'let them feed him the milk just so they would, um, leave us alone'. She felt overpowered by the medical professionals and felt she had no autonomy in the situation. She was under attack and she admits defeat, 'I did give in', and her sense of failure is felt in her ability to advocate for herself. Reasoning that she will 'let them do that', Jill regains a sense of agency. She makes the decision in order to leave the hospital sooner, and return to the sanctuary of her vegan home without the input of non-vegan others.

Abigail's experience related to the lack of autonomy she had over her own body during her pregnancy:

> *I don't even think she'd cooked any vegetarian options, because she's she'd started to and I think in my pregnancy she didn't, I'm not 100% sure. And I just remember having to give in and just eat this bit of chicken. It was like a chicken curry or something. But yeah, it was really like, it was quite horrible, because they just said but you need your iron you need your protein, you need this for your pregnancy (Abigail, p.4, line 159).*

Abigail was provided with a non-vegan meal and pressured into eating it, having her veganism dismissed. Being told 'you need this for your pregnancy', Abigail's beliefs were completely disregarded, as was her authority in knowing what was best for the health of herself and her baby. She describes the experience as 'quite horrible', which relates both to eating the chicken and the powerlessness she felt in the situation. It represented an assault on her values and beliefs and she had to 'give in'. Abigail explains that her veganism began to be ignored during her pregnancy, with meat-free options no longer offered: 'I don't think she'd cooked any vegetarian options'. Interest from others in the baby she was carrying through the enforcement of non-vegan food, led to a sense of loss of governance over her own body as she felt increasingly less able to advocate for her veganism. Like Ella and Jill, bodily experience featured heavily Abigail's sense of powerlessness, and given the significance of the female body during pregnancy and child-rearing, this will be picked up on in more detail in the next chapter.

The women below share reflections on what becoming a vegan parent was like for them, which impacted their sense of self in different ways. Some women felt they may have had an innate disposition to choose veganism, requiring exposure to the lifestyle as a catalyst for their transition. For others, identifying the vegan changes they were making left them with guilt about their past self.

Barbara felt shielded and ignorant to veganism before it became a significant part of her world:

> I honestly, I don't, like I say, I didn't know anyone that was vegan. I don't think
> I knew, actually, much about it, I don't think (Barbara, p.2, line 71).

She is so embedded in the lifestyle now that she is almost surprised at her old self in having so little relationship to veganism, expressing 'honestly' as if being so separate from veganism is inconceivable to the person she is now. Whilst this extract is short, it is particularly revealing given the distance that Barbara places between veganism and her identity in other areas of her interview. The way in which she grapples with the place of veganism in her life throughout her interview suggests the enormity of the lifestyle change, regardless of whether she wishes to absorb it into her identity. Having previously not known 'much about it', also demonstrates the large shift becoming vegan represents. She appears to struggle to recall exactly how she felt prior to the change, saying 'I don't think', as if she cannot be sure of herself before veganism. Barbara describes her transition:

> Um, I don't know, but, someone I used to work with who, actually, I'll tell you
> about. She's my best friend over here now, she is vegan. She was the only
> vegan person I've ever known, and I used to sit next to her. So I think, maybe,
> just her talking just made me realise I'd not eaten meat, or. Or maybe I was
> trying to, like, not brag to her, but you know, like, oh, I've not eaten meat
> today. Ooh, and today as well (Barbara, p.2, line 60).

With little exposure to the lifestyle, Barbara had not previously engaged with veganism. It did not resonate with her past self, and it was not something that existed in her consciousness. Barbara had moved abroad several years before her interview, which served as a catalyst for her veganism. Beginning a new life abroad left her open to change; she was required to find a new of sense belonging and became more alive to difference. By describing 'my best friend over here *now*', Barbara emphasises the difference in the self 'now', compared to 'then', demonstrating the significance of veganism as part of who she currently is. While searching for her new sense of self, veganism was presented as an option to Barbara. Her new friend 'was the only vegan person I've ever known', and exposure to this different way of life caused her to reflect on and interrogate her non-vegan status.

Margot's lack of consciousness around veganism also served to maintain a more stationary position as a non-vegan:

So I was raised a meat eater, uh, even though watching my mum be a vegetarian, and I spent most of my time with my mum. But never kind of like occurred to me like it never kind of crossed my mind. Like I always loved animals. I always had a passion for animals, but the two things just didn't connect. Um, and then when I was in high school, when I was about 15, or I was about 16, I had a friend and her name was [name removed], and she was vegan. And I was like, what's vegan? And she told me what it is, and like the philosophy behind it, and straight away, I just made the switch. Like it wasn't, it wasn't difficult at all. It was just straight away (Margot, p.2, line 34).

Margot creates distance from her past self, trying to reconcile the incongruity of her mother's lifestyle as a vegetarian and her own as a meat eater. She positions herself as unconscious to the disconnect between her and her mother, and excluding meat 'never kind of like occurred to me like it never kind of crossed my mind'. She reflects on how there was an unidentified barrier, something missing that was needed to bridge the gap between her love for animals as a meat eater and becoming vegan. Margot goes on to identify the bridge to this gap in the form of a friend she made at school, who provided an invitation to veganism when she told Margot 'what it is, and like the philosophy behind it'. Margot describes switching to veganism 'straight away' which 'wasn't difficult at all'. However, having been witness to the alternative lifestyle of her mother, perhaps she was more susceptible to realise a different way of life for herself when she developed more agency outside of the home.

Denise also encountered an immediate switch to veganism:

I remember just crying and just feeling like years of guilt over it because I didn't know, kind of, the ins and outs of... I knew, I knew animals got killed, but I didn't really, I was really naïve about what happened and how. But it, kind of, horrified me, so, yeah, I just went vegan overnight (Denise, p.1, line 34).

Both Barbara and Margot had experienced an invitation to the lifestyle whereas Denise, who had previously been a regular meat eater, gained access to the lifestyle of her own volition. She describes being 'really naïve about what happened and how', despite having made the connection between animals and meat. Denise describes crying over 'years of guilt' about eating meat, almost excusing her actions when she says 'I knew animals got killed, but I

didn't really'. She is confronted with her past non-veganism and what this means in the context of veganism, and accesses feelings of guilt that did not exist in her past self because she 'didn't know'. The strength of response during her period of reflection suggests a process of letting go; she feels guilt for the actions of someone she no longer is, and it is as if the old self is being drained through her tears, making space for her new way of being.

The accounts of Barbara, Margot and Denise demonstrate the fluidity of the self, and the significance of their milieu. These women existed within an environment that normalised meat eating and where access to alternative lifestyles was limited. As older children and adults with greater agency, and increased exposure to alternative ways of life, they evolve as autonomous individuals and gravitate towards new social spaces. Engaging with their past selves as non-vegans made the women determined to provide their children with the capacity to make informed decisions about their own lives and to interrogate the status quo.

Other women experienced a need to renege on veganism for the sake of their children. However, instead of finding their self-determination compromised by others – as the case of the first women discussed in this theme – they took control of compromises. This is shown in the below extracts that demonstrate how this may be done at different points of vegan child-rearing.

Daisy pre-empted the challenges of vegan parenting even before she had given birth. By researching possible obstacles and making plans 'just in case', she had ownership over her decisions rather than to feel like her beliefs had been ignored or undermined:

> *I did look into it before I had her just in case because I saw loads of people in some of the Facebook groups of people doing, you know, parent's groups, that people have a baby and the baby wouldn't latch on for some reason. And then they suddenly urgently need to find formula in the middle of the night, or something. So I was prepared. And I'd looked into it before she came. And I found the closest thing that I could get to a non-dairy kind of close to a vegan option and have it ready prepared for her (Daisy, p.4, line 155).*

Compared to Ella and Jill, Daisy's experience exhibits a sense of control over how her daughter is provided with non-vegan baby formula. As with all of the mothers in this study, Daisy prioritised her daughter's health. She had considered in advance of her daughter's birth that she would be willing to renege on veganism where

necessary, helping her to position any non-vegan experiences as 'not a big thing for me'. She had planned for the possibility of being unable to breastfeed, gaining reassurance from the vegan community that she would not be alone if this did happen. By sourcing 'the closest thing' to a vegan baby formula, she involved herself in the decision for her daughter not to be fully vegan. Daisy presented as unwavering in her commitment to a fully vegan lifestyle as an individual, but as a parent she creates a new self-image to accommodate the needs of her daughter.

Like Daisy, Camilla accepted the need to give her daughter non-vegan baby formula. This had to be done in response to the situation she found herself in, and by reframing and rationalising it she was able to avoid the feeling of loss that some of the other women had experienced:

> *I did breastfeed our daughter, but I'm a unilateral breast-feeder, which means I've only got one functional breast. So we've had to supplement it with formula. And there's no such thing as vegan formula in this country because of food regulations. You can't get it (Camilla, p.1, line 26).*

Identifying as a 'unilateral breast-feeder' she finds meaning and identity in her experience of having 'one functional breast'. She removes the sense of personal failure from her inability to breastfeed fully, and is matter of fact in her acceptance that she 'had to supplement with formula'. Whilst she shared a lack of access to alternative vegan options with the other mothers, she does not describe having her options wrenched from her. Instead, she responds quite unemotionally to the idea that her daughter would not be vegan if she was given baby formula. It is worth noting, however, that as part of her sense-making process of transitioning from a vegan individual to a vegan mother, Camilla had already decided to raise her daughter as a vegetarian.

As the women's children became older they still found themselves in a similar position, required to manage the input from others in feeding their children. But now, further complications presented themselves due to the way in which the meaning of food changed from sustenance to a social activity. In the extract below, Kylie avoids compromising her son's veganism by refusing food altogether:

> *So you know we're vegan. So I don't want to make life difficult for you. And it's easier for you to check for me for you to cook as normal. And some people see it as a challenge. And they're like, oh, no, no, I've always wanted to try*

this, or I'll do it and they want to and other people go okay, fine. And they just,
we just don't, don't do food (Kylie, p.9, line 421).

She attempts to protect her son, countering any resistance to his veganism by positioning it as 'difficult' or a 'challenge' herself, and taking those labels away from her son. By raising 'so you know we're vegan', she exposes their difference immediately, as if she expects this to be seen as objectional to non-vegan families. Despite an almost apologetic revelation, she is unwilling for her son to deviate from veganism for the sake of having a meal with his peers, which is at odds with some of the other mothers who prioritised full social participation for their children, as will be discussed in the next theme. Instead, Kylie appears to place significance on the social interaction of her son with his friends, dismissing the sharing of food as integral to his participation. Kylie is an active advocate for veganism in other aspects of her life, particularly amongst her own friends and family, but takes a more retiring approach here when navigating veganism for her son. Her compromise is to dismiss any expectation of others to accommodate veganism, making space for a social divide and resolving 'we just don't, don't do food'.

A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation

The ability to participate socially was integral to how the women felt about themselves, as well as how they made decisions for their children. However, the extent to which they could engage with others was often determined by their willingness to compromise their veganism. The women's sense of difference features across this entire theme, and it is responded to and managed in a range of ways.

Ella discusses how she navigates spending time with 'mum groups' that are not vegan, taking ownership of her difference to manage the situations accordingly:

Um, so yeah, so that's, that's quite tough because again, you know, if you
think about like your mums groups, I'm the only I'm even like, the only
vegetarian, let alone vegan. And of course, a big part of what mums want to
do is meet up at cafes and, you know, do picnics and things like that. And of
course, then I have to be like, oh, I'm a vegan mum can we not go there? Or,
you know, sometimes I might just not say anything and just eat my lunch first
and then go to wherever they're going for food if that place doesn't offer
vegan food (Ella, p.9, line 347).

Ella draws attention to her difference as 'the only vegetarian, let alone vegan'. She shares commonality with groups of friends through being a mother, but is unable to fully connect due to being vegan. Her reference to herself as a 'vegan mum' rather than advocating for herself as just a vegan, highlights her desire to fit in and feel the same; she is a mum too, but just happens to be a vegan mum. Feeling the need to disrupt plans and request 'can we not go there?' reinforces her sense of being an outsider, as the only one who is unable to attend places that do not cater for vegans. By deciding to eat before meeting with her friends she is able to remove her sense of difference to the group, and connect with her friends fully based on the shared experience of motherhood independently of her veganism.

Margot also relays concerns about how to share food within non-vegan groups, and like Ella she takes responsibility for any compromises required. She recognises how meaningful it is for her son to eat the same thing as his peers, and so prioritises the elimination of his feelings of difference:

> *But now that I have [son], like, I read a newspaper saying that, you know,*
> *Nestlé uses child labour. And, like, I don't know, if I can justify buying into that,*
> *even though they have a vegan KitKat. But at the same time, I think it's*
> *amazing that they do because if he's with his friends, and they have a KitKat*
> *he can have a vegan KitKat and it's the same thing, you know, a little bit*
> *different. So, like, these sort of things are always playing around in my head,*
> *and, like just conflicting choices, if that makes sense. So that's difficult. Yeah*
> *(Margot, p.11, line 459).*

She grapples with her desire for her son to participate fully in social situations alongside her strong ethics, which extend beyond vegan food. She explains that Nestlé have released a vegan version of a KitKat which in theory would mean her son was able to eat the 'same' thing as his friends, which is 'amazing'. She clearly does not want him to be reminded of his difference or feel that he is denied full access to social circles due to foods that he is unable to eat. However, the problematic ethics that she associates with Nestlé serve to remind her further of the unrelatable world that they exist within. Her veganism has been accommodated by providing an alternative chocolate bar that adheres to the ingredients that vegans are permitted to eat. But the labour practices of Nestlé do not align with her belief that no harm should be caused to any living being (including humans). In this way her world still remains unentered by non-vegans, as they have not fully engaged with the meaning of

veganism for the purposes of the new product. Her son is left unable to fully enter the world of his non-vegan friends if his status as a vegan is to remain fully intact.

Daisy took a slightly different stance, seemingly unmoved by her and her daughter's difference and the impact of this for her socially. She feels that non-vegan children are provided with a skewed view of the world, and there are missing pieces to the stories they learn in childhood. Daisy would rather her daughter did not engage in these stories with other non-vegan children:

> *And also the honesty element that I mentioned, you know, like, where she'll actually have a view of the world, which is not this distorted view that that we always have, the old McDonald's farms books where all the animals are super happy. And then we magically have on our plate later. You know, I think she'll at least know what's going on in the world (Daisy, p.6, line 227).*

Daisy reiterates her desire to raise her daughter with the 'truth' and not to allow her to have the same childhood as non-vegan children, which she sees as 'distorted'. Her repeated reference to 'the world' positions her as an outsider, looking at the reality of what exists, with non-vegans inside who cannot see what she sees. She wants her daughter to share this view with her, and 'know what's going on in the world': an immoral system that children are socialised into and so cannot see. As a result, the stories that her daughter will hear alongside her peers, such as 'old McDonald's farm books', will have different meanings. Daisy takes an active role in the meaning-making her daughter will do so that despite being in the same space as other children, her experience will be very different, and she may struggle to use these shared experiences to fully connect.

The women experience misunderstanding and social exclusion in different ways, but for all of them it takes place at the hands of others. For example, Mia felt alone as a vegan mother as she had no one to turn to for tailored medical advice:

> *Um, and the kind of diets that, the information that these people would give me was not working for me. So it was, yeah, it was, I couldn't turn to anyone. I was, a lot of research myself, vegan, non-vegan, about gestational diabetes and about, and really experimenting with food (Mia, p.6, line 243).*

Here, Mia draws on an experience she had during pregnancy when she developed gestational diabetes. When support was offered by medical professionals, 'the information that these people would give me was not working for me'. It was not that it could not work to improve her condition, but it was inappropriate in the context of her veganism due to the dietary changes that were required of her. Medical advice existed to support the needs of non-vegan women in her position, which ignored her needs as a vegan and meant that they were left unmet. She felt that she 'couldn't turn to anyone' because there was no one that was willing to provide the knowledge and guidance that she needed. She was alienated from the support other mothers with diabetes had, looking at a system that ignored her. Mia appears lost and alone, forced to conduct research by herself. She experiments on herself, compounding her position as unknown and overlooked.

Florence's sense of isolation was more self-imposed than Mia's; she shuts herself off from romance due to the availability of vegan men and her unwillingness to compromise. However, she too is responding to the options available to her:

> I just… I don't know if I want to be with a meat eater long-term. I don't know. I don't, don't want meat. Like I said I don't want meat in my house so that would be something, erm. But I'm also not this person that's like, like I'm trying to make everyone vegan, obviously I'd love that, but, erm. Yeah, so it's a… It is really… It is hard, I think (Florence, p.12, line 565).

Florence shies away from romantic relationships due to the difficulties she faces in finding a partner who shares her lifestyle. She struggles to articulate the tension between wanting a romantic partner and denying herself this opportunity due to not wanting meat in her house, repeating 'I don't know' and then ultimately deciding 'I don't, don't want meat in the house'. The strength in her rejection of meat causes her to feel isolated in her house, which she feels unable to welcome a partner into. She rejects meat in her life and by association feels she must reject others who eat meat. The passage demonstrates the vicious cycle she is trapped in, in not wanting meat in her house but also not wanting to convert others to veganism in order for them to gain access to her space. When she says 'it is really… It is hard I think', she refers to the difficulty she feels in making sense of her situation. It also represents her position; it is hard being alone, feeling like her options are limited as a vegan.

Like the other women, Camilla experiences feelings of isolation due to her veganism, which was used as a weapon against her parenting choices. She is outnumbered when she receives anti-vegan attacks from family members, and feels unable to defend herself:

There was one time she had a stomach bug which was actually really serious and she was taken up in an ambulance to the hospital and um the texts that came in were kind of like, oh, well that's it, you know, too much vegan food or whatever. It's just likes she's baby! She's on a milk diet for God's sake, you know? So yeah, I didn't, I hate I hate the kind of pejorative narrative that I get very close up in my family (Camilla, p.3, line 89).

A serious illness Camilla's daughter had was overshadowed by wider family's concern with veganism, and desire to make a point. A hurtful attack is veiled with the flippancy of 'too much vegan food or whatever', suggesting that their support and empathy will be withheld whilst she continues with a lifestyle choice they do not share. Camilla's hurt and outrage is clear, 'she's a baby!'; her daughter is innocent and helpless, and unable to defend her own vegan status. She tries to separate veganism from her daughter in defence of such heartlessness, stating that she is on a milk diet and so her illness cannot be due to the choices Camilla has made for her future. Her repetition of 'I hate, I hate' demonstrates the strength of the hurt she feels in being cast aside, and support being denied on account of her veganism. Unlike the other women within this theme, Camilla's experience is very close; she does not have the option to remove herself from this situation, and cannot defend herself from the cruel comments. It is as if the respect for human life is overshadowed by the desire of her family to reject veganism, and in doing so she and her daughter are rejected.

The women's narratives discussed earlier in this theme, have explored their sense of difference and isolation on account of their vegan beliefs. For most of the women there were also times that their vegan needs had been accommodated. This was particularly meaningful when they had not had to directly advocate for themselves, or when non-vegans sacrificed their own preferences to create a truly shared experience. The extracts below bring this chapter to a close by showing how difference could also be used as a way to for non-vegans to connect with the women.

Jill demonstrates her gratitude at vegan options being offered to her children without her having requested this in advance:

My mum volunteers for, ah, like, an old people's home type thing. And she, um… They asked to see the kids there. So, she's gonna take the kids tomorrow. And they were like, oh, we've got them. Oh, there are vegan

chocolates and stuff like that. And I'm like, that's so sweet, you know. Like, we, we didn't ask at all (Jill, p.10, line 434).

She places significance on the fact that their veganism was accommodated and she 'didn't ask at all'. This reinforces the sense of burden she experiences due to the preparations she usually needs to make for her children in social settings, either by advocating for their needs in advance or providing alternative food for them. It is as if this burden has been shared and she is being supported, and she feels touched at this uncommon gesture, 'that's so sweet of you'. Jill is experiencing the same benefits as non-vegan parents, where the reciprocal joy at the giving and receiving treats between adults and children is free of significant forethought, and she makes sense of this in a way that suggests residents of the home have gone above and beyond what is expected. The gesture also suggests that her children's vegan needs have been considered and deemed credible, validating their choices as a family and providing full access to alternative social groups.

Similarly, Denise found an unprompted gesture from her daughter's school significant. In this instance, not only is her veganism recognised but an additional display of respect is offered by encouraging others to do the same:

But again, the preschool has been brilliant. They sent out a big, uhm, a big mass email saying that we have some vegetarian and vegan kids in, in the preschool. And things like Haribo aren't vegetarian, they're not vegan, it would be really great if you could either do like an all-vegan, kind of, all-inclusive option. Some kids have allergies as well (Denise, p.7, line 338).

Denise recalls the support provided by her daughter's preschool in raising awareness of and validating her vegan needs. Rather like Jill's example of the care home, without having to ask, the preschool have recognised Denise's daughter's requirements which is 'brilliant'. This extends beyond veganism, to include children who have other needs such as 'allergies as well', reinforcing the space as somewhere her daughter can find a sense of belonging because all types of differences are accepted. In doing so, the preschool also alleviate Denise's need to make additional preparations for her daughter. Of significance is their request for the parents to provide an 'all-inclusive' option, inviting them to consolidate a range of needs so that her daughter's sense of acceptance is truly shared with other children. Alone, Denise can only ensure her daughter's individual needs are met, but with the backing of the preschool her daughter can share the same foods with her peers.

Jill and Denise gained a sense of inclusion by having their children's vegan needs actively recognised by others. Kylie describes an experience which appears to extend way beyond this, during which she is joined en mass by non-vegans:

> It's gonna be like a whole key stage one key stage two, they really, I couldn't believe it I was on cloud nine. I felt like a super parent, a super vegan, honestly, it was like one of the happiest moments in my life. I couldn't believe it (Kylie, p.13, line 625).

Here she refers to an instance where she had suggested an alternative school outing for her son's class, as the previous activity had been at odds with her vegan beliefs. She made a request to her son's class teacher, without expectation, and they changed the plans for her son's entire year group. She uses the metaphor 'on cloud nine', symbolic not only of her state of happiness, but suggesting she is being supported by all those below her who will be joining an activity she sees as representative of her and her son's beliefs. When Kylie describes feeling like a 'super parent', and a 'super vegan' she alludes to feelings of accomplishment in successfully advocating for her children's social wellbeing as well as the vegan movement, which have previously been in conflict with each other. It was 'one of the happiest moments' of her life, and she 'couldn't believe it', demonstrates that past experience had led her not to expect the support she gained from the school.

In this chapter I provided an in-depth account of the women's experiences through the presentation of five GETs:

1. *Reciprocal rejection: the experience of being vegan in a non-vegan world*
2. *Feelings of despair lead to reflections about raising vegan children in a non-vegan world*
3. *The construction of identity through lived experience as a vegan parent*
4. *The impact of being a vegan parent on the women's sense of self*
5. *A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation*.

In the next chapter I will present an alternative analysis of GET 5, *A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation.*

CHAPTER SIX – A LIFEWORLD PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEED FOR SHARED EXPERIENCE FOR MEANINGFUL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

"It can be difficult when you come together for celebrations that sort of centre around food, and it's all about having a, you know, a Christmas when you would have a turkey dinner"

Chapter introduction

In the previous chapter I presented an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of vegan parenting through the construction of experiential themes. In this chapter, I build on these findings by taking a more theoretical approach. Maintaining a close relationship to the women's narratives and applying the principles of IPA, I revisit the data to provide a conceptual analysis of just one of my original themes 'A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation'. A key distinction between this empirical chapter and the first is the emphasis on the processes through which the women – and I as the researcher – make sense of experiences.

As a tool to guide this secondary analysis, I employed the conceptual framework of the lifeworld, focusing on the three fractions that were expressed most prominently in the women's narratives: project, embodiment, and sociality.

Chapter rationale

This chapter engages with the fractions of the lifeworld in order to widen the perspective and conceptualise the findings from my first empirical chapter. Remaining concerned with how subjective experience and personal context informs understanding, I provide a different angle with which to view the original theme, and highlight alternative ways 'into' the data. My first empirical chapter presented my analysis traditionally, with direct quotes from the interview data followed by my interpretation of the women making sense of their experience. This was in line with a conventional presentation of IPA, and played an important role in providing a gestalt of experience for all of the women. However, in line with Gadamer (1960/2004), the wealth of data provided by the women felt open to new interpretations and I was compelled to re-examine and deepen the initial analysis, providing greater emphasis on the phenomenological theory underpinning my interpretations.

The significance of the lifeworld

Within phenomenological approaches to human science the lifeworld has become integral to getting to the heart of lived experience. It has been shown that by attending to features of the lifeworld, meaning may be systematically captured to guide reflections about how structures and objects become meaningful to an individual (Van Manen, 1990). According to Halling & Carroll (1999) the lifeworld "is the realm of immediate human experience" (p.98), meaning that each woman's experience of vegan parenting is filtered through their own unique frame of reference (Aho, 2020). However, this 'taken for granted' lifeworld tends to be experienced by individuals with little interrogation. That is, the 'way we are' as humans – from the way we exist and interact with our worlds – rarely enters the forefront of our sense-making processes (Zahavi, 2003). It therefore feels important for me to inspect the women's lifeworlds to access the more latent aspects of their sense-making.

Following the nuanced approach to essentialism discussed in Chapter three, it is important to reiterate that essential meaning does not have to represent a phenomenon entirely. It may simply refer to key features that define a phenomenon, or make an experience what it is. Therefore, the fractions of the lifeworld represent essential elements of experience that I draw on to uncover further insights into the women's worlds. Employing this approach provides a valuable extension of my original analysis and will support closer proximity to the women's experiences and a greater understanding about the significance of these experiences. In order to enhance my original analysis in this way I will be drawing heavily on the lifeworld work of Ashworth (2016).

The significance of the theme, 'A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation'

What was most pertinent in the women's accounts of their experience was the impact of the events involving others; they made sense of the situations they encountered, and of themselves, through their relationships with others. This made clear the space for further examination of how others gave meaning to, or were involved with, the women's meaning-making. For this reason, in this chapter I chose to focus on Group Experiential Theme (GET) 'A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation'.

This theme originally served to capture how the women managed their sense of difference during social interactions. They emphasised the role of others in how they viewed their connection to the world according to the levels of participation they were granted during social interactions. Many of the women felt that only when experience was truly shared with

others did they consider themselves to transcend their position of being on the peripheries of a non-vegan world. This is particularly relevant to the idea of the lifeworld, given the multiple ways in which interactions can be interpreted from the perspective of the individual.

A mealtime between vegans and non-vegans represents this idea well. For example, it could be that a host is providing a meal to a group of friends that includes non-vegans and one vegan. The host has gone to great lengths to prepare a separate meal for the vegan that meets their dietary requirements, whilst the others all eat a different non-vegan meal. According to one vegan's frame of reference, the host has demonstrated care in an attempt to cement their relationship with the vegan. However, it is quite possible that to a different person this act could draw attention to the vegan's sense of difference and cement their position as an outsider. It is for this reason that I have decided to examine further, how a person's unique lifeworld can alter how an event is experienced.

Viewing experience through the fractions of project, embodiment and sociality

Conceptualisations of the lifeworld have evolved over time, but the unique nature of each individual's lifeworld is largely regarded as having a similar structure (Zahavi, 2003). According Ashworth (2016), this structure includes self-hood, sociality, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, project, discourse, and moodedness. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be taking 'project', 'embodiment' and 'spatiality' to provide further interpretations of the theme.

Ashworth (2016) asserts that the lifeworld fractions do not serve as "independent categories or parameters or perspectives. Rather, they are mutually entailed, with overlapping or interpenetrating meanings" (p.25). However, I want to clearly demonstrate the ways in which the fractions can support in-depth understanding and serve as a helpful tool for interpretation. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter I will address each fraction in turn, and independently of the entire structure of the lifeworld.

Project

According to the work of Sartre (1943/2006), an individual's project is entwined with their sense of self and is responsible for the direction of their activities. In Ashworth's (2016) paper he acknowledges this, viewing our project as the things we are committed to. However, he suggests that there may be a greater number of lenses through which experience can be seen to relate to the person's project. We could take the decision of

Camilla, referenced in the previous empirical chapter (and below for reference), who is raising her daughter as vegetarian rather than vegan.

And she'd go to Birthday parties with a lunch box with vegan food in it, vegan party food, which she said, you know, that the host parent would put out for her. But I just, I just don't know. I mean, I think I was putting myself in well my own shoes as a child at birthday parties. And I think I'd feel really mortified. So I think I'm projecting a bit there, but I never liked feeling like the odd one out, as as a child. I thought yeah, I found it mortifying. I found it very difficult to explain myself as a child. So I suppose. In that sense, I was. Yeah. Keen not to make my daughter, I mean, this is so odd, because I'm suddenly sort of having these revelations while I'm speaking to you, but I suppose that's what I didn't want, you know, our daughter to go through (Camilla, p.2, line 68).

Camilla is steadfastly committed to veganism herself and had originally wanted to include her daughter in the lifestyle fully. Yet, she acknowledges her project of social participation for her daughter as an overriding commitment. Camilla has multiple projects which include veganism as well as social participation, demonstrating the many aspects of the self that exist but that are varied in how far she is able to commit to them. It is therefore important to distinguish between the commitments that exist within and across the women, rather than to homogenise veganism as a shared project.

The extracts below demonstrate how the unique projects of the individual women can greatly alter their experience of vegan parenting:

I would take my daughter to, probably not somewhere like [location removed] Zoo. Or another zoo. But I do take her to, uhm, places where animals are in cages which a lot of vegans would say that's not vegan. That's not vegan. And I would take her to an aquarium whereas a lot of people think, that's not vegan. Whereas I've learned to kind of go with what I feel (Denise, p.6, line 251).

We hate [location removed] aquarium with a passion... And my son probably probably me that suggested it that we like let's write a letter to the aquarium. So he kind of dictated this letter. And I wrote it, obviously, he's [age removed]. And then on the front page drew a picture of the ocean animals swimming

free. And inside it basically kind of said to the manager of the aquarium
please can you free the animals, we know you think you love them, but
they're not happy (Kylie, p.12, line 581).

Denise describes avoiding a zoo, which directly relates to the vegan principles – or projects – that she imparts on her daughter. She then goes on to say that she would take her daughter to an aquarium, which is not vegan. Repeating the sentiments of others who say 'that's not vegan', she demonstrates the presence of other projects other than veganism. Going with 'what I feel' suggests she is tapping into something else, alternative projects, perhaps projects related to her daughter's enjoyment.

On the other hand, in Kylie's extract we see that no allowances are made for her son to participate in popular childhood activities, and that she has not been driven to the pursuit of projects that do not align with veganism. Not only does this demonstrate the diversity and complexity of projects belonging to an individual, but also demonstrates that the essential meaning of a vegan parent is not possible. This further emphasises a need to see the experience as heterogeneous and unique. Denise and Kylie clearly prioritise different projects when considering activities for their children. However, both demonstrate the core of the theme in thinking about the penetration of two different worlds, and how far they will integrate with the norm.

By acknowledging that activities or things are given meaning according to the project with which they are associated (Ashworth, 2016), we may open up new ways of understanding what lived experience is like for someone else. The significance of this in the wider context of the world will be discussed later in this thesis, and the below extract from Barbara reinforces my earlier reference to how the accommodation of difference can be made sense of in different ways:

> *And they are, yeah, they're, every time we go round to their house for, like, a*
> *play date and food or anything, like lunch, they always cook us vegan food.*
> *They've always been very, bless them, they're actually really good with it.*
> *Like, they're like, so these are the knives we've been using, these are, like,*
> *the chopping boards that we've used for you, and this is all our stuff. They're*
> *very, very separate (Barbara, p.6, line 257).*

For Barbara, respect for her vegan beliefs leads to feelings of inclusion. I interpreted Barbara's description of the project of the host in this extract as a demonstration of vigilance

and to provide reassurance to Barbara that her vegan needs had been considered and catered for. Barbara enabled and validated the host's project, interpreting care from the host's actions, as opposed to any attempt to single her out.

The Heideggerian concept of 'Care' is relevant here where Care denotes our commitment to the things closest to our project. That is, the way we may engage with or attend to the things we consider most central (Mulhall, 2013). Care is therefore a core part of human existence underpinning how we connect with the world. Despite our actions not always being driven by Care (such as being bored or daydreaming), these instances simply just represent a 'deficient mode of concern' (Langdridge, 2007, p.31) which feature differently in our experience. In this way, Care is more than a feeling, it is an inherent part of the self that drives physical or mental engagement, and plays a significant role in how individuals generate meaning (Mulhall, 2013).

With relation to veganism and Care, a parallel may be drawn from the shift in meaning of animal products. In the below extract, Denise recalls how she attended to new and 'old' foods during the initial stages of her veganism:

> I'm quite a relaxed vegan, I would say. But back then, it was kind of like everything repulsed me, like go shopping was, ah-ha. Because it [unclear]. Being vegan was really, like really easy for me, which I never thought would happen (Denise, p.3, line 100).

Here we can see that whilst she had excluded animal products, they still featured heavily in her life. Their meaning changed from something to enjoy, to something that repulsed her. However, with time there was a further shift to how she 'cared' about these, and they moved more to the peripheries and took on new meaning once again.

The concept of Care can also influence how an individual attends to others, and how far the women feel they are truly sharing an experience. Matilda describes the leniency with which she treats her mother:

> It can be difficult when you come together for celebrations that sort of centre around food, and it's all about having a, you know, a Christmas when you would have a turkey dinner or whatever. And I just think, you know, with my mum, who's quite set in her ways, because she was she was a farmer's daughter when she was brought up and that's just what she's used to. And I

can't see her ever, ever sort of willing to try something different and change.
So it's nice now that I think the next generation her children have gone vegan,
and she's willing to like at least let us do our own food in her house and talk to
us about it. And I think she still is baffled by us (Matilda, p.10, line 413).

Had Matilda applied a less empathetic lens to her mother, attended to her with less Care, then her view of her mother and the experience of visiting her may have been very different. According to the present theme – that fully shared experience is required for meaningful social participation – it could be suggested that Matilda and her mother exist in impenetrable social worlds. However, her Care for a convivial relationship provides a different meaning for this experience. Had she been preoccupied with her mother understanding and engaging with her way of life, this would have completed shifted the meaning of the experience.

I previously pointed to the value of understanding the projects of others when making sense of experience. Due to the minority status of the women in a non-vegan world, this can also have practical implications. In the below example, Mia's daughter ends up having a non-vegan cookie when visiting someone else's home for tea:

So that lady was she was trying her level best to be a good host and she
brought out these biscuits and I told her 'no, no, please don't'. But she still
brought them out and offered them immediately. You know, before I could
even realise what was happening she was offering it to my daughter and my
daughter, you know, so then with that, that was a standard packaged cookie.
And for her it would be, it looked exactly like you know, the vegan ones that I
would bring. So she also went for it (Mia, p.7, line 290).

The host's project to demonstrate hospitality, and Mia's project to accept this in order to reaffirm the relationship, overrode her commitment to veganism. Whilst this challenge was symptomatic of non-vegan norms rather than malicious intent to attack the lifestyle, it exemplifies how certain events can impact the women's ability to maintain committed to what they hold as central (veganism). However, despite her attempts to foster connection, Mia's sense of isolation is reinforced as her daughter unwittingly colludes in non-veganism with the host and Mia is left on the peripheries of the event.

In the previous chapter I provided an interpretation of this same extract. Whilst the meaning I generated in both examples is not contradictory, the use of both demonstrate the extent to which the position of the researcher making sense of the event can impact interpretation. I

originally identified the host's actions as a disregard for veganism, which highlighted the invisible nature of Mia's choices. I suggested that Mia's sense of difference and otherness was reinforced by this event, and acknowledged that by allowing her daughter to have the cookie, her desire for a sense of belonging overrode her commitment to veganism. By engaging more with Mia's own lifeworld this time around, I was more involved with her process of sense-making and observed more of her own agency around choice, understanding what was happening for her in the moment and feeling like I was closer to the experience.

From this greater sense of 'in the moment' understanding, I noticed a sense of urgency in Mia's account. She almost becomes detached from the situation as she watches it unfold, feeling helpless to intervene (or perhaps more heavily committed to her project of social connection). In surrendering to her daughter's acceptance of the non-vegan cookie Mia also accepts her daughter's sense of bodily autonomy in consuming something non-vegan. Whilst the meaning of this may not have been apparent to Mia's daughter, it leads onto how we may consider the body in making sense of experience, which I discuss below.

Embodiment

The body is 'behind' human awareness, and so is heavily involved in the experience of vegan child-rearing. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) proposed an almost layered approach; he pointed to our position as being inside our bodies that are then in the world as a starting point for understanding how we connect to the world. In this way, rather than our bodies containing or restricting the self, they provide mediation between the self and the world, serving as a channel for understanding (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). The body is also a tool for helping to remember how things 'were', in being able to remember how we felt in certain situations more than the exact events themselves, making the body particularly relevant to the women who had transitioned from having experience as part of the status quo, to having experience as outliers.

As has been discussed, for Merleau-Ponty the body is always involved in our meaning-making – it is literally always present with us – and underpins our interactions with the world. Accordingly, "the body discloses the world for us in a certain way. It is the transcendental condition for the possibility of experiencing objects at all, our means of communication with the world" (Moran, 2000, p.425). As no individual will move, or listen to, or look toward things in exactly the same way, no two experiences generate the same meaning and knowledge. Moran (2000) puts this idea succinctly: "the body brings me into a spatial world in a special

way. I discover things as left and right, tall and small, etc., all on the basis of my orientation"
(p.424). In this sense, our bodies become vehicles for our individual meaning-making and
provide the means for our relationships with phenomena in our world (Todres, 2007; Zahavi,
2019).

The body featured heavily in the narratives of all women and were brought to the forefront of
experience through their 'function' for breastfeeding and physically caring for a child. With
this increased concern around the body, further opportunities to distinguish between the
'right' non-vegan and the 'other' vegan way of child-rearing arose. Motherhood became
another aspect of life that the women could be excluded from or feel represented as a
minority within. In the example below from Mia, we see how her diagnosis of gestational
diabetes at the end of her first trimester made her vegan project(s) difficult:

> *Um, but to have that thrown at me during the pregnancy and still having to kind*
> *of do it as a vegan (.) it was extremely scary. It made the doctors even more*
> *suspicious or, you know, and they would project that on to me. (2) yeah, so, but*
> *I, the one thing that I was very sure of was that I would not stop being vegan. In*
> *spite of that, I would somehow manage (Mia, p.2, line 52).*

Mia looks to doctors to support the health challenge she encounters as a vegan. Instead of
finding support, she ends up feeling scrutinised as an outlier. She has to 'do it [pregnancy]
as a vegan [alone]'. When examined more closely through the fraction of embodiment, we
see how integral the body is to her experience. Mia decides not to let her body determine the
failure of her vegan project. Her body has let her down and colludes with the assumptions of
medical professionals that a vegan pregnancy is unsafe; her body may be signalling that
veganism is not the best decision for her health, but she will not let her body control how far
she can pursue her vegan project.

In this example from Mia, she is almost at risk of losing ownership of her body – more
specifically what she puts into it – due to the physical needs of her and her unborn baby.
Mia's bodily changes and new found incompatibility with veganism were a direct result of her
pregnancy, and due to this she is forced to confront both veganism and child-rearing
together.

The link between child-rearing and veganism, and the potential for conflicting projects, is
also seen in an example from Daisy. She explains how she approached the decision-making
process for pursuing IVF with a vegan lens:

So yeah, I mean, I guess in terms of ways of what I didn't want to do was kind of like, miss this last window that I had to try and go for it and then not have kids at all. Because it really was, because I was when we started IVF I was 38, 37. So it was for the NHS, you only get up to 40, and when you're 40 they stop any treatment. So I really had to make the decision pretty quickly. And my husband and I talked about it loads and about whether we really want kids or not (Daisy, p.10, line 403).

In this extract, we can see how Daisy is forced to confront the potential failure of her body in carrying a baby. However, in doing so she is also confronting the failure of her body to enable a vegan baby (as IVF is non-vegan). By going ahead with the IVF, she is able to socially participate in the phenomenon of child-rearing but she also surrenders her body to non-vegan practices.

Perhaps most prominent across all of the women's accounts was the experience of breastfeeding, whether this was possible for them to achieve or not. Breastfeeding was covered by a number of interpretations from the women in the first empirical chapter. However, it felt noteworthy to highlight again here as it relates so closely to the embodied experience of vegan parenting. Breastfeeding can represent an expression of the ethical values of veganism (in avoiding cow's milk formula), but also carries weight in terms of what it means to be a woman and to a person's sense of self (Shaw, 2004). Research suggests that the embodied experience of breastfeeding can generate a range of meanings for women, from connecting them to their baby, to impacting how they manage and maintain their bodily autonomy once they become a mother (Schmied & Lupton, 2001).

A vegan woman's inability to breastfeed – as was the case for a number of the women – has particularly significant implications given that there are few suitable vegan alternatives to human breastmilk. Being denied access to the bodily experience of breastfeeding also prohibits social participation for the women, whether from the wider breastfeeding community or from the vegan community whose babies are fully vegan.

In his book, *Food Philosophy*, Kaplan (2020) suggests that "our bodies sometimes override our minds and tell to us whether or not something is okay to eat" (p.36). Whilst this reference relates to the body's ability to protect us against inedible foods, it feels relevant in terms of how embodied experience can at times transcend

socialised norms and we begin to make sense of experience more instinctually. Accordingly, there is only so far we can understand or know something without drawing on the additional dimension of feeling, or using our bodily response as a way to generate meaning. This could relate to how we experience taste, and how variation in preferences may point to the interpreted nature of taste. Related to this is the experience of cravings during pregnancy, and what these could mean to a vegan mother. Florence describes her pregnancy as unproblematic, and free from cravings:

> *Erm, obviously there were some people, like, what are you gonna do if you crave meat, this and that. And I was like I don't really think of… My personal thing was I don't think your body's going to crave a dead animal but… [Laughs] But, you know. And I just was like well I, I will deal with it if it happens, which it didn't. I generally didn't get any cravings, erm. I had pretty much a healthy pregnancy (Florence, p.2, line 66).*

She almost disconnects her body, viewing the experience of craving as being something her body could do in opposition to her mind, thus reinforcing the integral nature of the body in experience. She is almost grateful that hers did not deceive her ethics. However, her body acting in opposition to her ethics in craving meat would have brought her closer to the non-vegan majority; she could have found new connection through her body but not her mind.

Amongst the women I spoke to, some saw the removal of animal products as a sacrifice as they were following their vegan lifestyle for ethical reasons. However, others found the lifestyle aligned well with their tastes, such as not liking cheese or milk independently of the decision to be vegan. In this sense, we can see again how a power dynamic exists between the body and the conscious will of a vegan woman when pregnancy cravings occur. That is, her sacrifices may be made harder by her bodily cravings, and her body may demonstrate its own sense of agency when tastes change and no longer align with her project(s).

The sense of a disconnected body also relates to how the governance of women's bodies changes during pregnancy. Where Merleau-Ponty focused on bodily experience as a way of connecting us to the world, the increased interest and interference with women's bodies during pregnancy can serve as a barrier to how they are able to do this. During her interview, Abigail raised how women's decisions

for their children – including via their bodies during pregnancy – become more heavily scrutinised when it is discovered they are vegan:

> *Discussions around how the female body is monitored, especially like in pregnancy. And so it's quite interesting that especially when there's a child involved or a minor, the the whole issue always gets blown out of proportion (Abigail, p.19, line 947).*

The idea of a woman's body being monitored, on the surface may indicate the way in which her health and the health of the baby are supervised during pregnancy. However, what Abigail describes is the governance of women's bodies by others, in terms of what they should eat, how they should move, the activities they take part in and so on. The body becomes the very thing that determines how the women's decisions are deemed socially acceptable, and whether they are granted access to the majority social world. Due to this scrutiny and lack of control over their bodies, there is a particular affinity between vegan women and the experience of dairy cows (Adams, 2010). It therefore becomes harder for any sense of intersubjectivity to take place between the women and non-vegans, when a mutual basis of empathy and shared awareness does not exist, and they cannot connect or relate on a bodily level to what is going on for the other person.

It is suggested that during interviews, the researcher be mindful of what their own bodily responses tell them about a participant's account alongside the participant's own description (Finlay, 2005, 2006). As discussed in Chapter four, the interviews for this thesis took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and so were conducted virtually. This meant I was able to identify a shift in how I connected with the women compared to previous IPA interviews I had conducted face-to-face. Speaking with the women via videoconference, I felt like access had been removed to certain elements of embodied understanding. For example, I was unable to know exactly what the women were attending to in their own physical space, certain non-verbal cues were undoubtedly missed, and the opportunity to draw on my own bodily instincts to know whether certain lines of questioning were appropriate, became lost. This brought to the surface the idea of bodily responses providing essential meaning, which challenged my own epistemology despite recognising the aforementioned nuance of essential meaning. In face-to-face interviewing there appeared to be an element of direct access to meaning that the body may provide (Finlay, 2006), such as tears revealing upset, blushing revealing embarrassment, or my own physical responses telling me something about the way the participant was feeling.

Understanding things and people via our own bodies may also provide insights into how others can feel, giving us a sense that we are able to relate to them in a way that transcends words (Finlay, 2005). However, the way in which vegans and non-vegans feel about meat consumption is undeniably different, and therefore calls into question how can their bodily experiences or responses can be mutually or intersubjectively understood. According to the work of Rozin & Fallon (1987) on 'disgust', humans feel "revulsion at the prospect of oral incorporation of an offensive object" (p.23). This is highlighted by Daisy:

> *Aside from the fact that it's ethical reasons and health reasons for me for being vegan, just handling of anything non-vegan is I find quite disgusting. So I think that would have just made me more sick [laughs]. And, you know, things like dairy making you all phlegmy and all that kind of stuff as well (Daisy, p.3, line 100).*

Daisy considers the bodily experience of being sick as a response to eating non-vegan food. This resonates with Testoni et al. (2017) who identified feelings of disgust as a motive for vegetarianism, whereby individuals would imagine pollutants entering their the body via animal meat. In this way, Daisy has fewer opportunities to connect directly in an embodied way with non-vegans, as she physically does not share or identify with their response to certain foods.

Explicit in Daisy's account is her rejection of non-veganism and her personal decision to place herself on the peripheries of the majority. This speaks to the boundaries of veganism, which Daisy cannot break free from in order to connect fully with the majority. She also excludes herself from full social participation in her disgust at anything non-vegan, which could include those who are non-vegan.

The women's position as peripheral to the majority non-vegan culture suggests they are part of a 'subculture' (Cherry, 2006; Edwards, 2013). However, within this they each have a unique lifeworld which distinguishes them and makes their experiences unique. What is clear from examining how the fractions of their lifeworld may contribute to experience, is the presence of others within their sense-making. The theme used for this chapter acknowledges the challenge of true social participation for women who represent considerable deviation from the norm, so it makes sense to take sociality as the next and final fraction to explore. In doing so I aim to understand how the presence of others impacts the women's sense of difference, how this difference impacts their relationships with others, and how power is exercised between vegans and non-vegans in relationships.

<u>Sociality</u>

Lewis & Staehler (2010) suggest that the presence of others cannot be separated from our consciousness. Accordingly, the unique nature of experience is not only shaped by others in the present, but those interactions can serve as the foundations for what we come to expect. Where we make sense of things in relation to others, this could be to the extent that if a different person was present or absent, or interacted with us in a different way, the whole meaning of the experience may change. Sociality therefore refers to the impact of our roles, and the roles of others, in a given event (Ashworth, 2016). As a result, there appears to be a great deal of power in others in how our own experiences are shaped. The chosen theme for this chapter introduces what the power dynamics within interactions may mean for the women's sense of belonging, which is then focused on more heavily in the next and final empirical chapter.

In the below extract from Margot, we can see how her position as a vegan is overshadowed by the non-vegan majority. She has to decide whether to allow her son to participate in non-vegan activities or not to participate at all:

> *They had a theme for a month where it was nursery rhymes, and they posted on his wall saying, oh we sang Old MacDonald had a Farm, and they decorated little piggy things. And, I mean, I was a little bit like, I mean, I wouldn't sing that song. But at the same time, I do need to pick my battles. I'm not going to start, you know, getting all funny about a nursery rhyme. Because it's just a nursery rhyme. And it's just the theme that they had at the nursery for, you know, a few weeks or something, and it's over now (Margot, p.9, line 363).*

The parameters have been perceived by Margot that her son is 'in or out' in terms of his participation, and this is because of his veganism. Within this power 'battle', Margot concedes that a non-vegan nursery rhyme is not harmful. The shared understanding of what a nursery rhyme is – a tool to aid child development rather than to teach morals or ethics – is taken on board, and Margot makes a judgment call. When considering the power relations of this decision, it is hard not to note the temporal nature of the event in that it was deemed a temporary disruption to veganism and so easier for Margot to bear.

When considering sociality, the more direct actions of the 'other' and their impact on the self are important; in any given event with others we adopt our own roles, but in doing so attempt to define the roles of others. In Margot's example she perceives the situation more widely and makes a decision based on her own assumptions, rather than from a close interaction with others. In making this choice alone she retains an element of power in her decision. However, the meaning of an experience can be altered more directly when individuals are in closer proximity to others. To demonstrate this, Ashworth (2016) uses the analogy of gift giving. In his example, the gift giver assumes their right to give a gift and anticipates the other will take up the role of recipient. If they do not, we can see how this would then impact the power dynamic, and the gift giver is denied fulfilment of their act.

Because an act may be disabled or enabled by others, it can carry a range of different possible meanings. In my own example of having a meal with friends, the provision of vegan food for a vegan does not automatically provide access to full social participation. In Barbara's example below, she shows how the practical elements of her vegan parenting are enabled through the provision of readily available products, but her integration with the norm is not:

> *It's, like, these, these popular nappies, I think if, if their, the main selling point of them was, guys, we're vegan, people would be like, ugh. No, I don't, I honestly don't think people would, would buy it. Or they'd be, like... She was just assuming because you think vegan is [unclear], it must be fancy, or weird, weirdly sourced stuff. It's not, it's not normal, it's not natural. Whereas, it literally is natural (Barbara, p.7, line 344).*

Here we see how vegan and non-vegan worlds remain siloed due to what non-vegans will 'permit' as part of their world. As Barbara shows, the removal of the vegan label on the nappies shifts the meaning of a product, even though it would have been exactly the same product had it been labelled as vegan. The concealment of the vegan status of the nappy allows Barbara entry to the non-vegan world, but her vegan identity is diminished in doing so.

This idea of an event or object's meaning being dependent on those accessing it is particularly relevant to food. The consumption of certain animals within social groups can generate solidarity (Kaplan, 2020). Other animals may be forbidden within a group or seen by outsiders as immoral to eat, such as the case of the consumption of dogs in South Korea being viewed differently by people in the West (Podberscek, 2009). That is, the meaning of

certain animals as food and others as pets, often referred to as speciesism (Ryder, 2011). The below example from Denise demonstrates the frustration and divide she feels when encountering juxtaposed attitudes towards animals for taxidermy, and animals for meat:

> *She was just really brash, and she was just really vocal about how taxidermy*
> *is horrific. And I was like, I think taxidermy is pretty cool. I think it's an art. I*
> *think like if, if you want to get your pet stuffed, it's a bit weird, but crack on.*
> *And she was just so angry about taxidermy. She was like, it's disgusting, it's*
> *an animal. I wanted to go, you realise you, you ingest dead animals. Like, is*
> *that not weird? Like, do you not think that's weird? (Denise, p.13, Line 607)*

Denise chooses not to 'out' herself by explaining what she is thinking and would like to say, and allows her self-concept to become somewhat diminished. In spite of this she remains unable to fully integrate because she has been forced to conceal her authentic self. However, despite the other woman's position of 'majority power' in the exchange, the display of hypocrisy that Denise perceives validates her own sense of righteousness.

The power that is held in relationships represents a significant part of our sociality, and was clearly present across the narratives of the women. Ashworth (2016) gives a clear example of how an individual could exercise power, drawing again on gift giving to demonstrate this. He suggests that the experience of gift giving (or receiving) is altered if the intention of the gift is to influence the outcome of another event, rather than to demonstrate affection in that moment. It is clear to see in an example like this how power may be held by each individual before the gift giving, and how this may change after the exchange depending on the outcome.

Power dynamics already underpin interactions between vegans and non-vegans. Vegans start on the backfoot in terms of their susceptibility to being 'in the wrong', or having attempts made to alter or express contempt for their deviant way of life. Commonplace within the experiences of the women were concealed attacks on veganism that were veiled as concerns for the health status of their children. First-hand experience, and fear of encountering this in the future, led the women to rigorously plan the diets of their children by way of a defence, reinforcing their position as vulnerable to attack. For example, in the first empirical chapter the women discussed how unpreventable childhood illnesses could lead to the criticism of vegan parenting. Camilla gave an example of veganism being blamed for a serious stomach bug her daughter had, at a time she had not even begun eating solid food. Had Camilla not been vegan, then this dynamic would have been very different; perhaps she

would have been responded to in a way that made her feel part of a network support, rather than ascribed blame for her choices and left on the outside.

In the example below from Margot, a similar power dynamic comes from within her household:

> *He [Margot's partner] feels that [her son] for some reason has stopped growing, which he hasn't. And that's why he thinks that he's not getting enough protein which again, he he is, but we have, you know, talked about it and incorporated that extra bit of protein. So he's happy with his diet (Margot, p.6, line 228).*

Margot's partner has directed anxieties around their son's growth towards his vegan diet. The meaning of the situation shifts from concern around their son's growth – which could be for many different reasons – to an attempt to exercise greater control over his diet. Like Margot, Abigail's partner is not vegan and at times has not wholly supported the lifestyle for their children. In the below extract we see clearly how power may fluctuate between Abigail and her husband, and how she attempts to steer the shared practices within the household:

> *I need to educate my children, my husband needs to learn more and become more confident with it. And gradually, gradually, gradually, hopefully not in the too distant future, we will be a fully vegan family. So I guess I just see it as a journey that my role in that is to guide them and help them in their decisions, but not be too pushy or judgmental while they're figuring out (Abigail, p.7, line 309).*

Abigail has little control over her husband's decision to be vegan. She demonstrates a sense of powerlessness in hoping that they will eventually be a fully vegan family, seemingly clear that she is unable to dictate this. However, she clearly recognises her ability to influence, and rather like the gift giver attempting to manipulate the recipient, she identifies covert means to cement a sustainable vegan family. In line with the theme of this chapter, her reference to being a fully vegan family is also interesting; it is as if the shared experience of veganism is necessary for them to be a complete unit, but until that point there is a lack of meaningful integration.

When attempting to understand experience it is important to recognise that the presence of power relations may not be linear or mutual. Our relationships may be impacted by the roles

individuals perform in a given event, but these can fluctuate. The below extract from Camilla exemplifies how our sociality can go 'full circle':

> *Yeah, so it's desperately frustrating, and also a little bit shameful... And so yeah, in that it feels like it feels it feels slightly shameful. Then this whole process of having to make this decision of not having, not having not raising our daughter fully vegan, yeah, it's, it is shameful. And I feel like I let people down a bit actually, because people know me as a vegan person, and they're very interested (Camilla, p.3, line 111).*

Camilla commits to the idea that for full social participation her daughter must share the same experiences with her peers – in this case, food. Camilla accepts her position and surrenders her daughter's veganism to enable full access to the non-vegan majority. In doing so, the presence of the non-vegan 'other' (which now includes her daughter), cause her to feel shame for her abandonment of veganism. It is as if the non-vegans that she was required to submit to in order to gain access to their world, now judge her for doing so.

The way in which experiences can be made sense of in such different ways reinforces the idea that key features of a phenomenon may exist, but entirely essential meaning of an event is not possible. After all, 'vegan' really only has meaning in the context of non-veganism. In this way we can see how the presence and practices of others are integral to experience, whether that be for validation of the self, the gatekeeping of social participation, and so on. One thing that is central to all of the women's experiences of social participation, is food. Whether it is involved in the projects underlying a mealtime, the bodily associations with eating, the social norms associated with certain foods, food is crucial to the women's sense of belonging in a non-vegan world.

The specific parenting aspect of the vegan experience was absent in elements of the women's accounts. From my literature review I had already found that experiential literature on parenting as a vegan was lacking, so it was my intention for all empirical chapters to focus more on child-rearing. I anticipated that by re-examining the data for this chapter, more attention could be paid to vegan parenting. However, in doing so it became apparent how the vegan context clouded the women's accounts of child-rearing. That is, when using the fractions as a tool to get to the heart of their sense-making, it became clear how much of this was impacted by the strain of being vegan in a non-vegan world.

Findings from the previous chapter demonstrated how some of the women identified more strongly with veganism that others, but none of them explicitly took part in activism. An 'activist' vegan parent, or one who was part of a wider community of vegans, may be familiar with freely sharing their beliefs. However, all of the women discussed having relatively limited in-person connections with other vegans. This suggests that where their networks of other parents could provide an outlet for discussing parenting-related experiences, these interviews may have represented a novel forum for them to consider their more personal vegan experiences. This could therefore be a reason why many of their individual experiences as vegans – rather than vegan *parents* – were at the forefront of their narratives.

Ashworth (2016) suggests that "in phenomenological psychological research, then, we may address a particular experience in terms of its meaning for the self. How does the lifeworld speak to us of social identity, our sense of agency, and a person's feeling of their own presence and voice in the situation?" (p.25). With this in mind, it felt necessary that the non-vegan context that infiltrated all aspects of the women's narratives, be given greater attention. It is for this reason that in my next and final empirical chapter I will be directly addressing the impact of the non-vegan world through how the women respond to social constructions of vegan parents.

CHAPTER SEVEN – EXPLORING THE DISCURSIVE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH VEGAN PARENTING IS EXPERIENCED

"They've been brought up with, you know, thinking that farming is normal, and meat eating is the norm and all these dominant narratives"

<u>A new perspective</u>

So far, the experiences of the women have been contextualised according to a non-vegan world. However, vegan parenting also takes place in the wider context of current politics and 'culture wars'. A term arising from conflicts between traditional and liberal groups, more recently 'culture wars' are used to describe opposing belief systems that result in a disruption of political order. Debates that may have originally been quite benign, become loaded and existential in nature, with opposing sides of the cultural concern fighting for the future course of the nation (Hunter, 1991).

It has been argued that we live in a 'post truth' era whereby our knowledge is filtered according to personal belief, and the idea of truth becomes 'eclipsed' and made 'irrelevant' (McIntyre, 2018). This means that the premise of culture wars can become skewed; the 'fight' becomes clouded by other political or personal ideologies and a desire to be defiant against change, and a forum opens within which unfounded opinions are seen to be rational and defensible (Hunter, 1991). This blurring of purpose and meaning is often perpetuated by the mass media, who along with other social systems prey on the fears of individuals (Donohue et al., 1973). Further, despite the changing modes of media consumption, we remain in an information saturated age.

Throughout the course of this PhD, I have become aware of negative discourses surrounding vegan parents. As was touched on in Chapter two, vegan parents are constructed by the media as other, deviant, dangerous, and positioned in direct opposition to non-veganism which is privileged as the status quo. When speaking to the women it became clear that these messages represented an inherent part of their experience and how they felt about themselves. However, the reasons for these power relations and how they operate needed further examination, and in particular how they are made possible by the media.

In this chapter I use the constructions of vegan parents identified in Chapter two, and re-examine my original findings using the principles of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to demonstrate how the women engage with them. I then use Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the impact of these on how the women feel about themselves and how they make sense of the world around them. I searched for similar studies that applied dual-focus methododologies, and it became clear how underused and underdeveloped this approach is. I therefore provide a valuable methodological and substantive contribution.

A dual-focus approach

I maintain that IPA has been the most appropriate starting point in addressing the new and relatively unexplored phenomenon of vegan parenting. I also acknowledge IPA's position on language, which is considered to be an important tool in understanding experience, but does not exclusively shape an individual's worldview (Willig, 2007). The use of discourse is therefore transcended by individuals; individuals do not consume the words that are used without filter, they are made sense of and responded to in the wider context of experience and interactions with others. In this way, language is not determinative; it gives meaning to experience rather than wholly constructing it (Ashworth, 2016).

However, insufficient recognition of the role of language has been raised as part of the critique of IPA (Tuffour, 2017). Whilst I suggest that language is not the only way in which knowledge and meaning can be generated, I do believe that experience involves an element of construction. I therefore intend to demonstrate the way in which language can be explored further when making sense of the women's worlds. That is, employing an 'and-and' rather than an 'either-or' approach (Colahan et al., 2012).

Discursive approaches are concerned with how discourse may be used to achieve a particular 'personal, social or political project' (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007), with language constructing objects rather than merely representing them. According to Willig (2015), in traditional discourse analysis language is seen as a social performance, and the attitudes and opinions expressed by individuals play a part in the construction of reality and achievement of social objectives. As has been discussed, discourse analysis shares some foundations with IPA; it is not assumed that there is an objective perception of realty, and concern with social context means that more than one interpretation of an event is possible. The difference is that where social and historical context are seen to influence meaning in IPA (Smith et al., 2022), in discourse analysis meaning is constructed through language itself (Willig, 2015).

With both 'object' and 'subject' realities formed by discourses, FDA takes a more critical view of language, focusing on its ability to generate constructions and how these are circulated and maintained more widely, beyond interpersonal objectives (Parker, 2014; Willig, 2015). In this sense, FDA is a social approach concerned with how knowledge can be collectively generated through language, with meanings also arising from social interactions and observations of the practices of others (Dreyfus et al., 1983; Foucault, 1982, 1998; Foucault & Rainbow, 1997).

According to Foucault (1998), power plays a significant part in how discourses are consumed and proliferated. When particular discourses dominate narrative spaces they can become static, consolidating what is 'known', becoming increasingly unlikely to be challenged (Foucault & Rainbow, 1997; Veyne & Lloyd, 2010). This makes FDA a particularly important device when disparities between groups may be a point of interest (such as vegans and non-vegans), and there is a requirement to interrogate dominant discourses (Burr, 2003).

Where discourses around vegan parenting only make available ways of being 'the other', it would be important to consider the additional impact of this on their sense of self and worldview (Gergen, 2009; Guilfoyle, 2016; Parker, 1994; Torronen, 2001). This is not to say that the idiographic focus of IPA is insufficient, more that the addition of a perspective that also acknowledges the influence of discursive constructs offers a valuable alternative view (Willig, 2011). In this way, attending to both experiential and discursive approaches when attempting to understand vegan parenting is particularly beneficial; the complementary methods allow for the identification of discursive constructions within the women's narratives, as well as to examine how experience is influenced as a result.

The media discourses presented in my literature review put this into perspective. According to Mills (2004) the density of messages, the privileging or omission of certain realities, and by whom discourses are presented, play a part in constructing what is important or true. The volume of polemic articles returned from my search, which at best positioned vegan parents as the 'other', may not only represent and reinforce widely held views, but also the limited options for ways in which vegan parents can identify and belong in a non-vegan world. However, the Foucauldian stance on individuals as lacking agency (Burr, 2003) ignores the varying ways in which discourses may be consumed and interpreted. I therefore wanted to revisit the women's accounts using elements of both FDA and IPA. In doing so, I could cater to the existence of structures as well as the women's individual agency when interpreting their world.

The work of Larkin et al. (2018) is useful in advocating for the expansion of traditional 'one-dimensional' IPA studies. They demonstrate the possibility of using multiple perspectives whilst still retaining the idiographic benefits of IPA, in order the extend the reach of the research. I found a limited number of studies that specifically employed FDA in conjunction with IPA in a complementary way (for example, Black & Riley, 2018; Colahan et al., 2012; Cosgrove, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Willig, 2011). Whilst I did not originally plan to, or conduct my data collection according to a dual-focus approach, I decided to revisit the original data with FDA in mind.

In order to be concordant with the preceding chapters, the primary focus of the FDA work in this chapter will rest on the subjectivities derived from my original IPA analysis. By taking my original findings, rather than the raw data, I am not attempting a traditional FDA to examine the production of knowledge for the women at a macro level. Instead, I am foregrounding their subjective experiences as a focal point for applying an FDA-style lens, in an attempt to offer another entry point to the lives of the women.

The discursive context

> *There is probably no other discursive practice, besides everyday*
> *conversation, that is engaged in so frequently and by so many people as*
> *news in the press and on the television (van Dijk, 1991, p.110).*

I will therefore take the constructions from the media messages identified in my literature review and examine their presence in the narratives of the women. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the ubiquitous nature of dominant discourses impact the women's discursive context, as a foundation for understanding how they make sense of their world and themselves. As a preliminary step to ensure this would work, I considered how striking I had found the repetition of a particular observation across the interviews. According to many of the women, a common narrative exists whereby vegans are assumed to freely share their status without invitation. This is demonstrated below by Barbara, Denise and Jill:

> *People saying, like, how do you know someone's a vegan? Like, they'll tell*
> *you (Barbara, p.3, line 73).*

> *Like, how do you know someone's vegan? Don't worry, they'll tell you*
> *(Denise, p.6, line 293).*

> *Like, you know, how would you know if someone's vegan? They'll tell you (Jill, p.20, line 923).*

I was curious to know how this had been constructed for the women and so conducted a Google search, "How do you know someone is vegan?", which returned over 48,000 results with similar themes. The first result was from an open platform website intended for contributors from a range of backgrounds, and was an article titled 'How can you tell if someone is vegan? Don't worry, They'll Tell you.' I had also noticed that even before hitting 'search' on Google, suggestions came up for additional search terms such as 'joke' or 'meme', further trivialising the identity of vegans and their ability to belong. It was clear that pejorative discourses about veganism had extensive reach and were circulated widely, including to the vegan parents who took part in my study.

Table 4 below shows the original themes and subthemes presented in my literature review. Table 5 shows the discursive constructions that I identified within the original themes, and which I will be examining within the women's narratives in this chapter.

Table 4. Themes and subthemes for the media articles relating to vegan parenting

Diet and health	Lifestyle and belief system
Vegan parents as deviant	Vegan parents as a nuisance
A warning about raising vegan children	Experiencing vegan parenting
Support for vegan parents	Relationships as a vegan parent

Table 5. Original themes and discursive constructions within media articles relating to vegan parenting

Diet and health	Lifestyle and belief system
Vegan parents as deviant	Vegan parents as a nuisance

I selected these two constructions as they create a subject position for vegan parents as well as a position for the non-vegan majority. My aim was to demonstrate the presence of each in the women's experience. For each, I descriptively present how the women engage with the specific construction of vegan parenting, including its impact on their actions and the practices of others. I then examine the experiential impact of the construction, exploring how it may have shaped the women's sense of self and view of the world around them.

<u>Engaging with the construction: vegan parents as a nuisance</u>

When a vegan parent's difference was not being constructed as dangerous or ignorant, it was presented as an impingement on the rights of others to enjoy a non-vegan life. Vegans were characterised as difficult and disdainful of non-veganism, a threat to the everyday practices and enjoyment of others, or a burden that had to be accommodated in a space that they did not belong. Headlines identified within my literature review reported instances of outrage at nursery school menus being changed to cater to vegans, and attempts by vegans to end longstanding school projects involving animals.

Abigail describes a much less forceful approach to requests she makes of her daughter's school:

> *But again, I've written vegan on the form, we haven't actually had many*
> *interactions with them yet, but I'm hoping it'll be the same – on their*
> *prospectus they did say things like, you know, if you've got dietary*
> *requirements that like they'll provide, you know, like vegan marshmallows, or*
> *you know, they do sound like there'll be fine. And but of course, there is that*
> *bit of an-an-anxiety. When you're, you are liaising with a new organization,*
> *you don't know how they're going to respond and that (Abigail, p.15, line 723).*

In this extract Abigail refers to a new school that she has signed her daughter up to attend. She expresses her anxiety about how they will respond to her vegan needs, having internalised the narrative that requests for a vegan alternative are burdensome. Due to her daughter's vegan status she has no choice but to disclose alternative requirements, and despite these being on offer already she cannot move away from the dominant discourses surrounding vegan parents as difficult. In this way, and related to the theme of shared experience in the previous chapter, vegan parents not only feel like a minority but they are also treated as such. It is not that their needs are unmet, but that their needs require allowances or deviations from the norm. This highlights their otherness and can lead to feelings of discomfort about burdening others by including them.

Denise internalised constructions of vegan parents as an invasion of the non-vegan norm. Like Abigail, she felt uncomfortable about her role in this and actively attempts to avoid any sense of inconvenience to non-vegans as a result of her lifestyle choices:

But I'm, I'm [unclear] other people of making the other people feel guilty,
which is not what I want to do. I don't want to make other people feel guilty.
Like, oh, I'm in the presence of a vegan so I'm a shit person because I eat
meat. I don't ever want anyone to feel like that. So, I do find it really awkward
to, like, announce myself as vegan (Denise, p.7, line 309).

Denise's thoughts about her own actions demonstrate how power can operate, with non-veganism positioned as a convention that should not be disrupted by her presence. It is as if she is speaking to the construction of vegan parents as infringing on the comfort of non-vegans, and she pleads that it is not her intention. The contentment of vegans and non-vegans appear mutually exclusive in the presence of one another, and so in her subordinate position her only option is to avoid disclosure.

Where Denise appeared culpable for resistance to veganism, Jill observes how this resistance manifests in a non-vegan childminder who rejects responsibility or desire to cater to non-vegans:

I interviewed a couple of childminders and one of them was like, oh, yeah,
you know, we've got the vegan, kinda, options. And then it wasn't. So, I was
like, okay. And then there was another one who was like, you're gonna have
to sort all that out, because I might give him the wrong thing. And was very,
kind of, like, dismissive of it (Jill, p.17, line 785).

She describes indifference to and dismissal of her request for vegan options for her children. This cements the position of non-veganism as dominant, and that non-vegans are at liberty to deny the demands of vegans. In Jill's example it is as if the childminder she interviewed had internalised the construction of vegan parents as burdensome, feeling justified that her request was over and above what they were willing to do. This reinforces the position of vegan parents and sends a strong message to Jill that she should not expect her children's needs to be met by non-vegans.

In Jill's case she made a request and then experienced the dismissal of her needs. Florence anticipates in advance that it will not be possible for her daughter's veganism to be accommodated. She suggests the likelihood that she will be required to prepare a vegan lunch for her daughter to take with her to any non-vegan day care or schools she attends:

I was, kind of like, well if they can't… If they turned round and said, like, we can't cater on that it's okay 'cos I'll just pack her lunch or I'll cook her food and you can put it on her plate and she won't know that it hasn't come… Look, you know, when she started going to the childminder she kept saying oh [childminder] gave me this for lunch today, and I'm like, oh actually mummy made it [laughs] (Florence, p.14, line 686).

Florence feeds into the idea that vegans asking non-vegans for their needs to be met is unreasonable, and that a rejection of vegan requests is just. Non-veganism is positioned as the accepted convention and so any deviation from this is an imposition and should not expect to be accommodated. This message is felt heavily by Kylie too, who internalises the narrative and avoids even asking the question:

And I always say I have a freezer full of cake. So don't worry, we'll just bring a slice of cake for him. And do you mind just swapping it in the party bag and, and I just I just talk about it and I try and put all of the effort on my shoulders. So I say, look, we're a bit different because we're vegan. It doesn't need to make any work for you (Kylie, p.9, line 435).

Kylie explicitly labels her difference and identifies her lifestyle choices as creating work for non-vegans, cementing the construction of vegan parents as an imposition before it has even been suggested. She appears to completely embody the discourse of vegans being difficult in her attempt to prevent non-vegans from viewing her in this way.

The above women demonstrate the ways in which their difference was seen to pose a challenge to the comfort of non-vegans, and internalised this narrative about themselves. Matilda picks up on the construction of vegan parents as determined to disrupt the status quo, unwilling to join in with activities unless on their own terms. Where the other mothers found work-arounds for the dietary requirements of their children, Matilda highlights the repercussions of disturbing convention:

And the school actually changed the menu on on a Monday, they were going to go for the meat free Monday thing, but they didn't advertise that they just changed the menu and sent it out to everybody. But the other families seemed to notice straight away, and they just went absolutely crazy. And it was all over social media. And they were saying how dare you take away the choice for my child to have meat (Matilda, p.11, line 462).

Matilda describes outcry from non-vegan parents about their rights. These rights surround changes to one meal for their children, which feels inconsequential but represents the much bigger issue of culture wars introduced at the beginning whereby the non-vegan parents become defiant against change without rational reason. This extract serves to highlight non-vegan parents asserting their majority interests as immutable, and their unwillingness to yield to the demands of vegans. Not only does this solidify a divide, but it also reinforces the construction of vegan parents as attempting to spoil the enjoyment of others.

The implications of the construction: vegan parents as a nuisance

The above experiences of the women highlight the existing narratives of vegan parents as an inconvenience or hindrance to the non-vegan majority, and largely surround the women's attempts to try and dispel these discourses through their own actions. The following extracts are intended to demonstrate how constructions of vegan parents as being an imposition to the majority were internalised by the women and impacted how they made sense of themselves and their world more generally.

A narrative thread relating to the women's reticence to occupy non-vegan spaces ran through all of their interviews. Feeling undeserving of having their needs met was also manifest in their accounts. As is shown in the below extract from Mia, feelings of veganism placing an unreasonable burden on non-vegans commonly resulted in a need to self-manage:

> *Um, yeah, definitely I think (.) it does. It affects relationships a lot. I don't like traveling with, with non- vegans because (.) you start feeling like a burden on them that the choice of restaurants that they go to are limited because it can't just be any restaurant it has to be one that has a vegan option (Mia, p.9, line 343).*

Mia demonstrates how she is unable to be her authentic self around non-vegans due to fear of being an inconvenience. She explicitly refers to being a burden, internalising the only position available to her (which is an expectation that she will give way to the non-vegan majority). As a result, she chooses to exclude herself from certain social situations which reinforces her feelings of not belonging and being unworthy of having her needs met. This not only compounds her sense of self as inferior, but also the construction of vegan parents as unwilling to join in with non-vegans. Except in this case, Mia is employing a sense of

altruism rather than treating the practices of the majority with contempt. Her unwillingness to disrupt the comfort of others suggests her awareness of how vegans are viewed as an inconvenience, and she attempts to protect the identity of the movement in avoiding doing this.

Kylie faces a similar predicament where she must choose between confirming her identity as a vegan parent or fortifying her feelings of unworthiness:

> *Sometimes I think to myself now it's been seven, almost seven years of it. I think God, you know, can I just tell them can you buy this cup- now that ASDA sell these cupcakes, you know, when they buy their football cake, they could actually just add this, but I would feel uncomfortable. I'd feel like I do feel like it's on my shoulders like I'm doing the different thing. So I should provide the difficulty (Kylie, p.10, line 456).*

The temporal nature of Kylie shouldering the vegan burden demonstrates the gravity of her feelings. The implication is that in the past it was too much for her to expect another parent to prepare vegan alternatives. However, despite the ease with which a ready-made vegan alternative could be provided nowadays, Kylie still feels unable to make a special request for her son. She expresses feelings of exhaustion from this longstanding burden for 'almost seven years', yet she is still not able to bring herself to ask. The fact that she would need to ask also illustrates the insignificance of veganism to the majority, sending a message to her that she and her son are not cared or thought about as vegans.

Mia and Kylie expressed unwillingness to expose their needs in the presence of others. Ella describes a similar struggle where she attempts to balance having her needs met with feeling connected to others:

> *Also, for my baby shower, my friends gave me lanolin nipple cream. And again, only after the fact, only after I started using it, I only then realised it was an animal product. So, again, it, I kind of felt like well, I don't want to waste things either. So I bought something. I bought something, I should probably use it because I also don't like waste. So it just felt like another sort of chipping away at my sort of vegan ideals (Ella, p.4, line 156).*

Ella's desire not to let her veganism disrupt social processes like gift giving has a detrimental impact on her self-image. However, for her this takes place in personal spaces rather than in

the immediate presence of others. She has internalised the construction of vegan parents as demanding to the extent that she feels compelled to feel grateful for something that contravenes her vegan principles. This highlights how her beliefs have not been considered in the world of non-vegan mothers who would be able to make use of the gifts. So, she ends up using them, making sense of this as avoiding waste, but feeling like her vegan ideals are being diminished. Ella is then trapped in a situation where her sense of self is at risk if she continues not to speak up, but if she rejects non-vegan gifts then she bolsters the construction of vegan parents that already exists.

There is a similar feeling for Abigail regarding her inhibition to advocate for herself:

> *I think as well going forward, where veganism is becoming more mainstream,*
> *it should get easier. And I kind of feel as well that because I'm not so like, in*
> *your face with it, um, I feel like I'm quite an easy, easy to get on with person.*
> *I'm quite understanding. I'm not preachy or anything (Abigail, p.15, line 737).*

Abigail equates being easy to get along with, with a more positive experience as a vegan parent. This demonstrates her struggle to occupy non-vegan spaces as an equal, and her need to self-manage. It also points to her lack of control as she has to wait until veganism becomes more mainstream before any changes to her experience can take place; meanwhile she attempts to make life as comfortable as possible for those who exercise the most power in her world. Abigail distances herself from the 'preachy' vegans, who embody more of the outspoken and forthright qualities that underline the construction of nuisance vegan parents. She attempts to impact the discursive space by being unobtrusive, but in doing so she risks her authenticity and losing her sense of self like Mia, Kylie and Ella described.

Matilda attempted to make more sense of her position. She acknowledges the reasons for her self-management with non-vegans; the alternative would be to lose friends or be alienated, which clearly demarcates her position in non-vegan spaces. The following two extracts from her interview demonstrate her engagement with her position and how she then responds to it:

> *We don't sort of, we're not too outspoken about what we think. So we haven't*
> *sort of alienated ourselves from anyone. But I suppose maybe we are a bit*
> *nervous of saying what we think because we don't want to lose friends*
> *(Matilda, p.13, line 519).*

Matilda suggests that as a vegan parent, a sort of veneer is required in order to retain friendships. This speaks to the narratives around vegan parenting being challenging, in that she assumes her true feelings would present intolerable criticism to her (non-vegan) friends. Matilda fears the consequences of being true to herself in a world she does not belong, but is also indignant about her social positioning:

> *They get given their their free milk at school, which really bothers me*
> *Because obviously, they don't get a free milk alternative for my children. So,*
> *one time, I talked to the teacher, and she agreed for him to take in some oat*
> *milk like a big carton a bit. And he shared it with the class and they tried the*
> *oat milk. And she took a photo and sent it to me. And I've got that picture on*
> *my desk at work. And it's because if I ever feel sad or stressed, I just look at*
> *it. And I think like that's him like doing his little bit to try and change the world*
> *(Matilda, p.5, line 202).*

Here we see that despite her reticence to encroach on non-vegan spaces, Matilda remains righteous. By recognising the injustice of her son not being provided for, she also identifies their position as forgotten or ignored in a non-vegan space, within which 'obviously' there is no option for her son. She sensitively manages her identity as a vegan parent by requesting that her son be permitted to have a vegan milk alternative, but she provides this herself to maintain her position as acquiescent. In sending the photo to Matilda, the teacher makes a conspicuous display of her son's difference whilst accepting him into the space, and Matilda feels hopeful.

In the final extract from Margot, she suggests that her son's vegan needs are not taken seriously enough. Whilst the other women have demonstrated that their veganism is not attended to without the need to ask, they have not directly expressed that it should be:

> *I need people to kind of take it seriously because it's not just, it's lifestyle.*
> *Like, it's not it's not just like a, like a phase. It's you know, this is how we live*
> *like it's just it's comparable, in my opinion to you know, not eating pork if*
> *you're Muslim, you know, it's the same (Margot, p.5, line 329).*

Margot feels strongly about the validity of veganism as a choice, so much so that she views it as akin to religion. It is clear that her experience of the discursive space available to vegan parents does not contain sufficient care or attention. She rejects the idea that her choices

are unreasonable, and fights for her right in a space that she sees as willing to accommodate divergent dietary practices on different grounds. In doing so she is also fighting against dominant constructions of vegan parents and attempting to legitimate their right to exist authentically and equally in non-vegan spaces.

Engaging with the construction: vegan parents as deviant

Media discourses presented in Chapter two constructed vegan parenting as abnormal, with individuals characterised as radical and willing to risk the wellbeing of their children. The headlines about vegan children being malnourished, unhealthy and neglected appeared to offer limited options for a vegan parent identity; they could either be seen as criminal in causing deliberate harm, or stupid for unknowingly doing so. Where the previous construct captured the complexity of power dynamics through fluctuating identity management, in this construct the vegan movement was positioned as a direct attack on the status quo. I will demonstrate below how this is internalised more heavily by the women as a dominant discourse that influences all of their social interactions.

In Camilla's interview she explicitly identifies how vegan parenting is positioned as 'other', having meaning only in comparison to what has been constructed as normal (non-veganism):

> I still have to take a beat and think about that, sort of, not contravening, but just not being, like the veganism binaries. You know, I've just been told that there's one option or another, that vegan's radical and unusual. And it's like, well, no, not really, there's that's just what I've been told. But it doesn't mean it's a truth (Camilla, p.16, line 671).

She engages with the existence of the discourse and has to actively attempt to subvert it. Where she feels entrenched in a position of being different, she struggles to engage with the possibility that veganism could be one of many options, as opposed to an alternative to the norm. By acknowledging the challenge she faces in resisting vegan parenting being seen as deviant, she reinforces the existence of the construction whilst also highlighting the ease with which someone else may internalise the discourse without question.

Abigail also recognises the dichotomised way in which veganism is positioned as abnormal against non-veganism, to the extent that non-vegans could not comprehend that vegan parenting is a viable option:

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> *They've been brought up with, you know, thinking that farming is normal, and meat eating is the norm and all these dominant narratives that I kind of feel that they wouldn't understand, and that they might be a bit more judgmental (Abigail, p.17, line 831).*

In this example she is referring to an interaction with a couple who she has only just met, and to whom she does not want to divulge that she and her children are vegan. She identifies the construction of vegan parenting as deviant by expecting their views to be rooted in dominant discourses about meat eating. Not only does she assume that they may judge her, but also that they have not had access to any alternative information or narratives around veganism. In doing so she reinforces her own position of difference, and in doing something for which she could be judged. It is as if she has internalised the type of messaging seen in the media and accepted that it represents widely held beliefs, and so manages her expectations accordingly.

Where Camilla and Abigail engaged with feelings of otherness and a sense of being unusual or abnormal in a slightly passive way, in Barbara's interview she acknowledges and then rejects her prescribed identity and attacks the practices of non-vegans:

> *And then I saw, um, I can't remember exactly how it was worded, but people were saying, um, they think, like, vegans are extreme. Literally, you've killed a living thing, like, skinned it, eating it, and you think someone eating a plant is extreme? Like, it's there's a very, very misconstrued of veganism (Barbara, p.12, line 570).*

Barbara identifies hypocrisy in the practices of non-vegans, demonstrating the strength of dominant discourses in creating a 'truth' that killing animals for food is normal and that to reject the practice is abnormal. The power that discourses can hold becomes particularly apparent here if we consider that in a different context Barbara may not be trapped in her position as extreme. Non-veganism is protected and unquestioned, and a discursive space is maintained that has implications for Barbara's own world.

Kylie also recognises a more formidable element to the construction of veganism. Her experience suggests that it does not just identify her as different, but that this difference may be used to attack her:

She basically went off on one. And obviously it was trying to be like, you dirty vegans bringing disease into... And just all of the cliches and stigma and I'm just not, not gonna rise to it (Kylie, p.15, line 709).

Kylie is describing an experience at her son's school where she felt attacked when he fell ill and was sent home. In fact, nothing was explicitly said about veganism during the interaction, but Kylie identifies anti-veganism in the behaviour of the other parent. She sees this as the only reason she could be under attack and reinforces her identity as deviant. Her reference to 'all of the cliches and stigma' shows an awareness of negative discourses around veganism, and the interaction serves to feed existing narratives around the health status of vegan children and the failure of vegan parents to keep their children safe.

Another extract from Abigail's interview continues this thread:

When it's a kid it's almost like they wanna frame you as (2) I mean, they're not being mean and framing you as this evil person but it's like this, these implicit undertones of like, what you're doing is wrong (Abigail, p.19, line 938).

Like Kylie, Abigail acknowledges the way in which vegan parents are assumed to be irresponsible, prioritising the lifestyle over the wellbeing of their children. It is as if she is responding to the messaging present in the media; it is internalised by her and she assumes by others too. Similarly to Kylie, nothing had been explicitly said to Abigail about her vegan parenting, but she was interpreting encounters as being charged with judgment and a sense that she is misguided. It is also clear to see the normalisation of vegan parents being framed as wrong and it being acceptable to pass comment on this.

The women also shared how constructions of vegan parenting felt so universally accepted that they had infiltrated institutions that were thought to be informed by an impartial evidence base. Mia and Jill discussed how some medical professionals approached their veganism with fear and suspicion:

So that immediately made her think that you know, her weight needs to be tracked just because I'm vegan, that I'm doing this to her because, or she's smaller because I'm vegan. Although she didn't make any note of it or, or anything. I mean, she did note down that I said I'm vegan. I could see that concern because as soon as I said it, she said, 'yeah, she does look a bit smaller (Mia, p.15, line 615).

In this extract it clear to see how alive Mia is to perceptions of her identity, and how she is perceived as a vegan parent by the medical professional involved in the care of her daughter. Not only did Mia feel that her daughter's weight was being monitored more closely because of her vegan status, but she comments that 'I'm doing this to her', as if she is causing deliberate harm to her daughter. The way in which vegan parents have been constructed as a risk to the welfare of their children has been internalised by both parties, and the impact of such constructs in affecting real life situations becomes clear.

Jill describes an interaction with a medical professional whose opinion appeared to be steeped in conjecture around veganism, rather than evidence:

> *I'm anaemic. Um, it's something that I've struggled with for quite some time. But I kept reminding them that I had had this since I was a teenager. I wasn't even a vegetarian as a teenager. So, me, my anaemia has nothing to do with me, you know, not eating red meat (Jill, p.6, line 263).*

In Jill's example, she refers to medical appointments during her pregnancy that she felt focused on her diet as a cause for any health concerns she experienced. Whilst this does not directly expose the ways in which vegan parents are constructed as deviant, it points to narratives that assume the women prioritise their lifestyle choice over health, characterising them as ignorant or uninformed.

The implications of the construction: vegan parents as deviant

Having presented some examples of how the women identified and engaged with constructions of vegan parenting as deviant, I will now look at the implications of these for the women. The below accounts are not intended to directly link to the specific experiences discussed above, but instead demonstrate how dominant discourses around veganism permeate the entirety of the women's experience. This appeared most prominently in several ways: impacting the women's identity and sense of belonging; destabilising their sense of self; fuelling a desire to thwart their subject position and impact discursive spaces. Of key significance is the way in which the women have all internalised dominant discourses around veganism, but respond to them in different ways.

Camilla describes an experience where she feels she is made an example of for being vegan, which highlights her sense of difference and lack of belonging with the majority:

And this one one one of the mums said, yeah, you know, well, we're really
keen, obviously, to kind of start introducing meat, because I just think he
really needs to develop his digestive system… then the other person who
was non vegan said, immediately brought it around to us saying, how are you
guys finding it? You know, you, you guys are alright with the baby uh the
babies, they're okay with their digestive systems. You haven't had any
problems like that? (Camilla, p.6, line 234)

In this example another mother who is non-vegan directs a question to Camilla regarding the health status of her child, the implication being that due to the lack of meat in her diet she must have health issues. Despite this not being done in a malicious way, Camilla's daughter is used as a benchmark against which non-vegans are doing things 'right', excluding her from having a meaningful place in the group. Camilla could attempt to prevent this narrative from being perpetuated by sharing her views that children do not need meat to develop a healthy digestive system, but in doing so her access to the space would decline further; the space belongs to the non-vegan majority, and her veganism is already at odds with this. Instead, the non-vegan mother is able to assert her position, questioning the deviant practices of Camilla and reminding her that she is an outsider.

Kylie also internalises constructs around vegan identities, but instead attempts to position herself closer to what is considered acceptable and distance herself from the 'most' deviant vegans:

I know some vegan parents who are that very holisticcy, anti vaccination, they
won't eat anything pro- pro- I don't know. Kind of earth loving mama type,
which is great. Nothing against it, but it's just not the kind of I'm much more of
a sciencey kind of vegan (Kylie, p.18, line 857).

In this example, she acknowledges the different 'types' of vegans that have been constructed, which is based on how far they deviate from the norm. In doing so she not only recognises the constructs that exist, but positions herself as closer to the non-vegan norm, allowing her greater access to a world that is hostile to veganism. This appears to be an internalisation of the types of media messages I presented, whereby vegan parents were positioned as extreme or a danger to their children; by associating herself with science (and an implied evidence base) she is appealing to the majority for legitimacy as a parent in their space. This reinforces the idea of subgroups rather than a community of individuals with a

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shared set of principles, opening up the possibility for segregation within the movement to further weaken their position as a whole.

Where Kylie's internalisation of constructs led her to attempt a greater sense of belonging, for Abigail, it led her to question how she could preserve her sense of self within the context of vegan parenting being seen as wrong:

> *So yeah, I try and shy away from conflict, I avoid any kind of situation where I think it might be an issue as much as I can. Um, and so yeah, I guess I do feel that others would perceive me in the negative way, but out of their ignorance, not because I truly believe that there is an issue here. I know, deep down I know very confidently that, you know, it's perfectly possible to raise a vegan family (Abigail, p.18, line 860).*

In this extract we can see how messages about vegan parents being at odds with the majority have been internalised by Abigail. Her identity as a vegan parent has been solidified in her mind; she assumes she will be perceived negatively, and there appear to be no other options for her to adopt a different position. She responds bravely to this and maintains confidence in her own beliefs. However, her sense of belonging is impacted as she does not hold the same confidence in her right to exist authentically in spaces with non-vegans. Instead she is trapped, either by concealing who she is or avoiding spaces that will not accept who she is.

Mia, who had earlier identified a doctor's suspicion of her veganism, does not share the same confidence in her position as Abigail:

> *Anything with nuts, anything with seeds. And you know, she would gravitate towards fruits and vegetables and everything, but I was constantly trying to force her to eat those high calorie things (2) it, I, it did drive me crazy for some time and I think probably when she was about 13 or 14 months, it occurred to me that she's just growing normally, and I don't have to worry (Mia, p.15, line 629).*

Mia had previously acknowledged the doctor's affinity with the construction of vegan parenting as harmful, and now demonstrates the strength of that construct on her sense of self. She bows to the suggestion that her daughter is at risk of not growing properly due to her veganism, and 'drives herself crazy' trying to prove veganism as a legitimate choice for

infants. As a result of the narrative surrounding her capabilities as a vegan parent, she temporarily loses herself. Deprived of her own instincts she submits to her constructed identity as a harmful parent, before managing to regain ownership of her experience independently of the non-vegan norm.

The women's experiences all point to their struggles against being positioned as deviant parents and how they challenge this or attempt to fit in. For some women this impacted how far they were willing to interact with non-vegan spaces, and for others their sense of self was impacted to the extent that they questioned their approach to child-rearing altogether. In Daisy's case, she engages with her position and almost feels resigned to her lack of available options:

> *I mean it's much the same as having to give them Calpol and vaccines, right? Because the vaccines are not vegan, they absolutely do get tested on animals. It's not something that I (2) obviously there needs to be alternative methods of doing these things and they need to find better ways. But for the moment, that's all we have access to you know, so it is just one of those things (Daisy, p.5, line 196).*

Here, Daisy acknowledges that medicines for children have been designed with non-vegans in mind, and recognises that her beliefs are not important to the majority. She refers to 'we' as vegans, reinforcing the divide between non-vegans and vegans. Because non-veganism represents the majority in this divide, her choices for an alternative become more limited; for instance, she believes her only viable option is to accept non-vegan medication for her daughter. To reject non-vegan medicines would reinforce her deviance and play into the construction of vegan parents. This makes her feel quite trapped, but she accepts the options she has available to her and makes a choice.

Denise also struggles with the nuance of choice. On the one hand she feels confident in her beliefs about veganism being a legitimate decision for her daughter, but also recognises the implications of this in a non-vegan world:

> *It's like, oh, you're vegan, okay, oh, your daughters vegan, oh. It's definitely like a… That seems like a, a big decision to make for your child. But for me, I feel like it has equal weight to it as choosing for your child to eat meat. It's, they're equally heavy decisions of, where one's just normalised, but the other*

isn't. I feel like, either way, you're making a decision for your child, but we do that every day (Denise, p.8, line 355).

Denise expresses frustration as she believes that veganism should be a viable choice for her daughter. At the same time, she is recognising non-veganism as so normative and entrenched in day-to-day practices that it is not even considered a choice for children. That is to say that veganism is a choice to deviate from the norm, whereas non-veganism is a process of conforming to what is right. Because the parameters of what is normal and what is abnormal have been set, Denise is unable to access a place where her decisions are not constantly called into question unless she is willing to renege on her vegan beliefs. This firmly places her on the peripheries of what is normal and lets her know her place.

On the contrary, Jill feels more able to undermine attempts to position her as abnormal, and takes pride in her sense of difference:

I did have the whole, like, vegan ego complex. I was like, we're vegan. Well, I'd never say it, but I used to, like, we know we're better than everyone. And we're never gonna get sick (Jill, p.19, line 877).

Jill compares herself to the majority, however, she identifies this majority practices as inferior. Here, she is referencing a part of herself she refers to as a 'vegan ego' that assumes her children will be healthier than their non-vegan counterparts. Whilst she still engages with and helps to cement a 'them' and 'us' narrative, she feels empowered and does not accept her prescribed identity, or that deviancy has to equate to something negative.

Concern with subverting a position seen as inferior or shameful was also demonstrated by Margot. Like Jill, she engages with and reinforces the disunion of vegan and non-vegan parenthood, but expresses pride and attempts to prove her position:

Like straight away. Like I tell everyone like I'm vegan, I just go around telling everyone [laughs]. He's a really big boy as well for his age, like he's big and, you know, he's quite lean. He's not fat, but he's not skinny. He's like a good shape. So I'm just like, yeah, look, my big baby [laughs] (Margot, p.9, line 338).

This extract from Margot is interesting in the context of my original observation that vegans are assumed to overshare their lifestyle choices. However, having understood more about

the subject positions available to vegan parents and the lack of opportunities to resist or overturn these, the idea that vegans may be outspoken appears to take on a different meaning. Margot responds to the discursive space by drawing attention to the ways in which she can challenge common conceptions of unhealthy vegan children. However, in her attempt to subvert the narrative, her vegan parent identity as deviant is cemented by highlighting her difference during introductions.

Reflections

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate how revisiting my original data with a new methodological lens could enrich my initial findings. To do this, I re-examinined the women's narratives alongside the discursive constructions from my literature review. This is because I suspected that the media messages I had already presented may impact how vegan parenting was conceptualised by non-vegans, and in turn shape how the women felt about themselves and the world they lived in.

Two of the constructions presented in Chapter two were retrospectively selected, the interviews re-examined, and the women collectively demonstrated a recognition of both. They also demonstrated the phenomenological repercussions (Willig, 2011) of the constructs, suggesting the pervasive nature of dominant discourses and the power they hold in shaping and cementing realities.

In the context of aforementioned 'culture wars', vegan parents represent a symbol of change, and these discursive constructions serve to protect the norm by shining a negative light on vegan parenting to keep it peripheral. That is, if vegan parenting is reflected positively, then a real threat is posed to convention in the immediate and future generations. Throughout all three empirical chapters, the women's narratives demonstrated how power operated in this way; they expressed great frustrations at their limited choices and inability to move beyond their constructed identity.

Identifying the discursive context of my research at this point highlighted the benefit of attending to other methodological standpoints, and offered an alternative way to access the experiences of the women. It also emphasised the potential origin of my own assumptions and prompted me to consider how I engage with discursive practices myself. As has already been discussed in Chapters three and four, it was important for me to 'bridle' (Dahlberg et al., 2008) my own ideas about vegan parenting, as well as those that emerged from the discourses I was exposed to during the course of this study. I have made clear my

immersion in the same media messages that the women will have been exposed to, as well as to acknowledge the potential influence of sharing the 'same' non-vegan world as the women.

Being mindful of how my own biases may have come about will continue to be of great benefit to future phenomenological research, and leads me to the final chapters of this thesis in which I will discuss my findings and personal reflections over the course of this PhD.

CHAPTER EIGHT – DISCUSSION

Introduction

The findings from this thesis have provided new knowledge in an incredibly topical field, which are also transferable to the wider context of social change movements. The women represent a group of determined parents seeking an alternative life for their children in a world that objects to their approach to child-rearing. Their experiences highlight the need for power relations surrounding minority or marginalised groups to be questioned to enable an increased acceptance of difference.

I have discussed that a vegan diet can be achievable for individuals of all ages, and the environmental benefits of people adopting this way of life are beneficial to everyone. However, the challenges faced by the women made vegan parenting prohibitively difficult, despite these challenges only existing due to their social context. If appropriate leadership and social policies were put in place to ease such challenges, veganism may be a more favourable option for more people and a precedent could be set for greater social acceptance in other areas of society.

Through the previous chapters I have responded to the absence of vegan parenting research by providing valuable insights into how the phenomenon is experienced. In this chapter I examine my findings in light of existing literature. The original corpus examined the motivations of vegans and begun to construct vegan identities. Some data were provided on what it is like to be vegan and how the lifestyle is experienced with the involvement of others. I will consider how these findings apply to the women in my study and how they evolve when child-rearing becomes a part of the vegan experience, which is what sets my work apart from what is currently available. Reflections on the significance of power relations between vegans and non-vegans will provide further depth, and demonstrate the relevance of my findings more widely. To conclude, I discuss the benefit of the approach I took to my empirical work.

The experience of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world: reviewing my findings in the context of the literature

All of the experiential data collected was used as the basis for the three empirical chapters in this thesis. These data were presented in full in Chapter five, which represented the experiences of all twelve women as a whole. For this reason my findings below are

organised according to the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) identified in Chapter five and include experiential findings from chapters six and seven. Specific insights related to power relations are discussed later in this chapter.

Reciprocal rejection: the experience of being vegan in a non-vegan world

Veganism represents a deviation from normative meat eating practices (Preece, 2008) and so negative messaging around veganism helps to reinforce the position of meat eating as normal (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). Research also suggests that individuals will naturally gravitate towards the 'status quo' (Bryant et al., 2022) giving rise to the longstanding culture of meat-eating that the women's experiences were grounded in.

Most absent in the existing literature was a conceptualisation of this status quo, the non-vegan world. Independent studies pointed to a number of its components, such as meat-eating as normative, conflict, discomfort and derogation towards veganism, and the 'meat paradox' (Bryant et al., 2022; Buttny & Kinefuchi, 2020; Harris, 1998; Khara et al., 2021). However, there was a clear need for my research to assemble the experiences that illuminate the non-vegan world in its entirety.

In line with the concept of 'vegaphobia' (Cole & Morgan, 2011), the women found themselves at the centre of misunderstanding, rejection or ridicule. Negative views of vegans and bias towards such lifestyles exists when behaviours threaten social norms (Earle et al., 2019; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). This became heightened for the women with the introduction of children to the lifestyle, when they experienced an even greater sense of judgment.

Variables such as location, culture and religion play a role in how accepted veganism is (Leroy & Praet, 2015; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019), suggesting a reason for why veganism is more prevalent in some areas of the world. For example, over one fifth of all vegans in Britain live in London (Ipsos MORI, 2016). The women in my study lived in a range of locations, with some directly stating that the navigation of child-rearing was made easier due to where they lived. This was owed to the provision of vegan-friendly nurseries, acceptance and understanding of the lifestyle, and access to specific products. This variation in how veganism is accommodated and responded to reflects the nature of the non-vegan world as constructed, rather than being based on universally accepted beliefs.

All of the women transitioned to veganism as late teenagers or adults, triggering a renegotiation of their position within their social world. They had rejected majority practices through their veganism, but also sought a sense of belonging with the people and institutions that represented their past world. However, their 'success' in doing so was partly dictated by a non-vegan majority who were often hostile to veganism and their decision to include their children in the lifestyle. This meant that they were required to balance their commitment to their own beliefs with those of the world around them, which often resulted in veganism being deprioritized.

The view of vegan parents as outsiders became a self-fulfilling prophecy as resistance to their needs pushed them into more peripheral societal positions (Davis et al., 2019; de Boer et al., 2017). As a result, the women discussed their avoidance of disclosure about the vegan status of their family as a means to living more harmoniously and maintaining greater connection to the majority. Decision-making processes around disclosure are corroborated by the existing literature on vegan 'identity management', with many meat-reducing individuals deliberately avoiding vegetarian labels (Fox & Ward, 2008). That is, the negative stereotypes of veganism lead vegans to 'play down' their commitment, or conceal elements of their motivations for the lifestyle in order to foster positive social interactions with non-vegans (Buttny & Kinefuchi, 2020; Paxman, 2021; Sneijder & te Molder, 2009).

Whilst the women shied away from overtly sharing their beliefs, or attempted to overcompensate due to their position as a minority, they identified how the avoidance of disclosure was less possible when children were included in the lifestyle. Veganism represents a public declaration of identity (Greenebaum, 2012) and having children required the them to draw attention to their difference: to medical professionals during pregnancy, when approaching nurseries to identify whether a vegan option was available, navigating interactions with other children or parents, and so on. Some of the women became trapped in a cycle of identity management whereby their hopes for veganism to be accepted for them and their children became eclipsed by their desire to belong.

Not all of the women chose to mask the strength of their beliefs, as was seen from Kylie's account of a time that she had called for change to a planned school event. However, activism represents a direct attack on convention and highlights why outspoken vegans are resisted so strongly by the majority (Cherry, 2010; Kalte, 2021; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019), which was realised in the strength of reaction Kylie received. Turina (2018) suggests that the concept of the vegan activist predominates

non-vegan conceptions of vegans, making it more difficult for the women to advocate for themselves without conforming to popular stereotypes.

Whilst the element of choice involved with veganism distances it from historic systems of oppression, comparisons have been made with the discrimination faced by other minority groups (Earle & Hodson, 2017; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). The women were already aware of the stigma surrounding veganism (Bresnahan et al., 2016) before having children. However, the fact that their choices then led to unprovoked attacks on their parenting highlights how, controversial ways of life can be grounded in a hierarchy of oppression (Yuracko, 2023). Their experiences also represented more indirect societal systems of hierarchy whereby the needs of the non-vegan majority were privileged over theirs (Horta, 2018). This meant that they regularly faced obstacles for child-rearing that were not experienced by non-vegan parents.

Some of these obstacles related to systems of support for the lifestyle they had chosen. Conflicting evidence exists around the safety of raising vegan children, and in the absence of endorsement from medical professionals or examples of other parents doing the same, the women had to be resilient against feelings of doubt. For example, there is evidence to suggest that with sufficient planning it is possible to have a safe vegan pregnancy and raise healthy vegan babies (Carter et al., 1987; Mangels & Messina, 2001). Yet, it has also been found that vegan children experience slower growth rates than their non-vegan counterparts (Sanders, 1988, 1995). Several of the women described concerns from others about the size of their babies and they felt a need to justify why this may be the case, or feel proud that their baby was large despite being vegan. However, much of their apprehension surrounded the social consequences of veganism for their children.

Implicit within all of the women's narratives was their determination to continue with a more challenging way of life, and their resilience in managing to do so. Trent Grassian (2020) suggests that strong personal motivations are needed in order to maintain a vegan lifestyle, and individual differences can impact the ease with which the lifestyle is sustained. However, North, Klas, et al. (2021) suggest that a greater purpose is required in order to sustain any unconventional diet, which speaks to the women's inclusion of children in the lifestyle. For example, Daisy expressed her concern for the future of the planet her daughter would live on, meaning that her commitment to veganism for the entire family represented dedication to her daughter above veganism itself.

Theories around the commitment to movements such as veganism have also pointed to the concept of a 'community of practice' among vegans (Laakso et al., 2022). A community of practice is identified as a social learning process of sharing knowledge, support and camaraderie that comes from sharing the same set of interests (Miguel et al., 2022). From the women's accounts it appeared that their vegan homes emulated this idea, particularly for those who had supportive vegan partners. That is, the family home became a separate and protected space within which the family could grow together as vegans and where the lifestyle was shared with children without the distractions of the non-vegan world.

Within the home, mealtimes become a symbol of the identity of a family (Fiese et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2016), and all of the women suggested that they would not be prepared to provide meat for guests. This extended to how they imagined times when friends of their children may visit for meals in the future, for which their approaches varied. For example, for the women who raised concerns about their children's ability to socialise in a non-vegan world, they envisaged avoiding direct reference to the meal as vegan. Others were more willing to avoid their children sharing mealtimes with non-vegan children altogether. However, the sanctity of the home was disrupted by partners or wider family who brought meat into the house, and the women expressed concerns around the messaging that this would send to their children given the influence of environment on eating patterns (Patrick & Nicklas, 2005)

Feelings of despair lead to reflections about raising vegan children in a non-vegan world

Dietary change can have a significant impact on improving the health of individuals as well as the planet, with veganism representing one of the most significant ways to reduce environmental damage (Candy et al., 2019; Hallström et al., 2015; Poore & Nemecek, 2018; Rosi et al., 2017). This factored heavily in how the women made sense of their world when children were introduced. Emphasis was placed on the impact of their choices on the wellbeing of future generations, and they felt compelled to weigh up the cost-benefit of veganism for their children holistically. That is, the impact of veganism on the planet and its impact of their children's social wellbeing.

Feelings of anguish at the state of the world were teamed with frustration that so few people were committed to preventative measures such as meat reduction. Vegans are more engaged with morality and feel more remorse (Kaivalya & Maheshbabu, 2020), which suggests that there may be a 'type' of person who is predisposed to being vegan, and points to why the women felt so alone in their strength of feeling. This is mirrored by Pallotta (2008)

who shows that childhood experiences may influence a future transition to veganism. Whilst only a few of the women reflected on events in childhood as triggers for their veganism, they all agreed about the need for strong ethics in their children to support maintenance of veganism into adulthood.

Guilt around the choices that they made for their children featured heavily in the narratives of the women. Due to the stigma surrounding veganism that they experienced themselves (Bresnahan et al., 2016; Greenebaum, 2018; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019), they had concerns that their children's social wellbeing would be impacted by the decisions that had been made on their behalf. They also recognised that this same stigma may be a reason that their children decided to follow convention, as it is already known that social pressures play a part in why vegan diets may not last into adulthood (Chwialkowska, 2018).

The women anticipated giving their children free rein to choose non-veganism outside of the home, but deep down hoped that by nurturing their values from early childhood they would not deviate too far from veganism. Ethical veganism in childhood is most likely to provide a foundation for continued affinity with the lifestyle (Chwialkowska, 2018), and the women shared an approach to child-rearing which supported an informed understanding of veganism. Many of the women felt that that their children had a genuine understanding of veganism, and were involved in the choices that were being made for them. This led to aspirations that their children could create change in the world and raise the profile of veganism further. However, literature suggests that family eating practices not only provoke conflict around food choices (Fiese et al., 2006), but leaving the family home tends to be used as an opportunity to deviate from family values (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992).

The predisposition of a child to reject the rules of the family home makes the context of the non-vegan world even more important. Negative discourses around veganism, and veganism as an obstacle to 'fitting in' are likely to leave children susceptible to conforming to the majority in the same way adults are (Cherry, 2015). Concerns around compromise to their children's veganism were raised by the women even before their children had developed sufficient agency to make their own choices. They were regularly required to give advance thought to their children's interactions outside of the home, for example when choosing a nursery that would likely be governed by normative rules around food (Metcalfe et al., 2011). Where some women had access to vegan or vegetarian nurseries, for those who did not there was a consistent need to have foresight of the activities that were offered and to provide guidance in advance surrounding the specific dietary needs of their children.

Food is very often used as a means to bring people together or grant access to a particular social network, for example, through a shared cultural practice around food preparation or choice (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). For some of the women the shared practice of veganism felt all-encompassing, representing a rigid set of principles that they followed and which shaped their identity.

However, the vegan identity is also constructed through lived experience whereby each individual carves out what being vegan means to them in a way which reflects their own context (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). Other women demonstrated how veganism is a non-static lifestyle, with their unique vegan identities expressed by filtering the core principles of the movement through personal beliefs. The use of Queer Theory by Stephens Griffin (2017) supports the idea that veganism does not represent a universal framework for behaviour. That is, the vegan identity is formed through the enactment of the lifestyle and is not finite.

Bisogni et al., (2002) points to the fluid nature of vegan parenting by highlighting the reciprocity between the internal and external world when forming an identity. As a result, the women had a tendency for their identity as parents to be consistently under review, making 'trade offs' between veganism and non-veganism, and reconciling the difficult circumstances they found themselves in with both their own identity as well as their children's. Whether they identified strongly with veganism as a framework to follow or saw it as a set of principles expressed through their own free will, all of the women experienced an evolution in the way they practised veganism and therefore how they identified as a vegan parent.

Significant heterogeneity is already known to exist in within minority groups, despite sharing deeply ingrained values (Napoli & Ouschan, 2020). This diversity becomes important to recognise when attempting to tackle prejudice, as the homogenisation of social groups makes it easier for hierarchies to be assigned and for discrimination and 'invisible' stigma to occur (Horta, 2018; Kurz et al., 2020). However, a 'strength in numbers' approach, and the benefit of a strong social networks and a sense of community (Cherry, 2006) was lacking from all of the women's experiences. This meant that the majority of women felt their vegan identity was in conflict with gaining access to parenting networks, leaving them feeling isolated in between the two.

By recognising diversity within subgroups such as vegans, conflict within the movement may also occur (Cherry, 2006). Indeed, the women did distance themselves from certain 'types' of

vegans who they felt damaged the reputation of veganism. This dissociation from particular segmentations of the vegan population was observed within several of the women's narratives who were keen to distance themselves from vegans who were viewed as 'extreme'. As has been discussed, shying away from activism and related behaviours served to reduce conflict in the lives of the women and their children. However, it also served to elevate their social position as a 'more accepted' version of a vegan. The vegan identity is therefore quite political in its function, and can be used as a means to deny affinity with negative stereotypes of the movement and to forge connection with dominant groups.

Food choice is an economic privilege, meaning that vegans are often white and middle class Harper (2011). Whilst my sample is not representative of vegan parents as a whole, the women did reference the higher expense of products that were deliberately aimed at vegans, which increases the likelihood of vegan parents to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Greenebaum (2018) introduces the concept of 'double discrimination' to veganism whereby someone from an already marginalised group within society – such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME) – may be less likely to become a member of another subgroup, further reducing levels of diversity within vegan parenting. Socioeconomic factors that may influence the uptake of vegan parenting, as well as the overall experience, were not explored with the women. However, their accounts demonstrated the likelihood that the level of knowledge, money and time required to sustain the lifestyle would be a prohibitive factor for many.

The impact of being a vegan parent on the women's sense of self

Devine (2005) uses a 'life course perspective' to demonstrate that dietary choices change over time in line with the evolution of individuals in their social environment. The theory is useful when examining the women's transition to veganism as individuals, as well as to understand how their experiences changed again when they became parents. The women were introduced to veganism in a range of ways, for example through the influences of friends or in response to new knowledge about the impacts of their dietary choices. What they all shared was their socialisation into a society where meat eating was seen as the norm, which is something they endeavoured to protect their own children from.

Pregnancy and childbirth represented a new stage of life that would call into question the women's choices. For example, related health complications and medical advice based on the needs of the non-vegan majority required many of the women to renege on their ideals. In these instances, the contrast between being a vegan individual and

a vegan parent was made stark by the requirements of the women to choose between veganism and their baby.

The 'medical gaze' theory introduced by Foucault (1963/2003) is useful to consider here, whereby doctors are led by what they consider to be most 'relevant' to the care of a patient, as opposed to being led by what is central to the patient. The women's experiences mirrored this, as, whilst Foucault was not directly referencing veganism, their wishes became secondary to modern medicine. That is, what was 'best' for the women and their babies was often in direct contrast to veganism, and so elements of choice were taken out of their control. More directly, it has also been suggested that biased medical diagnoses do take place on account of prejudices against veganism (Aavik, 2021). This was experienced by some of the women in my study when abnormal test results were put down to their diet.

Loss of the vegan self was experienced by some of the women during and shortly after childbirth, as was a sense of loss regarding their vegan baby ideal. A key example of this relates to the women's ability to breastfeed, which featured heavily in some of their interviews. Several of the women experienced challenges with breastfeeding, resulting in their children being reliant on infant formula which at the time of this research was nearly always derived from cow's milk. This represented a sense of loss of the idealised vegan pregnancy and birth they had imagined, as well as to reinforce the lack of options that existed for them as vegan mothers.

The lack of choice the women had for vegan alternatives to breastmilk also highlights wider discourses that demonise decisions not to breastfeed (Morrison & Reed, 2022). All women – vegan and non-vegan – are influenced by pressures to breastfeed, with formula considered a nutritionally inferior option by those who ignore the range of reasons why a woman may not breastfeed (Unger, 2020). This calls to attention a need for greater sensitivity around choice and inclusive options for new mothers, given the nature of an experience that might represent a significant sense of loss for some women.

The women's bodies were given greater attention as a result of their pregnancy, becoming a contested space in terms of what they should consume for the wellbeing of their unborn child. As a result, their bodies were viewed more 'objectively'. That is, non-vegans would increasingly "peer at, leer at, admire, criticise, probe, investigate and dissect another's body" (Finlay, 2006, p.21), and the women themselves became more disconnected from their own

bodies, focusing on its particular parts or functions as opposed to the body 'as it is lived' (Finlay, 2003).

A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation

Research by Hirschler (2011) uncovered interpersonal conflict between vegans and non-vegans that led to the prioritisation of the lifestyle over connections with others. Prior to the introduction of children, vegans may feel better able to accept that steadfast commitment to their ideals will prohibit elements of social integration. However, divides become more pronounced with the introduction of children, who connect wider families and increase the need for interactions with non-vegan institutions. Further, the sacrifice of social connection moves from being a personal choice to a decision that may impact the wellbeing of a child.

Most of the women experienced times when 'trade offs' or a 'best effort' approach was required of them, during which their commitment to their beliefs was at odds with their commitment to their children's ability to participate socially. The degree to which this felt like a hardship varied across the women, but they all went through a sense-making process to determine how a vegan decision may impact their child's wellbeing, and how much of a choice they considered themselves to have in that situation. This process is described by Greenebaum (2012) as an 'accommodating strategy', whereby vegans use self-soothing skills when their behaviour contradicts their vegan identity, and is common in an environment that is not setup to meet the needs of vegans.

There was significant tension between the women's desire for their children to integrate fully with peers, and their desire to protect their vegan status. This related to social activities as well as food, and the following extract highlights why the idea of vegan alternatives for the women's children could feel conflicting:

> *Food is always a particular kind of food that has meaning and significance within a context. It can express values and norms, It can signify special events, and it can symbolize something else. Food can be about something other than itself; it can be read as well as eaten (Kaplan, 2020, p.24).*

Abigail made a distinct but relevant point in her interview which mirrors this. She suggested that food can be used to maintain culture and meaning through social boundaries. However, whilst food can act as a binding force in this way, by the same token it can also serve to 'keep out' people who do not share the same interests (Navarro, 2021; Willard, 2002). This

represents a feeling that permeated the entirety of all women's interviews. They identified the non-vegan world as increasingly accommodating to many elements of their lifestyle through the provision of vegan friendly products and convenience foods. However, the key obstacle that food represented was to meaningful social integration, which some women described through their children's attendance at Birthday parties. A Birthday cake at a party signifies a celebration, and traditionally a large cake is shared between a group of people attending the event. It therefore becomes symbolic of a vegan child's position within the group when they are not sharing a piece of the same cake, which is what some of the women expressed concerns about when choosing to provide something different for their child to take along to such events.

Veganism therefore represented a separating force to the women, whether it had directly played a part in the breakdown of relationships or served as a reminder of their peripheral position at events involving food. At times, the women would physically distance themselves and their children from difficult situations – particularly those surrounding food – which is a coping strategy that was illustrated in the literature (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Phelan et al., 2008). Withdrawing socially may appear to be an extreme response to the social barriers caused by food, but is indicative of how entrenched food is within culture. By avoiding occasions involving food the women not only avoided the additional work required to coordinate vegan alternatives, but were able to eschew the reminder of their difference.

Attempts to assimilate veganism with the norm via 'fake meat' products (Twine, 2018) supported the women to navigate motherhood more conveniently. Many of them found these products useful during the early stages of their children's lives when time was particularly limited. In addition to providing a convenient way to feed children quickly, they also enable sharing between vegan and non-vegan children, who may accept these types of products as 'normal'. However, they are also symbolic of the normative practices of meat eating and serve to reinforce non-veganism, positioning the enjoyment of meat-free food as a peripheral practice.

Veganism could also be used as a tool to forge connections with others given that conformity to a peripheral group such as veganism can create a sense of belonging (Cherry, 2015). This is particularly the case when veganism represents a central point of connection for individuals who would otherwise share little in common (Bates, 2020). However, the women's status as parents 'first', meant that their need for connection was with parents, who were not necessarily vegan. Sharing vegan activities or food with non-vegans was therefore incredibly meaningful to the women, particularly when it had been initiated by a non-vegan.

When non-vegans sacrificed their usual practices the women felt supported in their decisions and it validated their identity. Engaging in meat-free meals is also said to evoke greater empathy to the ethics of alternative lifestyles (de Visser et al., 2021), reinforcing the idea that to meaningfully minimize the divide between vegans and non-vegans, there is a need for truly shared experience.

Power

Power relations were heavily focused on in Chapter seven, with specific reference to how the exercise of power by non-vegans impacted the experiences of the women as vegan parents. Findings demonstrated the discursive context that surrounded vegan parenting, and how constructions were engaged with by the women. However, the reasons for the positioning of meat-eating as the norm remains open for further investigation. For example, the power of language in resolving cognitive dissonance around meat, whereby a cow becomes beef and a pig becomes pork so that non-vegans do not have to engage with what they are eating (Kaplan, 2020; Khara et al., 2021). If this is the case, it represents a significant denial of one's morals, which demonstrates an extremely strong desire to remain committed to what is accepted as normal.

'Normal' is a social construction (Burr, 2003) in the sense that the systems that exist in society enable or disable lifestyle choices according to what has been adopted by the majority. These systems have been created and evolved, they do not exist independently of people in society, nor are they finite. For example, if veganism was constructed as normal, systems would exist to support it. However, where food practices such as meat eating are heavily embedded in societal norms, and dependent of a range of factors from location to socio-economic and cultural norms, rejection of such practices is uncommon (Harper, 2011; Miller & Deutsch, 2010; Willard, 2002).

Examining power relations more closely in Chapter seven identified the possibility of parallels between vegan parenting and other social groups. According to (Newman & Clarke, 2022):

> *Feminism, gay liberation, disability politics, civil rights, anticolonialism and the contemporary rise of BLM, Me Too, XR and more have challenged the dominant orthodoxies of their time, and their successes undermined the power and authority of dominant groups (p.14).*

The women in my study represent a challenge to 'dominant orthodoxies' in the form of meat-eating. It may seem odious to compare vegan parenting with the movements mentioned above, however, the commonalities that exist across all 'culture wars' are the needs of one group to hold onto what is known and familiar in the face of another group that represents change (Hunter, 1991; Newman & Clarke, 2022). I have already discussed the impact of veganism on the women's sense of self; when their right to live as vegan parents with vegan children was compromised, the sense of attack penetrated many aspects of their life including their bodily experiences. The same could be said for the conceptualisation of veganism as an attack on the status quo, giving rise to the reasons why the vegan women experienced such resistance from the non-vegan world.

Emotional indifference to animal suffering aligns with hegemonic masculinity, with reasons for smaller numbers of male vegans including the threat of the lifestyle to what it means to be male (Fidolini, 2022; Greenebaum & Dexter, 2018; Mycek, 2018; Oliver, 2023; Rothgerber, 2013). Disparities between the numbers of female and male vegans therefore represents the position of the lifestyle within the hierarchical structure of the patriarchy (Cherry, 2015), and could have wider significance to other systems of inequality.

Power is neither static or necessarily determinable, which I found challenging to make sense of myself when trying to interpret the women's accounts. I often found myself conceptualising a binary of 'total power' and 'total powerlessness' between veganism and non-veganism, when instead, power is exercised in a more balanced way. Clarity was provided by a Sartre quote that was shared with me by my supervisor, and felt too relevant not to include in my thesis:

> We are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people make of us, but what we ourselves make of what they have made us (Sartre, 1964, p.584).

This defines succinctly how power operates, and how the constructions of vegan parenting that I have discussed may be used by the women. It is essential to consider the choice that the women have, and to acknowledge that they do not respond directly to the discourses through their behaviour. An extract from Florence's interview that was used in Chapter five illustrates this point:

> They were like we will try and give her, erm, a donor's valve, because she had a valve replacement, but if not it's gonna be a pig. And obviously I would

love to be able to be in a position to say no, but they don't know 'til they get down there and she needs it, and unfortunately it was a pig's heart, erm a valve, but, you know, that's, that's what I had to… Yeah, I wouldn't ever put her at risk, if that makes sense? But it is hard, like, and then… I mean, I've had people be like oh that's so vegan of you. And I'm like well it's not a choice, it's not a choice, like, I would have… If I could choose and there was two there I would've 100% gone for that (Florence, p.6, line 285).

In this example, Florence's daughter was given a pig's heart valve to save her life. It is important to recognise that while she would have preferred a vegan alternative, she still had choice during this event and was able to draw on her responsibilities as a parent to choose life for her daughter. This is relevant because the women made many choices within their role as vegan parents; despite what was available to them not necessarily accommodating the full extent of their vegan needs, they were able to exercise their free will in choosing whether to fully commit to their vegan ideals.

Revisiting Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Within my literature review I identified themes surrounding vegan motivations, identity and the context of a 'non-vegan world'. I also examined perceptions of, and positioning of vegan parents by reviewing media messaging. Reflecting on these through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT), which pays particular attention to the relationship between social groups and identity, supported insights into how and why the women were able to maintain their non-normative lifestyles in the face of significant challenges.

Work by Haslam (2004) suggests that social factors inform 'known' or objective features of the world, with psychological factors impacting how an individual interprets that world. This idea mirrors the approach I took using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which considers how individuals make sense of their experience in the context of their social world. SIT has also been used to examine the dynamics of language to understand phenomena, with speech considered a symbol of identity (Ferguson et al., 2016). Not only does this support the philosophical underpinnings of my approach, but it played out in the experiences of the women. For example, how the shared use of language within vegan communities generated meaning specific to that group, and how language was used to construct meaning about vegan identities through labels applied to them as a homogenous group.

As well as my methodological approach aligning with the principles of SIT, so do my findings. The women identified strongly with veganism, with some seeing themselves as autonomous individuals who had adopted vegan ethics. Considered through a SIT lens, these women had internalised those vegan 'group' ethics as part of their identity (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Throughout the GETs, the women's sense of difference was positioned as being a result of their veganism in a non-vegan world, pointing to the in-group/out-group principles of SIT (Capozza & Brown, 2000). For example, their need to 'disclose' their (vegan) difference, and seeking belonging with the majority non-vegan 'norm'. This was heavily present in GET 5 which I revisited throughout the thesis, within which the women sought a sense of belonging within a group that they did not identify with. The theme demonstrates just how challenging it was for the women to forge meaningful connections across distinct groups which could be invisible without closer inspection, and how useful SIT may be when attempting to understand the impact of how people perceive themselves and others.

As well as being useful to examine 'otherness', SIT is also a valuable tool to explore conflict between groups. Where identities may become more distinct when conforming to the characteristics or principles of a particular group, levels of 'perceived homogeneity' may also increase (Haslam, 2004). An example of this was seen in Chapter five, within GET 1 where Kylie felt that her personal beliefs and actions had been dismissed as 'vegan':

> *One of the mums said something to me. I can't remember what and she said, oh, the last thing we need is bloody vegans pushing their views on us. And I said, how do you even know I'm vegan? I've never told you (Kylie, p.14, line 678).*

The other women had also come to expect such responses, which gives rise to why they may have deepened their identification with their 'otherness' – or 'self-categorization' – to restore their sense of self-worth and protect themselves from the hostile external world (Haslam et al., 2018; Haslam, 2004). Despite the sense of rejection that many of the women experienced on account of their veganism, the lifestyle also offered a positive form of social connection through building and sustaining a 'psychologically meaningful group membership' (Haslam et al., 2022).

Within the framework of SIT, the work of Smaldino (2019) suggests that heterogeneous identities should not be ignored; where there is a relationship between social identity and society, as societies develop and change so too must identities. It is therefore possible for individual identities to retain uniqueness due to their political leaning, friends, family, work and so on. Despite collective group characteristics, individual identities may also be at odds

with others within that group. This was seen across the women's accounts where they would more strongly identify with particular elements of veganism over others, such as ethics or health, with the suggestion being that their way of being vegan was superior. In this way, individuals may enjoy the positive aspects of group membership whilst also distancing themselves in an attempt to elevate their own position and avoid being seen to share the same 'faults' as others. Further, individuals may belong to several groups that are at odds with each other. That is, the women in my study identified as mothers, as vegans, and as members of their immediate and wider family units, many of which were in conflict with each other.

Where SIT demonstrates how group belonging can be a positive thing, providing a sense of meaning and purpose to individuals (Haslam et al., 2009), if group identities are devalued then the benefit may become lost (Jetten et al., 2017). Understanding this at a group level through SIT has been valuable in identifying changes needed to protect stigmatised groups, and indeed what it may be like to be part of these groups. My research has highlighted why and how in/out group conflict may arise, as well as the need for individuals to challenge the subjective meanings attributed to groups (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Suggestions for future research are explored in the next chapter, where I include a suggestion for supporting policy change to reduce the burden of belonging to a minority group.

Summary of key findings

Given the limited experiential research with vegan parents, my research provided a timely opportunity to understand how individuals themselves make sense of veganism. It adds a new methodological approach to a growing social issue by allowing for organic narratives to emerge. The person-centred examination of how vegan mothers make sense of morally complex decisions also demonstrates how lived experiences converge and diverge greatly within the same lifestyle, and that a 'one size fits all' approach to understanding the motivations for – and experience of – vegan parenting is not appropriate.

The purpose of this study was to understand what the experience of being a vegan parent is like in the context of a non-vegan world. My aim was to build on the existing body of knowledge by examining how veganism is experienced when children are introduced, including how wider discourses around vegan parenting impact experience. My original research questions were:

- What are the factors involved in parents making the decision to raise their children as vegans?
- How do vegans experience raising children in a non-vegan world, both within the family unit and with wider networks?
- How does the experience evolve as children grow older and social pressures and self-agency become more pronounced?
- What are the dominant discourses surrounding vegan child-rearing and how do they impact experience?

The first three questions were answered across Chapters five and six, and Chapter seven provided a more in-depth exploration of the last question. A summary of the key findings is presented below.

The women's decision to raise their children as vegan arose from their own aspirations for the moral and health benefits of the lifestyle, as well as the reduced environmental impact of veganism on the planet. Their decision to maintain veganism themselves was a direct response to the problematic nature of non-veganism, which they wanted to shield their children from. However, the very 'thing' that they wanted to shield their child from ultimately called into question whether, and how, they could raise their children as vegan.

One of the most significant findings surrounded the distinction between how veganism was experienced as an individual, compared with when children became involved. Alterations to the way in which choice was experienced pointed to a push and pull between the women and their veganism, the women and their children, and their respective relationships to the non-vegan world. For example, choice to disclose their lifestyle shifted from a personal decision to a requirement when interacting with non-vegan institutions such as nurseries. Other significant alterations to the women's sense of choice surrounded important decisions for their children's health, which reframed how they made sense of their agency in a non-vegan world.

Having children ultimately changed the women's relationship with veganism, leading them to re-evaluate their motivations and reflect on their identity as both a vegan and a parent. For most of the women there were times they had to confront the idea of a 'trade off', whereby they were required to choose between their child and veganism. This meant that their lifestyle choices had to be separated from the decisions they made about their children's wellbeing, changing their relationship with veganism and how they responded to the non-

vegan world as a result. For others, where they chose not to renege on their vegan ideals for the sake of their children integrating with the non-vegan world, their relationship with and identity as a vegan was reinforced.

Whilst the women's approaches to social participation varied, what was consistent was their desire for belonging. The fragility of their connectedness to the non-vegan world became more pronounced as a family because their children represented a further deviation from the norm that could not be concealed. This sense of disconnect only grew further as their children aged and engaged more with non-vegan children and institutions, which drew attention to their sense of difference. Some women responded to this by relaxing veganism for their children so that they could participate with non-vegans, whereas for others attempts were made to invite non-vegans to take part in vegan activities or food. This represents the lack of relatedness between vegan families and non-vegan families, and how an invisible social divide exists.

Raising vegan children also increased the sense of judgment that the women felt about their lifestyle, and their need for resilience. Increased interest and input from non-vegans took place when the women had children. this emerged from new social networks, medical professionals, or greater contact with wider family members, making them more vulnerable to attack. Veganism as a choice for adults was received more favourably by non-vegans than as a choice made for a child, at which point it became extremely political. However, rather than expressions of concern for the wellbeing of the children resulting in support, they tended to amount to criticism and rejection.

My research highlighted a number of negative discourses surrounding vegan parenting, and how the meaning of the lifestyle could – in part – be constructed through language. By examining more closely the discursive context of the non-vegan world, it became possible to understand more fully how the women felt disadvantaged, and how they made choices for themselves and their children with the restraints that were placed on them.

Research implications

To date, experiential literature on veganism has emphasised barriers to uptake for individuals. As has been discussed, the inclusion of children in the lifestyle dramatically changes its meaning and the way in which it is experienced.

My research has focused more heavily on the social implications of being a vegan family, and highlighted the challenges that are faced as they navigate the interactions that take place as children grow older. As a result, I have provided insights into the mutual ways in which barriers to raising a vegan family can be reduced, taking the onus away from the vegans themselves. Not only could this support more conciliatory relations between vegans and non-vegans, but it could help enable children to sustain meat reduction into adulthood, which would benefit elements of their own health and the health of the planet (Craig, 2009; Rosi et al., 2017; Springmann et al., 2016; Turner-McGrievy et al., 2015).

I have also provided insights into the women's experience of the non-vegan world, within which discriminatory attitudes towards vegan parents have been normalised and legitimised. Understanding the ways in which vegan parents are constructed and positioned as a minority group, and the systems of power that operate to maintain this construction, can be extended to other more established minority groups. For instance, the example I gave of Florence reluctantly accepting a pig's heart valve for her daughter may mirror the concerns of a Muslim mother expected to accept tissues or organs from a pig for her child. In line with the medical gaze theory put forward by Foucault (1963/2003), these sorts of findings point to the need for more inclusive and accessible services in pluralistic societies.

In addition, by encouraging the recognition of diversity amongst vegan parents, it may be possible to break down the pejorative constructions and generate greater acceptance and respect for alternative lifestyles. This is particularly relevant given the recent climate of political and economic uncertainty, which often leads individuals to hold more closely what is known and familiar (Hunter, 1991; Newman & Clarke, 2022). I viewed the women who took part in my study as pioneers, bravely carving out a new way of life for themselves and their families. They therefore represent a symbol of change, which can feel destabilising and provoke resistance, and suggests that their experiences may be comparable to other marginalised groups.

This study outlines the need for vegans and non-vegans to find a way forward, whereby opposing views are sensitively acknowledged and the needs of both parties are accommodated together. However, the current environment mirrors the topical concept of 'culture wars'. Veganism versus non-veganism is analogous of culture wars between other social groups, and so the findings from my study are applicable to a wider context.

In my next and final chapter I reflect on my overall programme of study, evaluating the decisions that I made, the strengths and limitations of my findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER NINE – EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Method: the value of my approach

I reflect below on the value of including Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) alongside Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in my overall approach.

As has been shown, we are reliant on the words of participants when attempting to gain access to their world. As a result, absence in what is directly said, and the way in which experience is mediated through the 'taken for granted' or 'hidden' context of the individual, will always create an element of distance. This is accepted in approaches such as IPA, which acknowledge the subjective nature of experience at the level of both the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2022). Whilst I too acknowledge the limitations of what is possible to know through research, I wanted to apply multiple lenses to the accounts shared by the women. In doing so, I was attempting to get as close as possible to their worlds, as opposed to emphasising range in their experience.

Employing IPA for this study assisted in managing prior expectations of the direction of this research, whilst utilising the value of my own knowledge. My own experience, teamed with the literature, identified the range of social and practical obstacles that exist when attempting to pursue a vegan lifestyle in a non-vegan world. However, access to resources advocating for more of the positive aspects of veganism – beyond its environmental and health benefits – could have been beneficial. This emerged as the interviews with the women progressed and I felt that there had been missed opportunities to explore more of the benefits of vegan parenting, and this would have been a valuable finding to support interest from those who were considering the lifestyle for themselves.

Phenomenological research is about understanding what matters to the participant (Zahavi, 2019). By adopting the open questioning style of IPA, the women were able to share their experiences in a way that demonstrated the meaning they assigned to the events in their lives. This also included their interactions with others, which became an essential part of identifying their status as a minority, and what this was like for them. The freedom that IPA offers for participants to lead the direction of the interview (Reid et al., 2005) also allowed me to see how veganism permeated all aspects of their lives, highlighting the gravity and complexity of vegan parenting as a choice far beyond what parents feed their children.

Employing IPA therefore enabled a gestalt of the women's experiences, which served as a valuable foundation for understanding what vegan parenting is like. However, there were elements of the women's experiences that I wanted to explore further, and the theoretical underpinnings of IPA felt somewhat masked by the presentation of my findings as a narrative account of the women's experiences (Smith et al., 2022). I wanted to more explicitly explore the connection between the theories I had put forward in Chapter three, and how the women had made sense of their experiences. In doing so, I also wanted to showcase the methodological value of my work by inviting the reader to join me more closely in the analysis process.

Using fractions from the lifeworld on a smaller section of the data provided more psychological and phenomenologically informed insights into the accounts that I had presented in the previous chapter. I wanted to revisit the theme, 'A need for shared experience for meaningful social participation' as it represented such a prevalent part of vegan parenting in a non-vegan world. By presenting the data alongside more theoretical interpretations I was able to demonstrate more of what was happening for the women during their experiences, getting much closer to their lifeworlds. This is in contrast to findings from the first empirical chapter, which presented my own interpretations of those experiences. By employing IPA in different ways for both empirical chapters, I provided further insight into the hermeneutic processes of 'circles' and 'doubles' by varying the proximity to the women's lived experience. In doing so, new lines of enquiry also emerged around the power dynamics that appeared within their accounts, for which an alternative approach was required.

In Chapter three I revisited Ricœur's 'hermeneutics of empathy' and 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. The former aligned heavily with the findings that I had presented in my first two empirical chapters. For my final empirical chapter, my approach aligned more heavily with the latter, and I utilised it as "the mode of interpretation, employed by psychoanalysis for instance, that seeks to understand by peeling back the layers of meaning – digging beneath the surface for what is hidden – which may lead to suspicion over the initial empathetic account of meaning" (Langdridge, 2007, p.44). By revisiting the data using FDA, I drew attention to the discursive context within which the women's experiences took place. It transpired that this context represented an integral part of how they made sense of vegan parenting, which if replaced, could significantly alter their lived experience. Whilst my original IPA findings were fundamental for understanding vegan parenting, the additional Foucauldian lens provided insights into how and why it could be understood in this way. Without this more critical element to my analysis, the findings would have lacked sufficient

consideration for the presence of power relations between vegans and non-vegans, and how these relations extend to wider contexts.

<u>Method: the quality of my approach</u>

Approaching the data in the ways I have just outlined demonstrates the merits of using a combination of positions to uncover the layers of individual experience. I now discuss the quality of the approach that I took, evaluating how well I executed my chosen methods.

When planning and carrying out my empirical work I referred to IPA-specific guidelines to help shape my approach and sense-check my findings (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Nizza et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022; Smith, 2011). In order to retrospectively demonstrate the quality and rigour of my work, and to consider improvements for future studies of this kind, I looked for broader frameworks that would also be applicable to the inclusion of FDA. Smith et al. (2022) recommend guides provided by Yardley (2000) and Elliott et al. (1999), with the principles set out by Yardley (2000) most appropriate to review my dual-focus approach. The evaluation of my findings will therefore consider: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance.

Sensitivity to context

By its nature, IPA is sensitive to social environment through the interpretations that are made of the participant, which attempt to uncover and take into account individual context (Smith et al., 2022). By using FDA to magnify the discursive context of my women's accounts, further attention was paid to the social environment of the women. The data that was shared by the women arose from a schedule that was structured by open and neutral questions, designed to explore the phenomenon of vegan parenting in a way that represented their subjective experience. I situated this study in relevant academic literature as well as dominant discourses surrounding vegan parents, meaning that my findings had a strong contextual grounding.

Reading widely around phenomenology and hermeneutics meant that I was able to approach analysis appropriately. That is, to appreciate that the individual contexts (and lifeworlds) of the women would mediate their experience, and therefore their accounts of the events that they shared with me. An understanding of my own context also meant that I was minded to 'bridle' my prior assumptions, and attempt reflexive awareness (Willig, 2019) of my own experience of veganism throughout the entire course of this study. An important and

ongoing component of my research was to reflect on my role as an interviewer. This included consideration for how much I shared, how the participants viewed me, and how my own context may impact what was shared before I even got to the point of analysis. There were clear positives to be gained if the women saw me as likeminded, such as an increased willingness to speak openly and freely without judgment. However, in retrospect, I believe there may have been relevant things that were omitted from their interviews due to assumed knowledge on my part.

In Chapter four I reflected on the experience of conducting my interviews online, and made reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst my previous reference to the pandemic focused on its impact on recruitment and mode of data collection, I am also aware of possible influences on my findings. A number of the women I interviewed had either been pregnant during periods of strict lockdown, or were managing the formative years of parenting with fewer physical social networks than they had expected. I am therefore alive to the need to contextualise my findings accordingly. However, the value of addressing the dominant discourses that continued to circulate regardless of the pandemic, suggest that the women's experiences are also likely to reflect those of vegan parents post-COVID.

Commitment and rigour

By developing this topic from my Master's, I have demonstrated continued commitment and passion to an important social issue close to my own heart. Throughout both programmes of study I would regularly think of the women who volunteered their time to take part in my research, comparing their experiences to situations I found myself in, and often making notes in the moment that may be valuable to my work. Over three years have passed since I began this PhD and the findings still correspond to the attitudes towards veganism that I witness today, which continues to motivate me to develop this area of work further.

Rigour was initially achieved by revisiting the philosophical underpinnings of my research. I reviewed a wide range of literature on phenomenology, hermeneutics and existential psychology, mapping prominent developments and theorists over time, which represents the chronological way in which I organised Chapter three. I wanted to ensure that IPA was the most suitable match for research, and by giving sufficient consideration to a range of standpoints I felt sure that the primary concerns of IPA represented the aims of my study most fully. This is demonstrated through my nuanced approach to some of the concepts – such as 'essential meaning', for which I provide a range of positions – and my later decision to use FDA to cater to the needs of emerging findings.

More detailed information about the rigour I applied when planning and carrying out my empirical research was included in Chapter four. Detailed in this chapter is the thoughtful way in which I approached who I wanted to recruit for my study and why; the design, including the use of scoping interviews to inform my interview schedule; the use of appropriate participant materials; reflexive data collection and ongoing amends to my interview questions where needed; my approach to systematic analysis. My methodical approach to the entire research process not only demonstrates commitment and rigour, but also highlights the properties of IPA as both scientific and deeply interpretative.

I was transparent when deviations were made from my original research proposal, including the size of my entire sample, which was smaller than I had originally intended. I confronted this challenge, considering my options and researching comparable studies to review their participant numbers. According to Yardley (2000), the adequacy of a sample depends on "its ability to supply all the information needed for a comprehensive analysis" (p.221). Concluding that my eventual sample did meet these conditions meant that the direction of my analysis changed and eventually led to more fruitful findings.

One of the greatest demonstrations of rigour was the time I dedicated to analysis. Following the steps set out by Smith et al. (2022) and supplementary IPA guidance offered by Nizza & Smith (2022) resulted in a thorough and illuminating process. I also spent time considering the emerging themes at times when I was not immediately with the data, recording thoughts that came to mind and revisiting the transcripts to review my ideas. The cumulative process of analysis that resulted in my three approaches to the data also represent how heavily immersed in and connected to the data I was. In fact, the eventual dual-focus of this study demonstrates my commitment to rigour, being led by the data to generate thorough and authentic findings.

The 'independent audit' recommended by Smith et al. (2022) was supported by my supervisor, who is highly experienced in IPA and assessed my work at each stage. Opportunities to critique my work were also provided by the IPA Research Group, to whom I took ideas for my research, and data extracts for review.

Transparency and coherence

> For researchers who believe that our experience of the world is profoundly
> influenced by our assumptions, intentions and actions, it is equally important
> to openly reflect on how such factors may have affected the product of the

> *research investigation. This kind of disclosure, sometimes known as*
> *"reflexivity", might include discussion of the experiences or motivations which*
> *led the researcher to undertake a particular investigation (Yardley, 2000,*
> *p.222).*

My commitment to transparency is represented throughout this entire thesis, within which I recognise my own interests and motivations as well as outline the ways in which I managed my prior assumptions. At each stage of the research process I actively 'bridled' my preconceptions, making reference to this in my findings as well as to resolve with my supervisor any misgivings I had about the impact of my experience as a vegan.

A significant proportion of Chapter three was dedicated to acknowledging the hermeneutic commitments of IPA. In doing so I point to the nature the researcher as a filter for understanding, as well as to recognise that multiple readings of the same text are possible. As a secondary form of analysis I introduced the social constructionist foundations of FDA, with its interpretative nature and rejection that a direct perception of reality is possible. In doing so I have been clear that the findings I present represent my own understandings that are open to further interpretation, whilst acknowledging that they utilise both schools of thought. Further, I provided a clear 'audit trail' to demonstrate my journey from the original text to my final themes. Using direct quotes when presenting my findings also made clear the interpretations that I made from the women's accounts.

Coherence between my research question and approach has been clearly shown through my choice of methods and their grounding in the theories presented in Chapter three. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a fitting methodology for unexplored topics, with IPA providing the most suitable method due to the "painstaking attention it gives to enabling the participant to recount as full an account as possible of their experience" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.42). Through my use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews I provided the women with a voice to tell me what vegan parenting is really like, avoiding any tendency to look for answers to predefined questions that would have been based on my own assumptions about the phenomenon. The use of FDA as a supplementary method to my findings is demonstrably coherent with the need to understand more about the context of the non-vegan world that was manifest int the women's narratives.

The overall structure of this thesis is intended to deliver an unfolding narrative, showing how the women's journeys as vegan individuals evolved with the introduction of children. Their

experiences are then situated in a non-vegan world, and I describe how it is constructed using the women's words.

Impact and importance

This study provides new understandings of a very current social and political issue, in a way that will benefit both vegans as well as non-vegans. For example, raising awareness of the way in which the lifestyle is experienced may promote a better sense of connection between vegans and non-vegans, and encourage more inclusive practices in shared spaces. The provision of readily available vegan-friendly products, such as 'fake meats' and 'cruelty free' toiletries undeniably improve the ease with which parenthood can be navigated. However, the social divide that remains between vegan parents and non-vegan parents is stark, and these 'vegan alternatives' do not bridge that gap. As has been discussed, the women found shared experiences with non-vegans a meaningful part of their connection to the world, suggesting that the practical ease of vegan child-rearing was not their most significant challenge. I therefore believe that the women's diminished sense of belonging – and fears that this would be replicated in their children – is one of those most impactful outcomes from this study, and one that will inform the basis for improving social relations.

Despite the experiential nature of this research, it also challenges the way both vegans and non-vegans think about parenting, and encourages engagement with a wider range of perspectives. According to Yardley (2000) in relation to the experience of health and illness,

> *Since discourse, ideas and beliefs are an intrinsic part of our experience of health and illness, then this experience can be substantially altered by research which contributes to a change in the way we think or talk about health (p.223).*

My work also identifies a need to examine the discourses that exist around veganism, and for focus to shift from ridicule and denigration to a more measured representation of the phenomenon. Evaluating the needs of vegan parents and children with empathy and sensitivity, and attempting to step away from the stigmatising messages that currently predominate, will empower them to live fulfilling lives within a more progressive society. I therefore hope that this work invites any reader to consider their own views, and question how they relate to – and even perpetuate – the dominant discourses that exist around vegan adults and children.

<u>Research strengths</u>

A key strength of this research is the gap it fills in existing knowledge at a particularly timely moment. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to what is considered to be an international 'climate crisis'. Intensive animal farming practices have been shown to directly affect climate change, and evidence suggests that a move to a vegan diet could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by two thirds in Western high and middle-income countries by 2050 (Springman et al., 2016). In 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report identifying climate change as an urgent issue for the global economy. However, the COVID-19 outbreak meant that attention was diverted from environmental issues whilst the world managed the immediate effects of the pandemic.

Living a vegan lifestyle represents a direct solution to unsustainable levels of animal husbandry, yet my research has shown that hostility towards veganism may be a prohibitive factor for parents choosing the lifestyle for their children. As has also been shown, practising ethical veganism as a family unit may support continuation of the lifestyle into adulthood. However, the more barriers that exist across key social institutions, the more likelihood there is for dominant discourses to steer the mindset of future generations back towards the conventions of meat eating. I would argue that what sets my study apart is its attention to how children may be raised in unconventional ways without impacting their well-being. The suggestion is not for non-vegans to transition, or even to reduce meat intake, but for empathy and support to be provided to enable those who have not already been socialised into meat eating to choose or maintain and alternative lifestyle.

At the time of this study a small number of phenomenological research papers on veganism existed, but I found no dual-focus IPA and FDA studies into veganism. I have therefore added methodological value to an important social issue, providing a platform for research to add further value through alternative perspectives. Using a dual-approach demonstrates a clear need to consider the impact of social structures as well as individual agency on experience, particularly when the phenomenon at hand has become politicized. I would also argue that presenting the data in different ways improves access to phenomenological concepts for a wider audience, and for those looking for a new 'way in' to understanding experience.

<u>Research limitations</u>

The aims of IPA are to provide a detailed examination of lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). That is not to say that findings do not have relevance beyond the interpretations of the participants' accounts, however, it does mean that my findings do not constitute general claims that can be made about all vegan families. Of note in my study is that the sample I had access to represents a particularly homogeneous group of vegan mothers with similar economic means. For example, they all had access to the vegan-specific products that their children needed, and were sufficiently educated to be able to conduct their own research. The way in which their lifestyles were received by the majority may not have been dependent on their socioeconomic position, but if my sample were different, the choices that were available to the women may have impacted other elements of their experience.

When relaxing the inclusion criteria for my sample I had concerns that the personal significance of vegan parenting may be weakened for women who had not decided to raise their children fully vegan, or whose location was particularly rural. In fact, these differences provided a new aspect for converging experiences as well as to demonstrate variation, and the impact of the non-vegan world was foregrounded as an important contextual factor for what vegan parenting is like. Further, the women's diverse locations which included cities, towns, as well as more rural locations, highlighted that experiences of vegan parenting were equally challenging in different settings.

The decision to only include women in my sample was necessary to meet the criteria for homogeneity that IPA requires (Smith et al., 2022). Vegan mothers are also able to share direct experience of pregnancy and childbirth, which transpired to be integral to understanding more about the impact of the non-vegan world. However, the exclusion of fathers has implications for my study as an experiential piece about parents, particularly in light of the gendered perceptions of veganism discussed earlier. My findings also suggest that for those women who were in a partnership, their male spouse was either not vegan or transitioned after them. This suggests the likelihood of challenges in accessing a sample of vegan fathers but also that they could offer a new dimension to the parenting experience, in particular how they may be perceived differently by non-vegans.

The final limitation relates to my own experience in managing the dual-focus of IPA and FDA. During times of immersion in FDA I found that the parenting element of experience was easily lost within constructions of veganism. Veganism represented an obstacle to many aspects of the women's lives as individuals, that became amplified when children were introduced. This meant that my attention was often drawn to the vegan/non-vegan binary when writing up my results, and I had to actively refocus my attention on what this meant for

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the experience of parenting. This was an interesting finding in itself, and in highlighting just how contentious veganism is for the non-vegan world I have also reinforced a wider need to embrace difference. I wanted to do justice to the women's experiences by approaching their accounts with a new analytic lens. However, making this decision in response to the data meant that the dual aims of my study were not embedded in the original design of my research, which is something I would endeavour to do in future.

Recommendations for future research

The women in this study have taken an innovative approach to parenting, and as such, my findings present a number of areas for future research into their experiences.

Further IPA research

I was unable to conduct the study I had planned with vegan women who were experiencing pregnancy. In light of the findings about choice – particularly surrounding breastfeeding and the absence of vegan formula alternatives – I believe further IPA research with this population could provide valuable insights and have further implications for social change. Learnings from my recruitment challenges, such as the need to access an 'insider' or 'gatekeeper' (in this case an online group moderator), could assist with the success of a study of this kind.

Addressing how vegan parenting is experienced for men would not only provide a deeper understanding of alternative child-rearing practices, but would also address the association between meat and masculinity. Examining how specifically male parents are received by the non-vegan majority could extend understandings of gender identities and how views on veganism as a minority subculture may be subverted.

My interviews invited the women to 'look forward' to consider what parenting may be like when their children grew older, when there becomes greater need for interactions with non-vegans outside of the home. They acknowledged that with increased individual agency and greater exposure to social pressures, there would likely be a need to allow their children to renege of veganism in the presence of their peers. Involving parents and older children in an IPA study could provide practical insights into how vegan parenting may be managed by parents and experienced by older children.

Furthering understandings of the non-vegan context

This thesis has tracked my increasing interest with the discourses surrounding vegan parenting, and how these provide a means to understanding the context within which experience takes place. Instead of further FDA driven work, I would suggest that IPA with non-vegans – such as wider family members of vegan families – could effectively explore attitudes as a 'response' to this study. Not only would a deeper understanding be gained of what it is like to be positioned within the norm, but it would provide an opportunity to delve into the reasons and feelings that underpin concerns about vegan families.

Expanding methodology

A combination of what is known from the literature, and the concerns expressed by the women, suggest that as their children grow older they may distance themselves from veganism. Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (LIPA) could provide a useful tool to examine how this behaviour change takes places, as well as to inform what might be needed more widely to support the continuation of veganism from childhood to adulthood.

Supporting policy change

The women's accounts demonstrated a lack of structural support for their lifestyle choice, as well as to identify some of the more practical things that could reduce the burden of being a minority. Conducting focus groups to flesh out the specific needs of vegan parents at particular timepoints in child-rearing could provide a means to inform policy and influence change in a range of settings.

The above suggestions for future research could be read as an aspirational list based on my own personal interests. However, I would argue that they represent the vast research space that exists for such an underdeveloped topic, and I hope this study provides the catalyst for further work.

Personal reflection

The heuristic nature of this PhD represented one of the least expected learning curves. Utilising my own experience as part of my approach to the topic, as well as when reflecting on the women's experiences, felt unsettling in light of the quantitative training I was used to. At times it felt challenging to let go of the idea that more experimental modes of research are

value neutral. The idea that multiple – or even infinite – interpretations of the women's experiences were possible felt disheartening given my ambitions to produce impactful outcomes. Reading widely around hermeneutic phenomenology, and from discussions with my supervisor and IPA peers, fuelled the development of a deep affinity to the assertion that knowledge and experience is inherently subjective. Not only did this result in greater confidence in my own epistemological position, but I believe that genuinely seeing the benefit of my 'insider knowledge' led to richer findings.

One of the most challenging elements overall was to let go of the linear process I had hoped for. Being open to new and unexpected lines of enquiry and being led by what the data was telling me, ultimately produced the most fruitful findings. However, I found the 'messiness' and lack of certainty difficult to manage, and it took time for me to appreciate how a robust approach like IPA could facilitate changes to my original research design, including the introduction of a new method later in the process.

Throughout the course of this PhD I acknowledged my position as a 'researcher in training'. I was already conversant with the use of IPA, and able to communicate findings in an appropriate academic style. However, I found the volume of work overwhelming, which fuelled my tendency towards rigidly structured workplans and a desire to reject significant changes to my original proposal. It was the final stages of writing up my findings and compiling my finished chapters that marked the point at which things 'fell into place', and this felt reminiscent of the hermeneutic circle. It felt that I understood the philosophical underpinnings of my work in a more meaningful way having conducted the research accordingly, which led to further developments in my epistemological position.

I want to conclude with the personal satisfaction that I have gained through conducting this research, as by attempting to make sense of the women's experiences, I have added significantly to meaning in my own life. I introduced this thesis with the exchange between my mother and I about our Christmas meal. I was left confused about the strength of her reaction to my transition to veganism. Through this work I have gained a deep understanding of the social significance of food, as well as the tendency of humans to hold onto what is known. This will not only equip me with the discernment required to manage similar situations in future, but serves as a reminder for me to challenge my own perceptions of difference. I also hope that this work prompts reflection and provides new perspectives for its readers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Recruitment flyer

HOW IS PARENTING EXPERIENCED AS A VEGAN WOMAN?

Are you vegan? Are you currently pregnant or a mother with young children? If so, I would love to hear your story!

The number of vegans in the UK has risen rapidly over recent years, and increasing attention is being given to the inclusion of children in the lifestyle. However, little research exists to understand what it is like to raise children as a vegan parent.

As part of my PhD I am conducting online interviews with vegan mothers to understand the experiences and decision-making processes involved in raising vegan children. I am hoping to speak to mothers who have been vegan for at least 2 years and are currently pregnant, or have children up to the age of 6 who may be thinking about how to navigate the nursery/school system as a vegan family.

For more information or if you are interested in taking part, please do get in touch!

Alice Ryley (PhD student)
Birkbeck, University of London aryley01@mail.bbk.ac.uk

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES
BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

INFORMATION SHEET FOR: *How is the parenting of young children experienced as a vegan?*

Before you decide to take part in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. A member of the research team can be contacted if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This research study looks at how vegan parenting is experienced as a vegan woman. Its aim is to provide person-centred accounts of what child-rearing is like for vegan women in a non-vegan world, and will feed into a wider PhD project looking at the experiences of vegan families. This particular study will focus on the experiences of vegan parenting when children begin to be socialised outside of the home, and follows a previous piece of work on the experience of vegan pregnancy. The overall PhD is expected to finish in October 2022, however this may change due to the current COVID-19 social distancing rules. You are welcome to receive further information about the write-up of this study or other research being conducted as part of this PhD.

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are a vegan mother who has a young child.

Your participation in this study will involve a one to one interview with Alice, that will last between 1 and 1.5 hours. The interview will take place via video conference. The study aims to give you the opportunity to explain what it is really like to be a vegan parent from your own point of view and we hope that you will find the experience of sharing your story a positive one. The interview may involve discussions around relationships or experiences that have not gone as you would have hoped but we do not anticipate there to be any risks associated

with your participation and you will not be expected to share anything that you are uncomfortable with. You are free to choose not to answer certain questions, take breaks during the interview, or decide to stop at any time.

The results of this study will feed into the PhD thesis, with the possibility of future publication in journals, books and disseminated at conferences.

Any information you choose to share will be anonymous and treated confidentially. You will be assigned a pseudonym (code name) which will be used to identify any data collected from you. Any information that you choose to share and could identify you as an individual will either be disguised or not included. In addition, only the immediate research team will have access to any of the data collected about you.

You have the right to withdraw participation at any point, without the need for explanation, up until the point that your data has been anonymised and can no longer be identified. This could be before or during the interview, or after the interview has finished. With your consent your interview will be audio recorded and written up by the interviewer as a transcript, with careful consideration given to the removal of any information that would identify you as an individual.

This study has received ethical approval from the Department of Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Birkbeck University of London

For more information, please contact:

Alice Ryley (Interviewer and PhD student)   Dr Virginia Eatough (PhD
                                            Or   Supervisor)
Birkbeck, University of London   Birkbeck, University of London
aryley01@mail.bbk.ac.uk   v.eatough@bbk.ac.uk

For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please visit: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#7

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at: ethics@psychology.bbk.ac.uk

School Research Officer

School of Science, Department of Psychological Sciences

Birkbeck, University of London

London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office https://ico.org.uk/

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES
BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CONSENT FORM FOR: *How is the parenting of young children experienced as a vegan?*

<u>Please read the following statements carefully, and feel free to ask questions at any point.</u>

I have had the details of the study explained to me and willingly consent to take part. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I will remain anonymous and the information I share will be used for this study only.

I understand that can decline to answer particular questions or stop the interview at any time. I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point that the anonymised data can no longer be identified.

I understand that an audio recording of my interview will be taken using a secure voice recorder and that my recording will be identified by my interview number. A written copy of my recording will be transcribed, removing or disguising personally identifiable information and my transcript with be identified by a pseudonym (code name). Following transcription of my interview, the interview recording will be destroyed.

I understand that any information I share will be kept confidential and my personal details will be stored separately to my interview data. Only the interviewer and the immediate study team at Birkbeck will have access to my personal details, interview recording and transcript.

I understand that my interview recording, transcript and any other information held about me will be stored within a secure voice recorder and a secure folder on a password protected

computer. My interview will not be used or made available for any purposes other than this study. My data will be stored for no more than 5 years following the publication of this study.

I understand that the results from this study will be used as part of a PhD thesis and may be included in submissions to journal publications. Results may also be presented at conferences and to colleagues. My data will be totally anonymous and I will be identified only by the pseudonym I have chosen. Any information about me will be presented in a way that ensures there are no means of identifying my involvement in the study, however I may be able to recognise some of my own data, such as short quotes from my interview.

I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

<u>There should be two signed copies, one for the participant, one retained by the researcher for records.</u>

Name (participant):   Signature: Date:

Name (researcher):   Signature: Date:

For more information, please contact:

Alice Ryley (Interviewer and PhD student)	Or	Dr Virginia Eatough (PhD Supervisor)
Birkbeck, University of London		Birkbeck, University of London
aryley01@mail.bbk.ac.uk		v.eatough@bbk.ac.uk

The below pen portraits are made up of the key features of each woman's experience, and served as a point of reference when reviewing my initial findings. I also assigned each woman a 'type', which encapsulates their approach to vegan parenting and is intended to highlight diversity within vegan parenting. These short descriptions were formed from the notes I made after each interview and updated with additional context after the analysis process.

Abigail: The evasive vegan mother
Abigail is a mother of two, with one daughter who is about to start primary school and one younger son who is one. She has been vegan for seven years. She describes her veganism as 'pretty consistent', occasionally deviating from the lifestyle due to her non-vegan surroundings or interactions. Both of her pregnancies were vegan.

Abigail's children are vegan when they are under her care, but eat non-vegan food when in the care of her husband. Her husband is not vegan but predominantly eats vegan at home due to her managing most of the cooking and provision of food.

Abigail and her husband are Islamic, which she feels plays a large part in her identity as a vegan. The significance of her faith largely relates to how able she feels to advocate for her veganism, seeing the lifestyle and her religion at odds with one another.

Abigail had experienced a lot of resistance to and rejection of her veganism from close family, which led her to experience a number of challenges during social occasions. She now prefers to avoid events surrounding food and even intends to home-school her children, which she feels will make raising them vegan easier (despite this not being her main reason for doing so).

Barbara: The accidental vegan mother
Barbara has been vegan for over four years and has a vegan son who is still a baby. Her partner is also vegan, having made the transition shortly before her. Originally from the UK, Barbara and her family emigrated to start a new life abroad in a place less familiar with veganism than the UK.

Barbara's transition to veganism was not intentional at the beginning, but happened due to a growing interest in meat reduction and a gradual aversion to cheese. She now identifies her vegan motivations as for environmental and animal welfare reasons, and for improved health outcomes.

Despite being obviously committed to the lifestyle, at times Barbara distanced herself from the movement. She did not express any negative feelings forwards non-vegans, but did acknowledge their contribution to the deterioration of the planet. Barbara was very clear that she did not wish to 'preach' to non-vegans or attempt to pressure anyone to become vegan.

Barbara's son is vegan, but she appeared quite willing to involve him in non-food related activities that did not strictly adhere to the lifestyle. In general her approach to vegan child-rearing appeared very relaxed, prioritising his enrichment and acknowledging the need to be flexible in a non-vegan world.

Camilla: The apologetic vegan mother

Camilla has been vegan for four years and has one daughter who is eighteen months old. Her husband has been vegetarian since early childhood, having spent some time as a vegan adult, and now identifies as 'low dairy vegetarian'.

Camilla had a vegan pregnancy but with the support of her husband, has decided to raise her daughter as vegetarian rather than vegan. She describes the area she lives as vegan-friendly, but had concerns that if her daughter was vegan it would impact her ability to fully participate in social activities. Despite making this decision for the good of her daughter, Camilla expressed some feelings of guilt due to a perceived sense of responsibility to fully represent veganism as a viable lifestyle in a non-vegan world.

Camilla remains committed to the principles of veganism herself and accepts the challenges the lifestyle may bring for her personally, but prioritises the social integration of her daughter over a vegan lifestyle on an ongoing basis.

Daisy: The heavily prepared vegan mother

Daisy has been vegan for six years and has a five month old daughter. Her husband became vegan sometime after her and they are raising their daughter as fully vegan.

Daisy appeared very confident that veganism is right for her and family, and had a lot of information and knowledge to share during her interview. She expressed strong views about

the detrimental impact of humans on the planet, and believes veganism is best for the health of her and her family.

Daisy felt quite negatively towards non-vegans, noticing hypocrisy in parents who criticised a vegan diet for children when they did not possess knowledge about nutrition. She also seemed unaffected by her need to distance herself from non-vegans at times when the two lifestyles were unable to agree.

Daisy described her vegan pregnancy as very easy, but did acknowledge the additional knowledge and preparations that were required of vegan parents living in a non-vegan world. Whilst she felt there was ample choice for vegan food and baby products, the lack of vegan medicines and medical interventions posed a challenge to her lifestyle; she would be willing to renege on veganism if it meant providing her daughter with non-vegan medical care.

Denise: The 'best effort' vegan mother

Denise has been vegan for almost three years and has a daughter who is three. Her daughter ate meat during the weaning stages of infancy, but has been raised as vegan since Denise made the transition herself.

The father of Denise's daughter (her now ex-partner) is non-vegan but supportive of their daughter's vegan status. Denise's current partner is non-vegan, but supportive of her and her daughter's veganism.

Denise refers to herself as a relaxed vegan, taking a 'best effort' approach and distancing herself from 'preachy' vegan stereotypes. It seems important to her that others are not pressured or judged for not being vegan, and that they are not burdened by her decision to be vegan either.

Denise acknowledged significant work involved in maintaining a vegan family, and initially struggled with feelings of not being 'vegan enough'. She also expressed conflicts between the personal sacrifice of non-vegan foods, guilt for her daughter missing due to being vegan, but that she could be doing more for the vegan cause.

Ella: The flexible vegan mother

Ella has been vegan for around three years and has a newly born son who she is raising as vegan. Her husband is not vegan and is supportive of her and her son's lifestyle. She

described feeling very certain of continuing her veganism during pregnancy and felt proud to have done so.

Ella described a lack of real-life vegan parent role models or networks of vegan families, which felt isolating. She also experienced times when she had no other option but to relax her veganism, which she found disappointing and was conscious of receiving judgement from the vegan community in doing so.

She also expressed concerns about her son's ability to fit in with non-vegan peers when he is older. She intends that he will make the decision for himself as to whether he will continue being vegan, but will equip him with the knowledge she feels he needs in order to make an informed decision.

Whilst steadfast in her beliefs, Ella referred to 'trade-offs' she is willing to make between rigidly following a vegan lifestyle and what is best for the health and happiness of her family.

Florence: The intuitive vegan mother
Florence has been vegan five and a half years, and has one daughter who is three and has been vegan since birth. She is primarily vegan for animal welfare reasons but sees veganism as the healthiest way of life for her and her daughter. She has a vegan mother and sister, and is no longer in contact with her daughter's father.

Florence's daughter was born with a heart condition that meant she received non-vegan medical procedures in the early stages of her life. Despite this, Florence described her vegan parenting experience as relatively easy and identifies as a strict but flexible vegan, appearing relaxed about the fact that there will be times when her daughter interacts with or eats non-vegan things.

Florence tries not to be judgmental about non-vegans, and does not describe herself as an 'active' vegan, but due to the importance of her vegan ethics can struggle in non-vegan environments.

Jill: The natural vegan mother
Jill has been vegan for six years. She is a single parent and has a vegan son aged five and a vegan daughter aged two. She made an immediate switch to veganism after going to a vegan festival, with concerns for the environment and animal welfare developing after her transition.

Jill was clearly committed to and knowledgeable about veganism, but it did not appear to be a governing factor in her life; she was very laid back about the non-vegan encounters her children may have. She described a 'vegan ego' that has softened since her initial transition, but she still believes her children will enjoy better health due to their diet.

Despite a challenging experience around one of her births, and concerns for her children 'missing out' due to their veganism, Jill appeared very positive about vegan parenting. She feels lucky to be vegan in the current climate, able to purchase vegan friendly products and feed her children with ease.

Kylie: The determined vegan mother
Kylie has two vegan sons, aged six and three. She has been vegan for six years, transitioning shortly after the birth of her first son. Her husband is vegan too, having taken a little longer to transition than she did.

Kylie is vegan predominantly for animal rights reasons and is a keen advocate for veganism. She has little patience for non-vegans, demonstrating a real passion for the cause and hopes for more vegans in the world in the future.

Kylie was confident in her decision to raise a vegan family and described becoming a more relaxed vegan parent with her second son; she had got to grips with how to navigate a non-vegan world with young children, and enjoyed increased availability of vegan products and food.

Kylie works hard to ensure her children can be vegan outside of the house, without feeling a burden to non-vegans. She is proud of the efforts she makes and what she has achieved in feeding her children healthy vegan food.

Margot: The 'takes it in her stride' vegan mother
Margot has been vegan for seven years and was vegan during her pregnancy. She has a son who is thirteen months old and has been vegan from birth. Her fiancé is pescetarian.

Margot is currently studying vet medicine and so has access to a lot of information about animal agriculture, and feels she knows a 'truth' that others do not. Despite this, Margot's approach to vegan parenting seems relaxed and positive, referring to most of her experiences as unproblematic.

She did touch briefly on some more challenging topics, such as the tensions between her father's non-veganism and her own beliefs, but on the whole her experiences of vegan parenting so far had been straightforward.

Matilda: The diplomatic vegan mother

Matilda has been vegan for three years and has three vegan children up to primary school age, only one of which has been vegan from birth. Her husband is also vegan, having transitioned with encouragement from her. Matilda cited the future world of her children as a key motivator for her veganism.

Matilda's rural location meant that meat eating is deeply ingrained in her community and wider family. Despite this, she did not find that veganism presented many challenges for her family, other than some strong reactions and lack of understanding from other parents at her children's school.

Matilda deliberately attempted not to be outspoken about veganism; she already felt different, and at times isolated in her views, and did not want to damage relationships with non-vegans.

Mia: The proud vegan mother

Mia has been vegan for around nine years and has a vegan daughter who is two and a half. Her husband is not vegan but supports her decision. Her original transition to veganism was due to animal welfare concerns, and now includes, health, environmental and other ethical reasons.

Mia described being proud of her decision to continue her veganism and to include her daughter in the lifestyle, particularly given some of the health-related challenges she encountered during pregnancy. She felt positive about identifying as a vegan family and managing a healthy lifestyle for her and her daughter.

Mia struggled to find networks of other likeminded parents, which left her feeling quite isolated from the parenting community and needing to put in additional work to ensure her daughter's vegan needs were catered for. She also felt excluded by medical professionals who failed to provide empathy or vegan-specific support during pregnancy complications, and led her to research alternative sources of information for herself.

1a.	**Question:** Can you tell me about how you became a vegan?

	Prompts:
	     o How long ago
	     o How long did the transition take
	     o Which elements of veganism were most important (why)
	     o Which elements of veganism have you adopted (why)
	     o How did becoming vegan make you feel?
	     o Describe the place of veganism in friendships/family relations

1b.	*[ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR WOMEN WHO HAD A VEGAN PREGNANCY]* **Question:** Can you tell me about how you approached having a vegan pregnancy?

	Prompts:
	     o Who was involved in the decision?
	     o Considerations (health; social; environment)
	     o What would you change/what was missing?
	     o Available vegan-specific information/support (e.g. nutritional advice for mother/baby)
	     o Who support/advice accessed from?
	     o Concrete examples

2.	**Question:** Can you tell me about how you made the decision to raise your child vegan?

	Prompts:
	     o Who was involved in the decision?
	     o How did it feel?
	     o Considerations (health; social; environment)
	     o Challenges (and how overcome/compromised)

3.	**Question:** Can you tell me about your approach to raising your child as a vegan?

	Prompts:
	
	  o Considerations for food
	  o Considerations for products etc.
	  o Health and wellbeing (inc. vaccinations)
	  o How child introduced to veganism
	  o Example of a typical day/routine
	  o Changes over time with new and updated information
	  o Concrete examples

4.	**Question:** How does your child fit into your vegan lifestyle?

	Prompts:
	
	  o Challenges of vegan parenting
	  o Benefits of vegan parenting
	  o Introduction of play and social activities (finding vegan toys; books; activities?)
	  o Concrete examples

5.	*[QUESTION FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE A PARTNER]* **Question:** How does your partner fit into your vegan lifestyle?

	Prompts:
	
	  o Involvement in decisions
	  o Practices in outside the home (partner practises veganism with child/child is not vegan with partner?)
	  o Level of support for mother/child veganism from partner
	  o Involvement of partners extended family?
	  o Concrete examples of how the above are managed

6.	**Question:** Could you tell me how you share with others that your child is vegan?

	Prompts:
	
	    o Disclosure during medical interactions
	    o Disclosing for nursery/school
	    o Disclosing during social interactions
	    o Impact on relationships
	    o How does it feel to 'come out'
	    o Concrete examples

7.	*IF APPLICBLE [otherwise, explore considerations and any steps already taken to secure childcare/place at school]* **Question:** Could you tell me about how you and your child manage their vegan lifestyle at nursery/school?

	Prompts:
	
	    o Disclosure
	    o How does it feel to 'come out'
	    o Availability of support/suitable vegan 'alternatives' (play; books; food' products; topics of education)
	    o Impact on relationships with staff/other parents (mother and baby)
	    o Challenges? How does it feel?
	    o Impact of child's own autonomy/choices (knowledge of mother that child practices veganism when not with her? How does this feel?)
	    o Concrete examples

8.	**Question:** Could you tell me about how you and your child manage their vegan lifestyle when they are socialising?

	Prompts:
	
	    o Disclosure
	    o How does it feel to 'come out'

	o How are the activities your child is involved in managed, and by who? (e.g. non-vegan activities? Aquariums, zoos etc)
	o How is food at social events managed?
	o Challenges? How does it feel?
	o Impact on relationships (mother and baby)
	o Impact of child's own autonomy/choices (knowledge of mother that child practices veganism when not with her? How does this feel?)
	o Concrete examples

9.	**Question:** How easy or difficult did you find being a vegan parent?
	Prompts:
	o Available vegan-specific information
	o Vegan-specific support (e.g. health/wellbeing advice; networks; role models)
	o Who is support/advice accessed from?
	o What would you change/what was missing?
	o Key milestones (vaccinations, school etc.)
	o Balancing staying true to veganism during difficult times
	o Navigating a non-vegan world
	o Concrete examples

10.	**Question:** How does raising your child as a vegan affect how you feel about yourself?
	Prompts:
	o Positive/negative?
	o How do you think others see you? Stigma?
	o Impact on how you see others
	o How has your experience changed over time?
	o Concrete examples (any times when a child is refused something because it is not vegan/advocated for veganism of their own volition? What happened? How did you feel?)

11.	**Question:** How do you imagine your experience of raising children would be if you were not vegan?
	Prompts: o Pros/cons of vegan child-rearing o Why is it different? o How does that make you feel? o Concrete examples

12.	**Question:** How would you feel if your child decided not to be vegan when they grew up?
	Prompts: o What would you do? o What would it mean to you? o How would it make you think of your child? o Concrete examples

13.	**Question:** Knowing what you know now, can you tell me what place you think veganism will have in the lives of you and your family in the future?
	Prompts: o Future children/partner(s) o How will provisions change? More easy/difficult o How will attitudes change? o How will veganism fit into wider society? o How do you feel about the future? o Concrete examples

Camilla

04 December 2020 • 01:14:37

> (.) 1 second pause
> (2) 2 second pause (number indicates duration)
> [additional explanation added by researcher] OR [identifiable information edited
> out] OR to denote an action, such as [laughter]
> [xxx] doubtful transcription
> '…' sentence unfinished

208 *Alice* (20:59)

209 Okay. And then just in terms of, perhaps networks that you have of parents who are not

210 vegan? What's that like for you?

211

212 **Camilla** (21:18)

213 (4) Um, it's, yeah, good question. It's, it's a funny one, because COVID's really kind of, you

214 know, socialising with people on that level has been really hard during COVID. So really,

215 when it comes to kind of, like, eating with other people, we just literally haven't been doing

216 it, but nobody has. In terms of just, you know, talking and connecting with people. Um It's

217 'okaaaay' [high pitched, sense of uncertainty]. But again, I, I would say, that's because we

218 choose friends who are open minded. And, you know, they've known us for years. So

219 they're mates with us, in spite of the fact we're vegan, and they eat meat. And, you know,

220 um it's not, it's not like a deal breaker for them at all. And in fact, they're probably more

221 surprised that that [Camilla's daughter] isn't a vegan, and they're like oh, right. Okay. And

222 actually, it does make it a hell of a lot easier. Because if, oh I don't know [sighs], if I'm out

223 with one of my mum mates and her daughter, and yeah [Camilla's daughter] and her

224 daughter are kind of like running around, they'll be able to share a bag of cheesy puffs

225 without it being a big deal or you know, it's that that kind of thing. I think the sharing thing

226 is something I've been terribly, terribly keen to just promote, because it's such an important

227 social dynamic, being, sharing food with each other is a really important social dynamic.

Experiential statements	Transcript	Exploratory notes
Removing opportunities to eat together for everyone puts her on a more level playing field. Barriers to shared experiences and forming new friendships no longer apply only to vegans. Vegans are positioned as the other and are reliant on benevolence of non-vegans to accept them.	*Alice* (20:59) Okay. And then just in terms of, perhaps networks that you have of parents who are not vegan? What's that like for you? **Camilla** (21:18) (4) Um, it's, yeah, good question. It's, it's a funny one, because COVID's really kind of, you know, socialising with people on that level has been really hard during COVID. So really, when it comes to kind of, like, eating with other people, we just literally haven't been doing it, but nobody has. In terms of just, you know, talking and connecting with people. Um It's 'okaaaay' [high pitched, sense of uncertainty]. But again, I, I would say, that's because we choose friends who are open minded. And, you know, they've known us for years. So they're mates with us, in spite of the fact we're vegan, and they eat meat. And, you know, um it's not, it's not like a deal breaker for them at all.	Due to lockdown they have not been meeting friends F2F. *Funny one* actually suggests sadness – disadvantages of lockdown outweighed by the benefit of removing vegan-related obstacles in F2F settings, such as food? *On that level* double meaning: physical level of F2F / level of intimacy that would lead to disclosure of veganism. *Nobody has:* feels she needs to qualify that she has not been left out due to veganism? Would being left out be a possibility otherwise? Just talking and connecting with people has been 'okaaaay' suggests it has not been wholly enjoyable. Does this point to the importance of F2F contact to Camilla (and the place of sharing lived experiences – such as food – with others?). Onus is on her to navigate others rather than expect acceptance. <u>She assumes position of other</u>. <u>Assumes as a vegan family they are undesirable.</u> Choosing open minded friends alleviates challenges of vegan / non-vegan clash. <u>Fear of rejection.</u> Use of '*I' would say:* this is how she feels / her own assumptions. <u>Veganism is a negative she has internalised but her longstanding friends can see other parts of her too; good (non-vegan) parts.</u> <u>She is grateful for acceptance.</u> <u>Veganism limits friendship options?</u>

The below example of a PET is taken from the analysis of Camilla's interview. It demonstrates how clustered experiential statements form single themes, which are clustered again to develop a final PET.

Personal Experiential Theme: THE SHARING OF FOOD AS A MEANS TO FULL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Theme: Vegan food as a barrier to belonging in a non-vegan world

Experiential statements:

- Enjoying the same food represents a shared frame of reference that veganism prohibits.

- The family unit collectively reject non-veganism, but when her daughter is in the outside world she is free to conform to majority meat-eating practices.

- She attempts to demonstrate allegiance to the norm (non-veganism) when in the presence of her daughter's friends.

Theme: Avoiding difference supports integration

Experiential statements:

- She wants her daughter to full access to all social events and imagines being a vegan child would hinder this.

- Feeling like 'the odd one out' as a child, she attempts to protect her daughter from the same by relaxing her veganism.

- Her daughter must decide what is best for herself, even if this leads her to distance herself from the beliefs of her family.

Theme: The significance of food at social events

<u>Experiential statements:</u>

- When social events involve food, vegans are forced to 'out' themselves.

- Vegan child-rearing becomes more pronounced when the child is introduced to solid food.

- Being a vegan child would remove her daughter's ability to make her own choices with and around peers.

- In the absence of food, vegans are more able to express parts of their identity that do not relate to the lifestyle.

Theme: Non-vegans as gatekeepers of 'normal'

<u>Experiential statements:</u>

- Dietary requirements versus moral judgements: food preferences are more accepted by non-vegans when they are considered to be value neutral.

- The provision of inclusive menu options prevents vegans being viewed as abnormal.

- Witnessing the transition to veganism from non-vegans can engender receptiveness to the lifestyle and may lead the way for others.

Appendix 9: Example Group Experiential Theme (GET)

The below example of a GET demonstrates how the women's PETs are clustered to develop a shared GET. Whilst all twelve women are represented across the entire set of GETs, not all women feature in a single GET.

Group Experiential Theme: A NEED FOR SHARED EXPERIENCE FOR MEANINGFUL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Theme: Choosing between compromise and exclusion

Personal Experiential Themes:

- She must choose between disrupting the principles of Islam or the rules of veganism.

- A sense of them and us: non-veganism is an indoctrination that vegans have escaped.

- Reconciling individuality with social integration.

Theme: The irreconcilable nature of veganism and non-veganism

Personal Experiential Themes:

- Struggling to belong: a vegan in a non-vegan world.

- She had no one to turn to.

- Isolating herself due to her vegan ideals.

Theme: Recognition and respect for vegan beliefs leads to feelings of inclusion

<u>Personal Experiential Themes:</u>

- Feelings of overwhelm when non-vegans work together to be inclusive of all children.

- Surprise and gratitude when vegan options are offered without request.

- Having her beliefs supported by non-vegans feels validating and she is full of pride.

The below diagram provides an illustrative example of analysis for the second empirical chapter. Data relates to the theme of 'a need for shared experience for meaningful social participation'. Experiential statements are in light green boxes and express the fraction of 'project' within the theme. Included for each experiential statement are brief coding notes in white boxes.
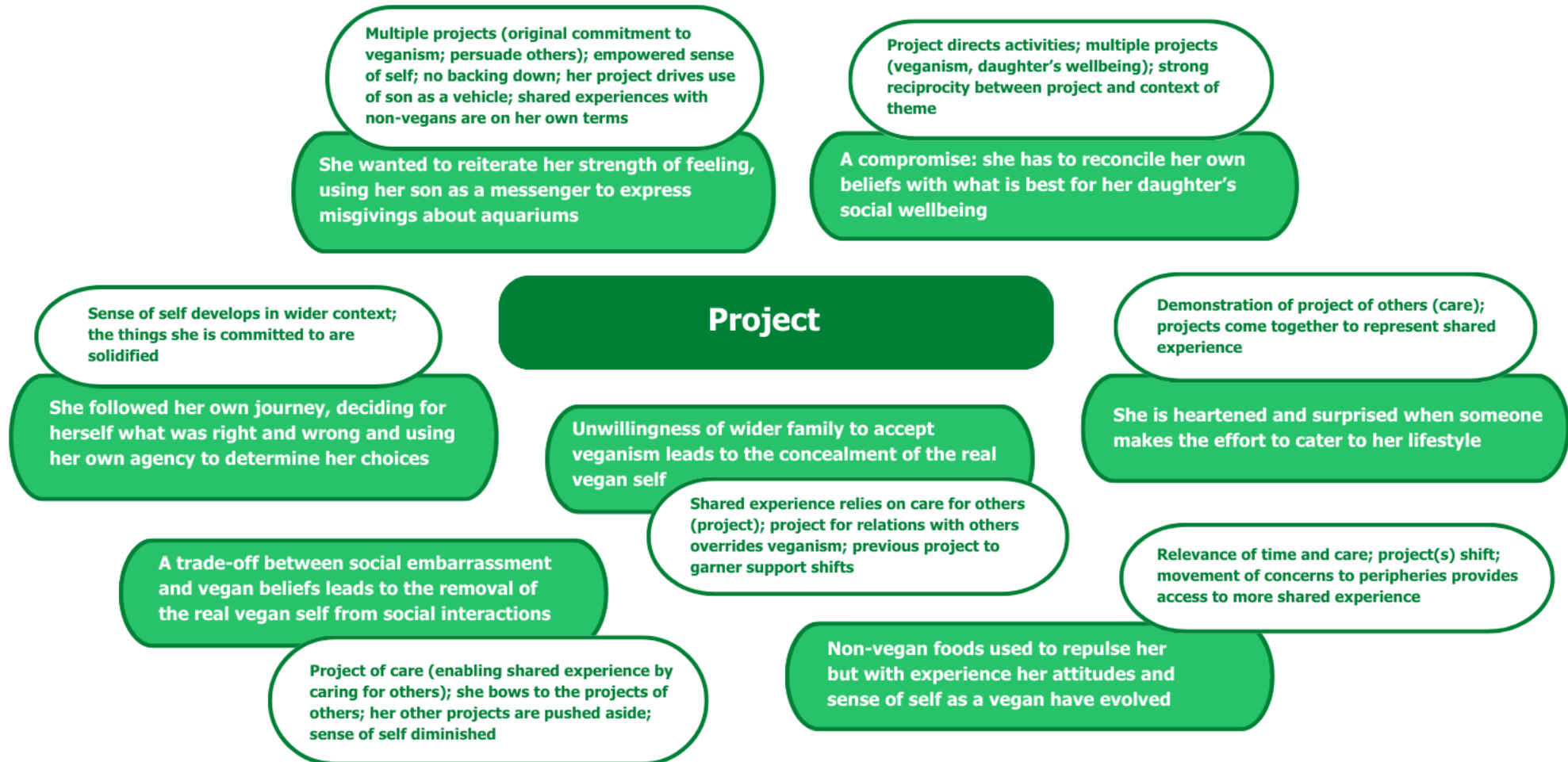
The below diagram presents the experiential statements within which the discursive construction 'vegan parents as deviant' was expressed. Experiential statements are in light green boxes. In white boxes are brief coding notes for each experiential theme.

Negative connotations of veganism binary; dangerous/wrong

Veganism feels more acceptable when there are no strict vegan/non-vegan binaries

As a vegan she is singled out, almost like she a benchmark for non-vegan parents to ensure they are doing the right thing

Veganism is conflated with instances of poor parenting

Recognition of difference; recognition of lack of acceptance

Conflation of veganism with harm; non-vegan parents positioned as 'good'

Internalised discourses; the need to disclose highlights sense of difference

Focus on danger; harming children; dangerous vegans; stupid vegans?

Acceptance of 'alternative' needs not currently being met; needs ignored (don't matter?); necessity is in direct opposition to what is important to her

She worries she will be perceived in a negative way if she tells people she is vegan

The involvement of children in veganism causes more objection than for adults

Assumes position of other; anticipates judgment

She accepts the necessity for medicines to be tested on animals but supports the need to find alternatives

Vegan parents as deviant

By avoiding situations where people have the opportunity to judge or question her, she is able to save herself feelings of upset

A sense of dread that the sharing of food would mean a spotlight would be shone on her veganism

Acknowledges difference; internalises/anticipates response to veganism; shame

A sense of pride that her son is vegan and large for his age

She believes that the view of vegans as extreme is fuelled by a very small sample of people who misrepresent the lifestyle

Challenge discourses; internalised expectation her child would be different/small?

Highlights negative discourses; refutes reality of negatives discourses; identifies where true deviance exists

'Them and us' extends to all institutions; deeply ingrained discourses impact objectivity/reason

Tension between believing veganism is best but worrying it was doing harm

Negative preconceptions about veganism causes insidious approach to monitoring vegan parents

The experiences of vegans varies depending on how they align with the dominant discourses of the society they're in

Internalised discourses; lack of resources/support for minorities; hard to avoid responding to discourses

Suspicion; 'them and us'; assumptions based on discourses; deeply ingrained discourses impact objectivity/reason

Direct reference; levels of deviance depending how closely vegans align with the norm; uses her own type of veganism for leverage towards the norm

Veganism as a go-to or easy option for medical professionals to assign blame to complications