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Exploring young women's vegan experiences in Aotearoa:

"[E]verything apart from white men is under threat…"

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Abstract

In the last ten years, veganism has transformed from a fringe social justice movement into something akin to a trendy lifestyle choice. Across the Western world, young women are its most likely followers. To explore this shift, this study sought to understand how young vegan women negotiate being vegan among mainstream norms and pressures in Aotearoa New Zealand. It looked to see how young women's vegan experiences intersected with veganism as a social justice movement. The role of social media platforms was also investigated. Assuming a critical feminist standpoint, narrative discursive analytics were applied to the narratives of eight self-identifying vegan women. Their narratives exhibited high levels of stigma, requiring active management against mainstream norms. In part, neoliberal and postfeminist contexts shaped the women's negotiation of veganism, interpellating them into regimes that positioned health as an individualised responsibility. Concurrently, veganism was a significant source of meaning-making that touched on such spheres as knowledge production, spirituality, and multiple, intersecting oppressions. Overall, my analysis emphasises that young vegan women today occupy a space in which veganism represents more than a diet and yet, they remain constrained by grander socio-cultural, pollical, and historical scripts, curbing radical political potential.

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Elisabeth, who would be telling everyone about this, all flushed with love and pride. Guck' mal her, Mama, was ich geschafft habe!

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Chapter 1: An introduction to veganism

Over twenty years ago, I turned to veganism after witnessing a lorry full of chickens, helplessly flapping around, on their way to slaughter. My subsequent inquiry into the (supposedly) humane practices of animal agriculture left me feeling shocked and disillusioned - no longer willing to support an industry that inflicts needless suffering on billions of beings. In my world back then, veganism was associated with straightedge subculture, tethering it to anti-consumerism, anarchy, and punk aesthetics. Unable to recognise myself fully in this while also transgressing mainstream consumption norms, I have kept my veganism mostly hidden. With veganism's increasing popularity however, I wondered if things had changed for young women today. To satisfy my curiosity, I set out to capture vegan experiences among young women in Aotearoa New Zealand (referred to as Aotearoa from here on) today.

Veganism is much harder to define than it may seem. A useful starting point is the much-cited definition of The Vegan Society (2022a): "a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose". Although the definition is contentious and fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of veganism's histories, it highlights that veganism's aims are two-fold: Veganism is not only concerned with animal product consumption but also serves as an ethical framework that reimagines human-animal relationships. Increasingly, its popularity troubles the existing, more radical traditions of a vegan praxis (Cherry, 2016). This may delimit critical examination of veganism's relationship to animal ethics, dominant understandings of the body, political institutions, media representations, health, and psychology. These issues will be further examined throughout this thesis.

The glorification of vegan athletes in films (Psihoyos, 2018), dietary health benefits (Braun & Carruthers, 2020), and concerns about the environment (Clay et al., 2020) all speak to veganism's diversity and fluidity. These conceptualisations contrast the perception of veganism as ascetic or

extreme (Cole, 2008; Cole & Morgan, 2011). Its shifting definition has launched it into a political landscape coloured by notions of individual choice, personal responsibility, and flexibility (Kemper & White, 2021). Especially with the advent of plant-based eating, veganism tends toward an individualised eating practice within existing food systems. Yet, this remains juxtaposed to its ethical activist roots (Cherry, 2010), making veganism's boundaries ever more diffuse and permeable.

Despite these contentions, veganism's star is rising among trendy foodscapes. A marginalised practice throughout the twentieth century (Cherry, 2016), plant-based eating has seen exponential growth over the last ten years. The number of vegans in the U.S.A. tripled between 2012 and 2018 to encompass 10 million people (McCarthy & Dekoster, 2020), and U.K. vegans ballooned by a factor of four in roughly the same period (Mori, 2019). In 2019, The Economist declared it "the Year of the Vegan", suggesting that it would become "mainstream" (Parker, 2018, paragraph 1). Closer to home, Google search trends have illustrated that the interest was not confined to the Northern Hemisphere: Aotearoa scored in the top three for vegan searches (Kamiński et al., 2020) with national polls estimating that roughly 0.5% of the population identified as vegan (Colmar Brunton, 2019; Judge & Wilson, 2019; Milfont et al., 2021). Indeed, mainstream media reports have demonstrated an appetite for veganism in the public ethos (Woolf & Rasmussen, 2020). The rapid spread of information online has boosted an awareness of the environmental impact of animal products, veganism's health benefits, and animal rights concerns. The development is mirrored by an array of documentaries available on streaming websites, dissecting all aspects of veganism. Podcasts and blogs along with social media influencers have added to its appeal, too (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Pirani & Fegitz, 2019; Psihoyos, 2018).

Vegans in Aotearoa still comprise a distinct minority. Globally, Aotearoa ranks fourth in terms of meat consumption. While the average meat consumption per person in the world is around 43 kg, New Zealand dwarfed this with 76 kg per person (Ritchie & Poser, 2019). Animal-based protein

accounts for 60% of Aotearoa's total exports, signalling large profits (MPI, 2018). Yet, the sector is also responsible for the greatest amount of greenhouse emissions (Ministry for the Environment, 2021), an issue that is increasingly garnering more public and institutional attention. Regardless, Aotearoa's love affair with eating meat and animal products emerges clearly from the literature: Animal products remain central to dominant traditions, reflecting a national passion for agricultural pursuits (White & Potts, 2008). White and Potts (2008) even suggest that these eating practices represent dominant symbols of Aotearoa's nationhood, positioning veganism as something akin to unpatriotic.

Gender, oppression, feminism, and veganism

Having situated my study in the context of Aotearoa, I now introduce veganism in the context of gender, its entanglement with feminism, and the socio-political landscape that houses these grand narratives. My research talked to young women between the ages of 16 and 20 years about veganism. This choice was motivated by the fact that most vegans are women, outnumbering men eight-to-one (Hancox, 2018; McCarthy & Dekoster, 2020). The reasons for this are complex and remain under-explored with varying theories put forth but lacking consensus. Most studies highlight the representational meanings of food choice. Food holds symbolic significance above and beyond sustenance, featuring in identity formation, status, ritual, and tradition. Animal products hold particular value and contribute integrally to the cultural fabric of life (Potts, 2017). They represent important ideas related to gender (Adams, 2010) along with class (White & Potts, 2008), race/ethnicity (Harper, 2010a), and political orientation (Dickstein et al., 2020), signalling both wealth and prestige (Taylor, 2017). In linking gender to animal products, scholars suggest that gender and animal oppression share commonalities rooted in patriarchy (Adams, 2016; Wright, 2015). These ideas indicate that exploring veganism through a feminist framework was appropriate.

Exploring the connection between veganism and other oppressions has been the subject of both activism and academic scholarship. Veganism's link to feminism is grounded in ecofeminism, highlighting the similarities between the oppression of women and animals (Adams, 2016; Gaard, 2011). Here, veganism serves as a way to contest oppressions by drawing parallels between patriarchy, man's domination over woman, and speciesism or man's domination over nature (Sturgeon, 2009). According to ecofeminism, essentialist conceptions of gender and the devaluation of nature are foundational for other oppressions where some groups are viewed as less-than-human – sexism, racism, classism, ableism, etc. Feminism also problematises the stigmatisation of feminine qualities (e.g., care, emotion) and calls for the development of an ethical framework that distances itself from the rationality of anthropocentric forms of ethics (Hill Collins, 2000). In the context of veganism, ecofeminist foundations highlight how animal oppression is relevant to feminism today. In fact, veganism's rejection to see animals as the other serves as radical political activism, enacted as an everyday consumption practice, contesting patriarchy and other oppressive institutions on a daily basis.

Yet, veganism's increasing popularity invites questions about whether it can hold on to its ethical roots. Greater knowledge, increased availability and accessibility of vegan food, and vibrant vegan communities in real life and online have made embracing veganism much easier. There is a flip side, however: In some ways, commercialisation has borne "lifestyle veganism" (White, 2018, p. 4), solely centred on food. This iteration of veganism fails to recalibrate human-animal relations and does not acknowledge social justice. This may mean that veganism loses sight of the socio-cultural, political, and historical landscapes that enable and constrict people (Foucault, 2003). The danger remains that veganism becomes an extension of neoliberal consumer culture, where vegan subjectivities are interpellated into lifestyle veganism rather than more radical, politically-oriented veganism.

With a focus on consumption practices, women also become interpellated into versions of feminism that celebrate notions of empowerment, personal choice, and individual responsibility. These iterations suggest that gender equality has been attained and that freedom is obtained in the neoliberal marketplace (Gill, 2007a). The gendered Western beauty ideal also remains entangled here (Bordo, 2004): Consumption practices are positioned as working on the body in order to attain the good life, where ideal femininity is performed by a white, middle class, and heterosexual body (McRobbie, 2015). Of course, this line of thinking obscures structural and institutional oppressions and makes it difficult to critique what it means to be the right kind of vegan woman.

Research questions

This study aims to explore the way that young women negotiate the pressures and challenges of veganism in Aotearoa's current environment. My research is situated in feminist conceptualisations, enabling me to analyse how young women live or attempt to experience being the right kind of vegan woman, with a focus on the grander narratives and the discursive landscape. I emphasise the little stories and connect them to the bigger stories, both illusive and immaterial but relevant to both veganism and feminism. Hence, my research aims for this project were:

1. How do young women negotiate veganism among mainstream norms and pressures?
2. How do their experiences intersect with veganism as a social justice movement?
3. What role do social media platforms play among this?

Structure of the thesis

Chapter two houses my literature review, which begins by examining veganism's multiple histories, iterations, meanings. Then, it outlines the three pervasive ideologies that continue to dominate young women – postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism – and how these relate to veganism. Their significance is discussed in individual, relational, and virtual contexts. Chapter Three

is devoted to my methodological approach. Chapter Four encompasses my findings and an integrated discussion, highlighting the discursive strategies that participants used in their stories. Lastly, in Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of my research. Throughout, I stress the situated experience of young vegan women in our textual landscapes – the contingencies of the past as they feed into the present-day discursive environment and the embodiment of these big stories in the small stories of young vegan women in Aotearoa.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter provides the context for my analysis. I dive briefly into the history of veganism and then move to explain the socio-cultural and political narratives that surround the current iteration of veganism. I also look at veganism in virtual spaces and social media engagement. Throughout, I pay special attention to gender and young people.

A (very) brief history of veganism(s)

Western definitions and understandings of veganism derive from The Vegan Society, founded in the U.K. in 1944 (The Vegan Society, 2022b). Amidst the chaos and devastation of post-war Britain, its inception imagined a world where animals were free from exploitation (Rodger, 2002). The envisioned future encompassed a kinder and more compassionate humanity. Essentially, in a time of tragedy and heartache, vegans declared peace and justice for all, recalibrating both human-animal and human-human relations.

While Western conceptualisations of veganism are rooted in the anti-war movement, food shortages, famine, and soil depletion registered on the radar as early as 1948 with vegans highlighting that animal agriculture disrupted the delicate balance between humans, animals, and the planet (Wrenn, 2019). In the 1970's and 80's, when the animal rights movement rose to prominence, veganism gained traction (Cavalieri, 2016). Animal rights activism actioned the public awareness of animal exploitation's entanglement with environmentalist and utilitarian causes (Lappé, 1991; Singer, 1976). Yet, this rights-based animal rights position remains almost absent from current vegan discourse. Today, it mainly serves to differentiate between fundamental rights violations (any exploitation of animals) and animal cruelty, which permits exploitation but argues for less cruel conditions (Palmer, 2010). Broadly speaking, the animal rights movement gave rise to the academic field of critical animal studies.

Both critical animal studies and veganism base many of their arguments on the concept of speciesism. Speciesism dictates that certain animal species hold more value than others and therefore, deserve a higher degree of ethical consideration (Ryder & Singer, 2017). The notion of speciesism paves the way for animal exploitation as the supremacy of humankind is assumed. While humans sit at the top of the hierarchy, the rest of the animal kingdom does not fare quite as well. Some species enjoy legal protection from cruel treatment (e.g., cats and dogs), yet farmed animals or insects, for example, fail to be included (Caviola et al., 2019). Speciesism's rationale, articulated through a conditioned human supremacist position, then explains why humans can proclaim to love animals and yet, have little moral objection to eating them (Joy, 2020). In this way, speciesism sits along other forms of prejudice, bias, and discrimination such as racism, sexism, ableism, etc. Yet, this helps to situate and position veganism alongside other social justice movements such as civil rights, feminism, and the environmental movement.

Yet, when discussing veganism's history, we must acknowledge that practices of nonviolence are also rooted among non-white and non-Western cultures and date back many more centuries (Wrenn, 2019). These practices circumscribe ethical, spiritual, and environmental reasons (Ryder & Singer, 2017). For example, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism all advocate for abstinence from animal products, pre-dating The Vegan Society's inception. Hence, this thesis recognises that no one history of veganism is quintessential and that multiple histories exist alongside each other. A lack of neat beginnings and the resulting tension, however, does not delimit critical discussions of vegan ethics. Rather, the complexity can serve to interrogate veganism's entanglement among other social justice issues with implications that reach far beyond food. Critical to any histories of veganism is the link between industrial-scale farming, unequal food systems, and colonialism (Harper, 2010b). Today, vegan voices from black and indigenous communities and the Global South are loudly demonstrating their erasure from mainstream, Eurocentric narratives of veganism (Ko & Ko, 2017). Yet, among mainstream voices, the loudest ones still tend to belong to white, masculine bodies.

Despite the fact that women outnumber men in the Global North (The Vegan Society, 2022), they remain underrepresented.

Buffered by the rise of social media in the last ten years, veganism has received much corporate and consumerist capture (Braun & Carruthers, 2020). Neoliberally oriented political principles have meant that veganism's ethical foundations are at risk (Wright, 2015). While veganism aspires to a (more) peaceful world with radical nonviolence (toward humans, animals, and the planet), its ethos may become attenuated and reconfigured to fit into the existing neoliberal economic landscape (Clay et al., 2020). This thinking is pitted against prominent strains of vegan activism that present themselves as solely focused on animal rights. Here, holistic notions of humanity's wellbeing that centre the need for symbiosis across species lines are silenced (Wright, 2015). Yet, a vegan philosophy emphasises the interconnections between becoming and being a vegan self and the advent of a more compassionate human society (Cole, 2014). Vegan ethics hold that the vegan subject is a site of transformation: Through lived praxis, vegans engage in emancipation and liberation at the level of the body. It is this body then that (re)presents and (re)produces what veganism means in today's world.

Critical scholarship

Critical academic engagement with veganism is complex and whittling it down to a singular object of study remains difficult (Wright, 2021). Studying veganism involves ideas that encompass ethics, health, the environment, politics, and media representations. While this thesis is grounded in the psychological aspects of veganism, a broad range of interdisciplinary writers, academics, and philosophers have all contributed to vegan scholarship. With the involvement of many academic fields, critical scholarship set into motion the emergence of vegan studies – an area of academic inquiry in its own right. Vegan studies and veganism as a social justice movement have been heavily influenced by two scholarly traditions: Critical animal studies and ecofeminism.

Critical animal studies

Emerging from the academic tradition of animal studies, critical animal studies (CAS) eschewed any form of animal exploitation (Best et al., 2007). A commitment to total animal liberation became *the* fundamental principle. The clear political commitment marks a shift in the last 20 years that recognises the significance that animals hold as social beings (Twine & Taylor, 2014). Notions of animal significance necessarily complicate their place in our material world – as commodities for trade. In addition, it throws up questions regarding the concept of social as inherently human, and therefore, interrogates what it means to be human (or animal). With its conceptual roots grounded in liberation and anarchy, CAS overtly criticises more mainstream movements as apolitical, accusing them of complicity in animal oppression (Best, 2009). CAS has generated novel theoretical and methodological approaches within the Academy, carving out space for radical forms of inquiry and action (Twine & Taylor, 2014). This necessarily blurs the lines between academic and activist. In fact, critical animal studies pledges to "eschew narrow academic viewpoints and the debilitating theory-for-theory's sake position" by "disassociat[ing] one's self…from academia, academies, and the academic industrial complex" (ICAS, 2016, p. 2).

Despite a critical stance, CAS presents a nuanced account of veganism that has surprised more mainstream academics who were ready to dismiss it completely (Best, 2009). Even in the early days, scholars raised concerns about a possible co-optation of veganism by capitalism, while concurrently noting that animal right advocacy must resist inflexible and rule-bound tactics; the ability to advocate in particular ways and times rests on privilege. Hence, scholars warned that these dynamics risk positioning veganism as the type of social justice movement that is only accessible and appealing to a white, Western, upper- and middle-class minority (Best, 2009). While the tension surrounded veganism even then, the insularity of the vegan movement only revealed itself fully,

when intersections between race and animal oppression were examined (Yarborough & Thomas, 2010).

Although CAS's intentions were always radical and encompassed strands of feminist, anti-capitalist, and de-colonial thinking, the erasure of women's voices, especially those of women of colour, pointed to the lack of race interrogation among the mainstream vegan movement (Harper, 2010a). For example, Harper (2010) demonstrates the fallacy of calling vegan food cruelty-free. She highlights the non-white, racialised bodies working in oppressive conditions and deprived localities that enable people in Western countries to consume products deemed vegan. Grounded in Black feminism, the inquiry spawned multiple new avenues that investigate intersecting oppressions in our more-than-human world (e.g., Harper, 2010b; Ko & Ko, 2017). This led veganism away from purity politics and centred all injustice in the existing food systems instead.

Ecofeminist vegan studies

The call for emancipation of veganism from animal studies spawned its own academic field - vegan studies. Wright (2015) articulates the need for a feminist-oriented discipline that exclusively engages with veganism, although other strands exist and employ varying theoretical and methodological orientations (Gillespie, 2017; Hamilton, 2016). According to Wright (2015), veganism is simultaneously an identity category and a practice. The focus of vegan as an identity category differentiates vegan studies from a vegan theoretical lens in CAS. Ethically motivated veganism, where animal advocacy and liberation feature heavily, is not the only reason people take up veganism. While CAS's considers this an imperative (ICAS, 2016), vegan studies acknowledges the multiplicity of feelings and motivations that lead to veganism.

Vegan studies engages with the construction and contestation of vegan selves and their embodied practices regardless of motivation and therefore, leans further toward examining the

socio-culturally produced discourses that surround veganism. While Wright (2015) situates her analysis in the USA, others have followed suit across a wide range of national contexts (e.g., Fuste-Forne, 2021; Hung, 2021; Wrenn, 2021). While Wright (2015) explicitly centres the evolving politics of representation, vegan studies also examines and deconstructs the ways the vegan body signifies a site of contestation for socio-cultural, political, and ethical theorising (Wright, 2019). Wright (2019) adamantly echoes the calls of second wave feminists for a lived politics based on listening, care, emotion, and relationality that reimagines the world as more just (Schuster, 2017). This lived politics encompasses a daily vegan practice but incorporates an ethical framework that exceeds its theoretical foundations and includes listening to perspectives that may challenge vegan standpoints.

The affinity of vegan studies and feminist conceptualisations of ethics is foundational (Wright, 2015). Vegan studies grew out of ecofeminist scholarship seeded in the second half of the twentieth century. Ecofeminism is located at the crossroads of ecology, feminism, and socialism; it holds that the ideology that sanctions oppressions based on qualities such as gender, ability, sexuality, class, race, and species are legitimised and normalised in the same way as the oppression of nature (Gaard, 2011). The argument that the exploitation of natural resources including the treatment of animals for human benefit is rooted in patriarchy features heavily in vegan studies (Adams, 2016). Exploring the interconnections between misogyny across most of the globe and the obsession with meat and masculinity heralded the critical examination of enmeshed oppressions that serves as ecofeminism's mission statement.

In contrast, some feminists have focused on contesting the linkage of women and the natural world (Kheel, 2004), where the association is seen to be proffering essentialist notions of gender and patriarchy (Rickard, 2015). They draw on a body of scholarship that illustrates how specific groups of people have been conflated as too natural. That is, particular groups such as women, people of colour, and animals bear the brunt of gendered dualism where man is

synonymous with “culture”, “good”, “spiritual”, and “rational” and other groups are left with such labels as “evil”, “nature”, “nonrational”, and “profane” (Kheel, 2004, p. 328). Instead, ecofeminists set out on a different path focusing on the devaluation of nature as the basis for gender oppression. In fact, ecofeminists resolutely proclaim that as long as the oppression of nature is legitimised and normalised, the framework exists by which groups of people can be dehumanised (Wright, 2015).

The last point deserves illustration of the historical context in which this thinking is situated. In the post 9/11 landscape, American culture underwent a shift that deepened the bifurcation of us vs. them rhetoric (Wright, 2015). Such nationalistic rhetoric authorised an increase of violent and dehumanising acts toward people and entities perceived as foreign. Non-normative dietary choices such as Muslim food dictates and veganism became linked to protest and dissent that required covert monitoring (Wright, 2015). The discursive environment positioned veganism as unpatriotic with rumoured links to anti-American terrorism (Lundahl, 2020; Sorenson, 2009). In fact, a number of vegan animal rights and environmental activists remain sought after by the FBI today. The cultural shift initiated new legislation that harshly punishes grassroots activism to protect corporate interests and the agricultural industrial complex (Best et al., 2020).

Wright (2015) argues that these developments illustrate the perception of veganism as an ideology not only at odds with the contemporary political environment but as outright dangerous. Often, discourses that label things animal are used to justify violence against animals. Subsequently, these can then be applied to certain groups of people to dehumanise them and legitimate violence (Wright, 2017). Yet, this is contested: An anti-vegan stance has been linked to white supremacist groups (Gambert & Linné, 2018), but veganism has also been used by far-right groups to vilify ethnic minorities (Clark et al., 2008). Hence, there is much complexity here that remains difficult to untangle.

Regardless of these tensions, ecofeminism remains central to the study of veganism in two important ways. Firstly, ecofeminism highlights the interconnected nature of oppressions and therefore, illustrates that working toward ending any form of exploitation, including that of animals, is vital in furthering the feminist cause. Secondly, by contesting taken-for-granted practices such as meat consumption, veganism becomes a way to challenge routines and practices that position particular groups (for example, animals) as the other. Here, veganism defies the sort of dualistic thinking that allows practices and institutions to become normalised as the natural order of things.

The various ways through which speciesism informs and upholds sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, racism, colonialism, etc are interrogated both by vegan scholarship and vegans themselves (Allcorn & Ogletree, 2018). In this way, being vegan is much more than either an identity category or daily practice. In scrutinising how these oppressive forces traverse and uphold each other, veganism can (re)imagine and (re)articulate a world that is less violent and more just. The ethical and political commitments of veganism, developed in response to Western, Eurocentric traditions of exploiting animals referred to in this thesis, represent forms of resistance against *all* oppression. Rather than a trendy lifestyle choice, a dietary practice, or moralistic imperative, veganism is a social justice cause, a disciplined lived practice and an expression of values, aiming to make the world a better place.

Vegan transformation

People turn to veganism for a variety of reasons. A large number of people report that they go vegan for health reasons (Ruby, 2012). Vegans tend to have a lower body mass index (Spencer et al., 2003), which takes on added significance among a socio-political environment coloured by an obesity epidemic (Oliver, 2006). While the debate rages on about the (possible) harmful effects of animal product consumption (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2020), food choices have become fused with concepts of health, making plant-based eating a salient option. A vegan diet has been linked to a risk reduction in conditions such as cardiovascular disease (Matsumoto et al., 2019) and diabetes

(Tonstad et al., 2013). However, it is important to note that there's a plethora of dietary and nutritional advice in circulation, often sending conflicting messages about what constitutes healthy eating (Sikka, 2019).

By a number of metrics, the agricultural processes that generate animal products have also been shown to produce a greater amount of greenhouse gasses than those used in plant-based eating (Clark & Tilman, 2017). In addition, a vegan diet has been presented as the most feasible way through which to reduce one's overall carbon footprint (Wynes & Nicholas, 2018). Arguably, climate change has become the most prominent crisis facing the globe with the effects of anthropogenic climate change tipped to reify catastrophic consequences in the immediate and long-term future (Pörtner et al., 2019). Hence, from a perspective that privileges environmental issues, veganism represents an important way to action change.

The most common motivation for embracing veganism remains the ethical commitment to end oppression against animals (Ruby, 2012). Despite debate amongst scholars about the ethical perspective underlying the moral consideration of animal lives, the majority acknowledges that veganism enables aligning one's moral principles with actions in real life (Singer, 2019). Often, the transition to veganism for ethically motivated vegans comes in the form of turning point moments that existentially challenge their previous consumption choices (Denzin, 2018). These instances recalibrate animal product consumption's normativity in the eyes of fresh vegans, irrevocably reshaping their outlook and rendering the practices associated with animal agriculture as abhorrent.

Vegan stereotypes

Despite veganism's aspirations to (re)imagine the world as more just, its public image has been a stigmatised one (Greenebaum, 2012). While veganism has increasingly been presented as a sensible antidote to the environmental crisis and garnered positive attention in the press (Clay et al.,

2020), dominant media depictions have also played an essential role in perpetuating negative stereotypes. Over the years, these have generated and maintained discourses and socio-cultural narratives positioning veganism as the other (Cole & Morgan, 2011). This other is always negotiated against an ideological framework that situates animal product consumption as normal, necessary, natural, and nice (Piazza et al., 2015). Joy (2020) termed this ideology carnism, which conditions us to and endorses animal product consumption. Carnism's significance hinges on its invisibility: Historical contingencies have sited animal product consumption as an unquestionable norm, articulating what is the ideal mode of consumption for people among the socio-political landscape of Western countries (Stephens Griffin, 2017).

The ordinariness and taken-for-granted nature of carnistic messaging therefore make questioning the hidden and engrained norms surrounding animal product consumption next to impossible (Joy, 2020). In this way, animal product consumption is far from a free and rational choice. Rather, carnism's beliefs and practices are omnipresent - from birth until death - and adherence to its regulatory force remains continuously socially sanctioned. Along with political and economic interests, media depictions are part of a complex web of social processes that maintain and perpetuate the hidden-yet-compelling normativity of carnism.

"Vegaphobic" discourses operate through some main stereotypical representations: Vegans are variably characterised as overly empathetic, nutritionally deficient and sickly, unhygienic, hostile, and generally unpleasant company in social situations (Cole & Morgan, 2011). These stereotypes have been identified as a key barrier in the uptake of veganism (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). When vegaphobic discourses collide with gender, often anti-vegan and sexist sentiments combine to form a barrage of tacit feminisation (Cole & Morgan, 2011) where veganism only deepens essentialist notions that women are overly emotional, irrational, and angry (Appignanesi, 2008).

The historical association of women with pathology produces an understanding of vegan femininities as inherently faulty – feebleminded with dysfunctional bodies, in desperate need of fixing. Such hostile discursive arrangements usually originate from masculine bodies and feed into wider socio-cultural narratives that foreground heteronormative linkages between meat-eating and masculinity (Potts & Parry, 2010). This positions vegan femininity as particularly threatening to normative masculinity above and beyond veganism's perception as unfashionable, abnormal, and ascetic (Cole & Morgan, 2011).

To counteract these negative stereotypes, animal rights organisations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have attempted to transform veganism, and especially vegan femininities, into something sexy and sultry (Deckha, 2008). In some ways, veganism's sex appeal has increased over the years, making it more marketable and profitable, especially in the current neoliberal capitalist system. Overall, however, the perception of vegans still veers toward disapproval.

Stigmatised vegan identity

The various stereotypes in circulation propel veganism into the arena of stigmatised identities, where being vegan is the type of trait that can "obtrude itself upon attention" (Goffman, 1990, p. 5). The vegan attribute can then lead to a devalued social identity. A stigmatised person is ascribed stereotypes or other deviant labels that increase vulnerability to prejudice, discrimination, unfair treatment, and status loss (Phelan et al., 2008). Often, stigmatised identities are dictated to and taken advantage of, subject to norm enforcement, and considered deviant. Vegan stigmatised subjectivities often feel dominated and exploited; they become ostracised from their social circle and judged for the choice to embrace a vegan identity (Greenebaum, 2012). Norm enforcement takes the shape of pressure to join in animal product consumption, especially in environments where commensality is prized (Wright, 2015). When it comes to shared eating practices, the mere

presence of vegans challenges the omnivorous mainstream to confront ethically ambivalent feelings regarding animal product consumption. Vegans, physical reminders of the moral flaws of animal product consumption, function as "killjoys" that disrupt the social status quo (Twine, 2014).

Carnism's invisibility means that the violence of animal product consumption is not often brought to overt awareness. Most of the time, non-vegans do not have to work hard to dissociate animal products from the animals themselves; animals are after all linguistically, discursively, and metaphorically "absent referents" (Adams, 2016, p. 22). Their deaths en masse for animal product consumption renders them literally absent, referring to animals as "beef" or "pork" divorces them from their lived embodiment, and animals remain figuratively absent when linking their flesh to human suffering through metaphors such as being treated like a piece of meat. These mechanisms allow cognitive dissonance to flourish among non-vegans (Festinger, 1957). Theories of cognitive dissonance are frequently drawn on to explain animal production consumption, even when associated practices oppose people's wider ethical commitments (Loughnan et al., 2014). In rearticulating Ahmed's (2010) conceptualisation of the "feminist killjoy" (p. 571), Twine (2014) illustrates how vegans bring non-vegan cognitive dissonance into the light and so, produce unpleasant feelings in non-vegans as they confront ethical flaws in their thinking. The negative feelings are then attributed to vegans as people. As a form of rebellion to dominant food narratives and conventions, veganism remains hard to swallow for non-vegans. Hence, veganism and vegans are stigmatised – a marginalised group pushed to the very fringes of social acceptability.

Contemporary political landscape: Neoliberalism

An ideology that hegemonically pervades the lives of most people, and yet, is a complex concept to define: Neoliberalism has journeyed through time, place, and political regimes to become a theoretical framework so institutionalised within the modern fabric of life that it is almost considered common sense (Harvey, 2020). Its global beginnings can be traced back to the 1970's,

when a shift in economic principles brought about the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms, an increase in free-market competition, and the deregulation of trade (Grzanka et al., 2016). Neoliberal practices also led to the withdrawal of state intervention in social provisions, even in countries deemed welfare states such as Aotearoa (Harvey, 2020).

The last fifty years have led to the infiltration of a neoliberal mode of thinking into such areas as education, corporations, the media, and financial institutions. Neoliberalism and its ideological effects have become so hegemonic that they are unremarkable, serving as *the* mode through which most people interpret, live in, and understand the world (Harvey, 2020). Harvey (2020) even ventures that neoliberalism's emphasis on free trade and market transactions has displaced all past ethical values and principles to become *the* ethic that guides all human action in the present.

Despite neoliberalism's tight yet unseen hold on the hearts and minds of the world, neoliberalism remains conceptually difficult to define (Labica, 2020). It encompasses such a wide range of phenomena, trends, and policies that the intellectual landscape of inquiry is marked by confusion and dismay. What is clear, however, is that neoliberalism's ethic has been of "critical assistance to the cause of totalization in an age of continued and deepening fragmentations, be they territorial (national, urban) or across labour markets or political spheres" (Labica, 2020, p. 4). While the exact moment at which neoliberalism arrived on Aotearoa's shores remains hard to pinpoint, the snap election in 1984 is considered its inauguration (Redden et al., 2020). The dependence on the production and export of agricultural commodities among repressive National Party reforms led to a distinct lack of economic progress between the mid-1970's and 80's, building the countries appetite for radical changes referred to as Rogernomics. The full historical sequence is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the gist of Aotearoa's neoliberal experiment remains much the same as in other parts of the globe: While privatisation, deregulation, and free participation in the marketplace

promised increased wealth that would trickle down to all members of society, neoliberal economic interventions have delivered everything but (Redden et al., 2020). Instead, wealth, housing, health, employment, education, and welfare disparities are only mounting (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

As the hegemonic ideology in the Western world, neoliberalism instrumentally shapes our psychological experience and subjectivities (Rutherford, 2018). Neoliberalism informs and regulates its subjects through the internalisation of its authority rather than external sources of control (Rose, 1996). Neoliberalism considers the ideal subject to be autonomous with the will and motivation to shape the self in such ways as to gratify the free market and its demands (Čakardić, 2017). The numerous ways in which the neoliberal subject can modify and improve themselves through competition and consumption ultimately represent freedom in the neoliberal world. Conceptualisations of freedom become fully enmeshed with participation in the marketplace, while working to produce subjectivities that fit and support the neoliberal economy. The internalisation of its ideology is all encompassing, where the pursuit of self-improvement and success functions as a distraction from burgeoning welfare needs and the ever-increasing fragmentation of society (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Critical examination of structural and institutional inequalities falls by the wayside in the quest for individual autonomy and freedom.

Neoliberal psy-discourses have been instrumental in the way that individuals take up a steady stream of self-improvement (Hook, 2007; Rose, 1996). In a cultural context that provides intelligibility of psychological concepts and terms, these discourses provide the means through which people can understand themselves and their experiences. Nikolas Rose (1996) illustrates that the discursive language of the psychological sciences developed in the 19th and 20th century gave rise to the conceptualisation of human subjects as discrete beings with psychological interiors. Human subjects themselves were considered to have an essential, individualised personality - a unified identity that could be discovered and worked on (Rose, 1996). Working on the self relies on

Foucault's (2008) notion of technologies of the self through which human subjects can intervene and better themselves. When psy-discourses collided with neoliberal imperatives of self-improvement and transformation, the ideals of freedom and autonomy became interpellated, making the freedom to choose an obligation for neoliberal subjectivities. In this way, psychological knowledge claims coded as psy-discourse enact a disciplinary power that neoliberal subjectivities welcome into their (inner) lives (Hook, 2007). Through such diffuse disciplinary power, psy-discourses continue to be (re)produced and (re)inforced among virtually all people including those in the fields of academia, professional bodies, and the media.

Neoliberal sustainability: Corporate veganism

The ascent of vegan products in the neoliberal marketplace speaks to the rising environmental concerns associated with animal products among consumers in the West (Lynch et al., 2018; Sikka, 2019). Global warming has become a pressing issue with increasing ocean temperatures, thawing ice caps, and rising sea levels, signalling the widespread impact on human and natural systems (IPCC, 2022). While varying strategies allow mitigation of these changes, neoliberal discursive formations place the responsibility on consumers' shoulders (Littler, 2017). Globalised concerns about climate change, pollution, the greenhouse effect, and carbon footprint are calling on neoliberal subjectivities to reduce their environmental impact through individual consumption choices.

Food practices are a key area in which individual responsibilities to combat climate change is communicated. Veganism is often presented as a remedy for the ecological impacts of agriculture by both academics and the media (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Vegan diets generally require less land, water, and energy than omnivorous diets, making them less resource-intensive and environmentally destructive. Hence, shifting to a plant-based diet has become synonymous with an environmentally sustainable existence (Clay et al., 2020). Yet, presenting individual consumer action as the answer to

climate change remains overly simplistic and diverts attention away from much needed change at institutional and systemic levels (Niles et al., 2017; Sachdeva et al., 2015).

Taking note of a public hunger for sustainable consumption, market stakeholders in the agri-food industrial complex have moved to provide a plethora of vegan products to individual consumers (White, 2018). In an effort to appeal to a wider range of consumers, these products have largely been stripped off their vegan label to counteract any association with popular perceptions of vegan food as tasteless, obscure, and bland (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Rather, vegan options are mobilised as plant-based by corporations, making them more palatable to the general public (Clay et al., 2020). This muscling-in on vegan foodscapes occurs among predictions that demand for animal products will continue to expand exponentially regardless of alternative options (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2015). The agri-food complex faces a win-win situation in the battle for individual consumers, maximising profits in all sectors.

By incorporating plant-based options into the existing food systems however, a vegan praxis is articulated in food-focused, consumerist terms. Offering plant-based meat as an individualised consumer form of climate activism positions it among the neoliberal politics of food choice (White, 2018) and continues to fetishize meat among food cultures (Joy, 2020). The neoliberal discursive formations are of particular interest in New Zealand, where meat consumption is a notable characteristic of our national identity (White & Potts, 2008; Wilson, 2005). Although individual consumers may find it easier to co-opt plant-based foods into omnivorous diets (Kemper & White, 2021), it problematises veganism's ethical commitments. Plant-based evokes notions of "greenwashing" (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015, p. 223) where products that circulate among the existing and unethical food system get a makeover, a "veganwashing" (Alloun, 2020, p. 25).

While veganism represents a form of political (non)consumption, individualising the responsibility for addressing climate change by proffering the coffers of big corporations undermines

the necessity for systemic and structural change (Dickstein et al., 2020; Springmann et al., 2018). The mainstreaming of vegan products as a form of "corporate veganism" in its current form only exploits the now fashionable vegan identity without a deeper commitment to veganism as a social justice movement (White, 2018, p. 10).

In this way, veganism is depoliticised and the complex web of socio-cultural, political, and material arrangements that give rise to gendered, racist, classist, and ableist oppressions among existing food systems is obscured (Harper, 2010b; Ko & Ko, 2017). Here, a vegan practice is rearticulated as a consumer-based form of resistance that supports and perpetuates neoliberal capitalism in its original form (Wrenn, 2011). While many may applaud the increased availability of plant-based products in restaurants and supermarkets, questions remain about whether supporting corporations through consumption does little more than uphold the status quo (Johnston, 2008). It fails to interrogate the entanglement of human-animal oppression among labour and environmental politics. For example, supporting "corporate veganism" (White, 2018, p. 10) still reinforces the same systemic mechanisms that determine who gets the least enviable jobs of all (Pachirat, 2011). For example, racialised class hierarchies tend to govern what bodies work in animal agriculture.

Yet, the hierarchies dominating the slaughterhouse kill-floors are also enacted among agricultural workers in the fruit and vegetable industry and beyond (White, 2018). While the latter are plant-based offerings by existing institutions, these products do not reflect a *vegan* sentiment in the sense that they still uphold oppressions. This demonstrates that neoliberal consumptive practices remain far from cruelty-free even if they are free of animal ingredients (Harper, 2010a). Through a plant-based veil, such vegan foods are normalised as edible solutions to the climate crisis, alleviating individual anxieties about impending doom, while perpetuating neoliberal ideals and carnist foodscapes.

Neoliberalism and women

Neoliberal culture has arguably focused on women disproportionately since the 1990's (Rutherford, 2018). With popular culture exhorting Girl Power in slogans, songs, and cultural memes (Lemish, 1998), media depictions portray women as great beneficiaries of increased freedoms in the marketplace (Rutherford, 2018). Yet, neoliberal economic policies have failed to reflect these optimistic portrayals. Instead, structural and systemic gaps only continue to widen at the crossroads of gender, race, and class (Gonick et al., 2009; Mohanty, 2013). As an antidote, neoliberalism beckons women to work on themselves to produce their *empowerment* among ideals of freedom, choice, and autonomy. Trapped in constant cycles of "ambitious and continuous projects of gendered self-transformation" (Rutherford, 2018, p. 621), the promise of *empowerment* coded as gender equality looms large in the marketplace. Where neoliberal ideals and psy-discourses combine in complex ways, feminine subjectivities themselves are the purveyors of a rhetoric that endorses an obliged freedom to choose *empowerment* (Rose, 1996). Psy-discourses emanating from these feminine bodies speak to a view of the self that requires endless improvement, regulation, and discipline in order to perform the *empowered* version of gendered neoliberalism. In this way, neoliberalism positions women's best lives as those marked by constant self-transformation, which amounts to little besides consumptive practices and the acquisition of wealth (Lazar, 2011). A lack of economic or emotional investment in the labour of these pursuits then represents the ultimate form of trespassing in the neoliberal era. No *empowerment* in sight.

Postfeminism

While there are always multiple iterations of feminism in circulation at any one point, the contemporary neoliberal landscape in the West has popularised a version of feminism called postfeminism (Gill, 2017). Entangled with neoliberal discourses, a postfeminist sensibility encompasses both feminist and anti-feminist themes so deeply embedded into everyday discursive

regimes that they have become simply taken-for-granted (Gill, 2007b). The commonalities between neoliberal and postfeminist ideals have only intensified individualism, rendered surveillance of women's bodies desirable, and positioned laborious regimes of self-improvement as pleasant among notions of empowerment and choice (Gill, 2017). Postfeminist discourses demand an individualised expression of feminism where women's consumption becomes conflated with gender equality, coded as neoliberal *empowerment* (Butler, 2013). In doing so, the empowered freedom to choose becomes a feminist act. This makes collective political engagement to change structural and institutional barriers redundant. In fact, there is a sense that feminism really is a thing of the past; no longer needed by women after all (McRobbie, 2004).

With overlap between neoliberalism and the postfeminist sensibility, the feminine subject is primed to take full advantage of limitless self-improvement in the neoliberal capitalist system. Rather than pleasing the male gaze, women work toward self-improvement and affluence where choices are made for their own satisfaction and fulfilment in line with (supposed) gender equality (Gill, 2008a). Traditional gender role expectations and neoliberal ideals are reworked under a guise of self-fulfilment and choice to produce the right kind of femininity. The postfeminist sensibility exhorts that femininity is produced through appearance work on the body, where the body becomes the yardstick by which women's identity and success is measured (Gill, 2007a). While this is surrounded by discourses of empowerment, choice, and pleasure, its disciplinary nature invokes restrictive and repressive beauty standards, obscuring the labour involved in appearance work. However, the postfeminist sensibility does not only govern disciplinary regimes of the body. Its reach extends to include such areas as food consumption, sexuality, educational attainment, career success, motherhood, psychology, and emotion (Riley et al., 2018). When the feminine (neoliberal) subject motivated by an obliged freedom to choose (Rose, 1996) sets out to be and become "the perfect" woman (McRobbie, 2015, p. 4) all aspects of life are implicated among the ordinariness and taken-for-granted nature of postfeminism.

Postfeminist ideals have become the dominant understanding of femininity and therefore, inform feminine subjects on what it means to be a woman. The feminine body requires constant management to adhere to normative ideals of beauty (Gill, 2008a). Meeting these ideals comes with the promise of both social and capital gains for feminine subjects, affecting how they see themselves and each other. Here, surveillance and self-surveillance entangle women into a cycle that perpetuates these normative understandings of femininity (Bartky, 2020). While self-surveillance has long been an integral part of being a woman, an increased intensity has been noted among postfeminism (Gill, 2007b) where new heights of self-control and self-discipline are positioned as markers of success (McRobbie, 2015). Yet, the required regimes of bodily discipline are not experienced as repressive or obligatory. Couched in a rhetoric that chooses self-empowerment, women work to produce their femininity for their own satisfaction, taking pleasure in their own sexual subjectification.

Postfeminist vegan

There has been a marked shift in perceptions of veganism both in popular culture and media representations. Cole's (2008) and Cole and Morgan's (2011) studies showed that media depictions positioned veganism and vegans as restrictive and ascetic (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Fast forward ten years and vegan media representations exhibit a decidedly postfeminist twist. Instances of high-profile vegan advocacy have been interpreted with postfeminism in mind (Braun & Carruthers, 2020; Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Pirani & Fegitz, 2019). PETA's lettuce ladies campaign stands out among these for the overt postfeminist overtones that are exploited in an effort to promote veganism (PETA, 2022). The campaign calls on women to wear bikinis made of cleverly positioned lettuce leaves in public, where the resulting publicity "embod[ies] empowerment" (PETA, 2022). Invoking postfeminist ideals, lettuce ladies "choose to turn heads" by using their bodies to highlight animal oppression (PETA, 2022). Arguably though, the campaign makes women into little more than

sexualised pin-ups for the animal rights cause. While PETA's rhetoric centres women's empowerment as a function of individual choice, it fails to acknowledge how feminine bodies are tied into oppressions of their own - normative ideals of beauty, sexual objectification, and subjectification (Gill, 2008b).

Rather than looking at veganism as a social justice issue, the campaign interpellates vegan women into regimes that discipline them as postfeminist, hypersexualised subjects (Dejmanee, 2013). The depictions adhere to strict Western beauty standards (Bordo, 2004), affirming the type of body that may become a vegan lettuce lady. Further, the lettuce-lady-images (PETA, 2022) also emphasise postfeminist constructions of heteronormative sexuality (Gill, 2008b). Young (potential) vegan women are compelled to look at themselves through a sexual lens, objects of the male gaze, where assessing their own and other women's performance of (potential) vegan femininity is normative (Riley et al., 2016). In this way, vegan campaigning cannot be described as feminist, nor does it aim to end all oppression. Instead, it ignores the connection between oppressions, opting to perpetuate the status quo.

Fegitz and Pirani (2018) echo these sentiments in their postfeminist reading of *The Beyonce Diet*. Endorsed by the popstar, it endorses adoption of the vegan diet for 22 days. Beyonce's book introduction is riddled with the familiar tropes of self-fulfilment, empowerment, self-improvement, choice, and individualisation (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018). Her "sexy, curvy" body serves to perpetuate what it means to be the right kind of vegan woman, positioned firmly in the neoliberally infused context of postfeminism (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018, p. 302). While Beyonce notes that veganism provided her with increased energy and positivity, she centres her desire to lose weight quickly. This positions veganism as just a diet and detaches it from its ethical and political causes. It becomes a self-disciplinary tool to control and regulate the body (Riley et al., 2018). Beyonce's vegan commodification is particularly troubling, when her gender is considered in the context of race and

class. It speaks to mainstreamed versions of veganism that present it as white, middle-class, and gendered. It is important to note that Beyonce's body adheres to normative Western beauty standards, despite being a woman of colour, and she hails from a privileged background (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018). Her success measured by the accumulation of wealth is seen as a function of autonomous choice and agency, where her *empowerment* is understood as participation in a neoliberal consumer culture (Pirani & Fegitz, 2019).

Yet, these discursive arrangements produced by Beyonce's veganism fail to attend to social inequalities that delimit who can take up this practice. Instead, veganism becomes entangled with achieving hegemonic beauty standards, leading to the disconnection from its ethical and political roots. As a representation of black vegan women, Beyonce only perpetuates the status quo and thus, erases critical voices in discussions about vegan ethics and ending all oppression (Harper, 2010a; Ko & Ko, 2017). Instead, contemporary veganism is infused further by white, heteronormative celebrity culture, depicting it as an individualised consumer practice only available to some (Harper, 2012). The representation of vegan women of colour in this way continues to harm women on all levels around the globe (Dosekun, 2015; Harper, 2012; Ko & Ko, 2017).

In the postfeminist context, compliance with a healthy vegan eating regime, hallmarks of self-discipline and self-regulation, produces feminine bodies that are empowered. The feminine body holds a troubled place at this intersection of postfeminism and veganism: Its sexual attractiveness represents power over patriarchy (Winch, 2011), even serving as a marker for postfeminist neoliberal success and wellbeing (Riley et al., 2019). At the same time, the feminine body is also unruly and requires strict surveillance and discipline, so it can squeeze within ever-narrowing beauty standards (Gill, 2007b). Despite staunch opposition to surveillance by critical feminist, postfeminism embraces this wholeheartedly and rearticulates it as an empowering practice, a way to take charge of one's health. Postfeminist discourses about the body and health

signify key ideas about veganism's relationship with socio-cultural norms about the body and thus, deserve exploration (Pirani & Fegitz, 2019).

While postfeminist discourses position the vegan diet as a means to discipline the feminine body, these sit rather uneasily with popular culture's pathologisation of vegan bodies. Routinely, veganism is accused of camouflaging a range of eating disorders (Wright, 2015). While veganism has been linked to both orthorexia and anorexia (e.g., Barthels et al., 2018; Brytek-Matera et al., 2019), debunking this association has just as many supporters (e.g., Costa et al., 2019; Fisak et al., 2006; Fuller & Hill, 2022). These discussions take on even more significance against a backdrop of public anxiety about a burgeoning obesity epidemic (Oliver, 2006) and rising eating disorder rates during the Covid-19 pandemic (Hansen et al., 2021). Of course, exploring what a healthy, feminine body means remains important, but, in the postfeminist context, it occurs at the expense of important dialogue in the messy realm of social justice intersections.

Healthism

Postfeminist discourses about the feminine body, or, rather, the healthy feminine body resonate with discourses of healthism. Healthism holds that health must be attained and maintained through continual adjustment of individual lifestyle choices, necessitating constant preoccupation and surveillance of the body's health (Ryff & Singer, 1998). In the last thirty years, the pursuit of health has become a highly valued area of modern life (Crawford, 2006), positioning it as a moral imperative with prescriptive notions of what this looks like in a neoliberal society (Gibson, 2022). With neoliberal policies progressing free market trade and commercialisation, reduced public spending in the healthcare sector has led to healthcare service privatisation including the establishment of private health insurance (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020). The entanglement of neoliberalism and healthism has moved the responsibility for optimal health from the state to the individual (Crawford, 1994). Despite the emphasis on health and associated discourses though,

health disparities and inequities are still increasing in neoliberal societies (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Further, the privatisation of healthcare and the competitive marketisation of health services in Western societies has refracted the concept of health into a type of competitive consumerism (Riley et al., 2018): People's health-related activities, practices, and choices determine how they value themselves.

With health now firmly an individual responsibility enacted through lifestyle choices (Crawford, 2006), the role of genetic, social, structural, and environmental effects on health have become overshadowed (Shea & Beausoleil, 2012). Health now encompasses mind, body, and spirit with everyday life becoming medicalised (Crawford, 1980). The boundaries of what constitutes health and healthcare are in constant flux; things like interactions with the medical profession, gym membership, meditation, vitamin supplementation, and plastic surgery all fit under the health umbrella (Cheek, 2008). In this climate lacking the traditional health boundaries, good neoliberal subjects are expected to perform daily regimes of health behaviour in all areas of life. They must combat health anxieties in the present yet always stay mindful of future disease risk. As health has conceptually extended beyond mere disease absence, individuals become embroiled in the pursuit of idealised physical, mental, and emotional states. This is supported readily by healthcare commercialisation. Crucially, healthism discourses have given rise to new and different understandings of health. Rather than a right supported by the state, health is now an obligation that individuals choose. Adherence to the health imperative then grants "the possibility of [and] the good life itself" (Crawford, 2006, p. 404). However, the unarticulated, neoliberally infused message proclaims that all people in all bodies can and should optimise their health by making the right choices. Poor choices, on the other hand, construct individuals as uncivilised, lazy, irresponsible, or even immoral (Lupton, 2005). Achieving or maintaining a certain standard of health then becomes entrenched with notions of morality and purity (Cheek, 2008), where those who cannot or choose not to adhere to a prescribed healthy lifestyle are positioned as responsible for their own ill-health.

Healthism and postfeminism

The pervasive neoliberal and biopedagogical lens through which to view the body has led women to attribute their health to the possibilities of choice. With discourses of choice and self-realisation through consumerism, a postfeminist sensibility folds neatly into healthism (Riley et al., 2018). Pursuing health involves a self-transformation imperative for women, where feminine bodies require constant surveillance and work to attain the health ideal (Evans et al., 2020). In trespassing the traditional boundaries, the self-management of women's health has moved far beyond the biomedical sphere. The self-transformation of feminine bodies and their health now resides among bodily and consumer choices in the free market economy (Riley et al., 2017). While the postfeminist sensibility encourages women to be empowered by their choices, their actions and practices remain limited by discourses of consumerism and a political system that maintains structural inequalities.

Reflecting on the social and cultural ideals of what it means to be healthy, the feminine body has become the main site where health transformation is enacted. While the body is the epicentre of improvement, the mind and affect are also seen as beneficiaries among discursive regimes that declare that a healthy body beckons a healthy mind to follow suit (Riley et al., 2017). Social and popular media depictions paint these transformative efforts as fun, worthwhile, and empowered (Riley et al., 2018). Postfeminist healthism then insinuates that young women should experience themselves as agentic, empowered, and valued with freedom of choice surrounding transformation work. Taking-up this postfeminist subjectivity promises women that if they work hard enough in the pursuit of the idealised body (and mind), they will live a happy and carefree life.

The postfeminist iteration of healthism surrounds and permeates feminine subjectivities, neither here nor there. Here, contextualised bodily realities, affect, and systemic limitations remain ignored in favour of imperatives to make the right choice. This self-improvement paradigm, however, demands that women understand themselves (and their bodies) as flawed (Riley et al.,

2017). This leaves women in a paradox, in which they should look and feel healthy and happy but simultaneously face compounding pressures to work on themselves to combat their flaws. The transformative project, therefore, is never done, and perfect health becomes both a prescription and an impossibility.

An ”aesthetic of health” is often built around contemporary appearance norms for the feminine body, which include slenderness, muscle tone, and smooth facial features (Jutel, 2005, p. 115). Attaining a healthy look is an individual responsibility and a socially desirable appearance bears witness to morality. Morality also infuses particular eating habits, where weight is framed as mutable, tethered to moral duty and individual responsibility (Cairns & Johnston, 2015a). This viewpoint assumes that all have the same access to resources for bodywork and so, failure to achieve an idealised appearance remains stigmatised with such bodies positioned as the abject other (Riley & Evans, 2018).

However, the abject other subject position also extends to those who may be seen as too restrictive or obsessive over body image as these are devalued as psychologically unwell. These notions illustrate that postfeminist healthism predicates that those subject positions deemed desirable are also steeped in contradiction: Women should love their bodies but work hard to transform them; they should be dedicated but not too fanatical in chasing the postfeminist transformation imperative (Riley & Evans, 2018). As Foucault (1980) pointed out long ago, imperative force is far from just disciplinary, “it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourses” (p. 119). The discursive regime then only refreshes sexist discourses of old where women’s worth is measured by the body’s discipline and appearance, while packaging these in empowerment, choice, and a happier future. With the disciplinary power of these discourses encased in notions of freedom, choice, health, and pleasure, it becomes hard to critique the urge for women to manage their bodies. Instead, such things as food restriction are reframed as

pleasurable (Cairns & Johnston, 2015a), while reinforcing the thin-ideal of old (Bordo, 2004). The omnipresence of social media has only intensified these dynamics.

Vegan, postfeminist healthism

Fortifying and fortified by neoliberal politics, postfeminist healthism delivers the socio-cultural scaffolding through which health and diet become intelligible in the contemporary Western context (Crawford, 2006). A key area where these discourses assert themselves is in dietary choice (Lupton, 1996). Health is routinely mentioned as an incentive for embracing veganism (e.g., (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991; Hirschler, 2011; Salehi et al., 2020; Scott, 2020), partially because it may represent a socially acceptable way to restrict food and, thus, alleviate concerns about weight management (Barnett et al., 2016; Cairns & Johnston, 2015a). Veganism in this space is often reframed as plant-based eating (Harrington et al., 2019) and is rather uneasily sandwiched between a dietary practice and a healthy lifestyle movement (White, 2018).

As a lifestyle, veganism bears resemblance to an individualised wellness diet rather than a social justice movement (Haenfler et al., 2012). Infused with postfeminist healthism, the onus of food choice and its responsibility is located in decontextualised individuals who are free agents choosing to consume whatever they want. This obscures the socio-cultural and political context of foodscapes (Goodman et al., 2017), eclipsing availability and access of particular choices at the intersection of race and class (on top of gender) (Harper, 2010a). It also bears mention that exclusion of particular food groups by choice also rests on privilege (Mycek, 2018) and that corporations heavily influence contemporary food choices in the battle for consumer dollars (Clay et al., 2020). In this complex web of power, women embrace veganism as a lifestyle with postfeminism's hope and optimism about *the good life*.

Even in vegan spaces, plant-based eating is depicted as intrinsically healthier than other dietary choices, promising a fit and slender body to a non-vegan audience (Wrenn, 2017). The vegan diet is presented as an empowered way to take control of the wayward feminine body with endeavours primarily related to weight loss. By incorporating the discursive formations of the obesity epidemic (Cinquegrani & Brown, 2018), vegan eating secures thinness, where health is conflated with slenderness (Riley et al., 2018). Here, a vegan practice meshes neatly with the lucrative diet industry (Cairns & Johnston, 2015a; Sikka, 2019), satisfying the enormous appetite of the capitalist institution gorging on weight loss/weight gain cycles.

While the allure of attaining Western beauty standards through veganism is undeniable, veganism is also reframed as a form of personal and ethical self-development (Pirani & Fegitz, 2019). Self-development is articulated here as a spiritual elevation, a makeover for the soul (Gill, 2007b). By fusing the ethical basis of veganism with quasi-spiritual themes, veganism promises to deliver renewal and redemption, surpassing the physical limitations of the body (Scott, 2020). The slender feminine body becomes a signifier of a transformation where individualised food choices centre the self as a site of self-actualised enlightenment (Doyle, 2016). This line of thinking requires conflating treating the self (supposedly) kindlier through a plant-based diet. Despite disconnecting veganism from its political roots as notions of plant-based do, an individualised vegan eating practice is seen as bringing about spiritual healing, nonetheless. Much like past religious dictates such as purification and confession (Riley et al., 2018), the vegan self can choose spiritual enlightenment through food and therefore, become healed, healthy, and happy. Rather than a disembodied entity, this form of postfeminist health-centred spirituality is achieved through bodily self-discipline and dietary control. Spiritual purification then revolves around abstention, resulting in a diet of subtraction (animal-free, gluten-free, dairy-free, fat-free, etc.) (Pirani & Fegitz, 2019). While veganism's ethical foundations do not vanish, the focus is on the body as a site of transformation with the ability to will itself to health.

Despite the spiritual awakening that veganism appears to guarantee, the continuous reinforcement of the thin ideal presented throughout restricted (vegan) ways of eating do come with troubling side-effects. Rhetoric around food restriction has ambled toward healthy eating, making the explicit pursuit of the thin ideal unacceptable (Dejmanee, 2016). Yet, this has propelled restrictive eating pathologies toward consumption pathologies such as bulimia nervosa or orthorexia. This reflects the cruel optimism of postfeminist healthism (Berlant, 2011), where empowered women are free to consume whatever they choose as long as they remain within the rigid standards set out by a socio-cultural framework that celebrates white, slender feminine bodies above all (Wrenn, 2017). As Musolino et al. (2015) suggest "postfeminism, neoliberalism, and healthism represent a constellation of contemporary forces which have created an environment for disordered eating to flourish" (p. 2). In this way, the popularisation of a vegan eating practice occurs in an environment where weight is presumed to be mutable and chained to discourses of empowerment, choice, self-actualisation, and even, spirituality.

Vegan, postfeminist healthism in virtual spaces

As a relatively dispersed collective, vegans rely on online spaces to communicate, coordinate, and build communities. Lacking diversity in voices, these virtual spaces remain dominated by thin-bodied women (Wrenn, 2017). The convergence of gender and health (thinness) discourses in online vegan spaces exemplifies vegan postfeminist healthism. This often manifests in discourses and practices that escape more academic eyes: They circulate through media depictions and digital spaces such as blogs and social media platforms with unparalleled accessibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Its embodied online presence – in content and people - has contributed to veganism's increased visibility and popularity. These virtual realms with their interactive content and interactivity make distinguishing between user and consumer difficult (Lewis, 2018; Lupton, 2015). Further, online spaces blur the lines between material and immaterial life where time zones and

geographic locations are transcended and nearly everyone has the potential to become an influencer (Baker & Rojek, 2020).

Through the compilation of text, visuals, and audio (Lupton, 2018) and interactive dialogue between producer and consumer (Goodman et al., 2017), truth about healthy vegan bodies is co-produced. While the consumption of online content is not a physical eating practice, it is a form of digital consumption – disembodied but felt by people and their bodies. Further, it is productive: The virtual relationality creates subjectivities cradled by notions of intimacy that mimic the sort of trust, familiarity, and kinship that real life relationships afford. These subjectivities then go on to discipline the body, leading to material effects. In vegan circles, these para-social relationships are dominated by young, white, middle-class, and slender femininities. They both embody and construct what veganism does and should look like among the entangled narratives of postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism (Braun & Carruthers, 2020). In this "mediated biopolitics of contemporary foodscapes" (Goodman et al., 2017, p. 162), veganism is situated in health and wellness discourses that position the right kind of vegan body as a function of self-realisation and empowerment. These discourses support taking control of the wayward feminine body with an individualistic (neoliberal) agenda that diverts attention away from structural change and can severely limit who can take up these identities. The disconnection from ethical initiatives that aim to end oppression remains unmistakeable in this landscape.

In the present online environment, differentiating between mediated understandings of veganism that universalise what veganism looks like, and the lived experience of veganism is becoming hard indeed. Sizeism is centrally tethered to online depictions of veganism (Wrenn, 2017). Fat bodies stand in stark contrast to the postfeminist memorandum to look healthy and conventionally attractive, resulting in an environment where fatness is coded as both a moral failing and an affront to Western beauty standards (Pausé, 2015). In this tightly regulated landscape, larger-

bodied identities become stigmatised and carry the burden of responsibility for the stigma itself. Scholars have noted the ubiquity of fat-shaming used to control, abuse, and oppress girls and women, both on systemic and interpersonal levels (Kent, 2010; Royce, 2009). Wrenn (2017) illustrates how the vegan movement, as a stigmatised identity itself, capitalises on the perception that vegan diets are intrinsically more nutritious and lower in calories in online environments.

Attempting to leave the stereotypical association of veganism with asceticism and ill-health behind (Cole & Morgan, 2011), virtual spaces are saturated by rhetoric that centralises veganism's potential to shed pounds in a thin-privileging society. Veganism's failure to reshape bodies then becomes a thorn in the side of a social justice movement that desires popularity, visibility, and legitimacy (Wrenn, 2017). Perceptions of veganism that reject size inclusivity and celebrate weight loss may be symbolically more valuable, leaving oppressions by the wayside. Of course, this positions veganism among the diet industrial-complex, medicalising and stigmatising fat bodies. Rather, they become interpellated into plant-based weight loss schemes that serve neoliberal capitalism (Julier, 2012). After all, the robust promise of #veganthinspo's empowerment is lucrative for the many content creators and businesses that promote diet regimes. Fat vegans routinely note that the dynamics that underpin a thin-privileging society render the idea that fat and vegan can and do coexist in the same body unintelligible, erasing their identities completely (Wrenn, 2017). This leaves larger bodied vegans unwilling to declare their vegan identities. Stigmatised (fat) identities fail to conform standards of attractiveness, silencing them and eclipsing out all other subjectivities that they inhabit (Pausé, 2015). While this throws a, perhaps welcomed, cloak of invisibility over marginalised vegan identities, it only perpetuates the triad of postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism that already problematises veganism's endeavour to end all oppressions.

Similar criticisms have been levelled at veganism for its all-encompassing whiteness, where it is understood as privileged and middle class; a lifestyle choice only afforded to those that have the

temporal, financial, and cultural resources to take up such identities (Polish, 2016). As Harper (2012) points out, such iterations of veganism remain deaf to inequalities that position ethical or healthy lifestyle choices as privileged pipe dreams (Harper, 2012). The perception that veganism is only for the privileged few has certainly between articulated among people of colour. Within these communities, veganism's centralised white privilege blinds its advocates to material and immaterial realities. This is notable in loud proclamations that exhort the simplicity of a vegan diet, that animal lives matter more than oppressed peoples', and that non-vegans "simply do[..]n't care" (Brueck, 2017, p. 11). What Brueck (2017) is critiquing, much like Harper (2010), is that veganism does not automatically uphold human rights, it is not cruelty-free by default, and it does not apprehend human oppression. In fact, vegan advocacy has frequently marginalised people of colour.

Revelations about the vegan blog, *Thug Kitchen*, exemplify the perpetuation of racial stereotypes (Davis & Holloway, 2022). While *Thug Kitchen* has undoubtedly increased veganism's popularity, the language in which it is presented mimics African American Vernacular English (AAVE, Ebonics) with plentiful expletives and thus, highlights stereotypical perceptions of thugs (Priestley et al., 2016). While this may be problematic on its own, it is also significant that the blog's authors indeed bath in the warm glow of white privilege. Harper (2011) argues that the use of AAVE and negative stereotypes constitute digital blackface – "a term that refers to the mimicking and appropriation of black racial stereotypes in online fora" (Priestley et al., 2016, p. 351). Such decontextualised personas of people of colour fit in among racist rhetoric and discourse. The language and invoked imagery only reinforce and are reinforced by unequal power dynamics of race, class, and gender with an abject lack of social justice.

Young people, social media, and veganism

While mass media remains relevant in producing understandings of the right kind of feminine vegan body, social media has only proliferated this in faster and more accessible ways. In Aotearoa

New Zealand, a steady increase of internet use year-on-year has been noted (Hinton, 2021). Social media plays an integral part in the lives of young people with significant impact on their health (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). More than two-thirds of young people spend roughly four hours or more online per day (Pacheco & Melhuish, 2018). Social media use has been implicated among a range of mental health issues in young women including disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). However, findings on the effect of social media use and health remain inconclusive: While a range of studies draw attention to its negative effects on body image (Burnette et al., 2017; Jarman et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2018), others did not find adverse effects on young people's mental states (Beeres et al., 2021; Kreski et al., 2021; Merrill & Liang, 2019). Not just a mere tool, social media is a powerful enabler that informs habits and produces health-related feelings, knowledge, and behaviours (Grous, 2021). It has the capacity to influence young women to embrace veganism with built-in online tips, tricks, and social support. Social media analysis has recently shown that young women followed the type of veganism branded as a healthy lifestyle choice rather than a social justice movement (Pilař et al., 2021). Indeed, celebrities and influencers often use objectified and sexualised images of young and toned bodies, appealing to a thin ideal to sell themselves and their lifestyle (Carrotte et al., 2017; Marwick, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Bombarded with content such as this, young vegan women may not get clued into veganism's ethical origins. Instead, they may only hear postfeminist healthism's tune of #thin- and #fitspiration.

Adolescence is a time of immense physical, social, and emotional changes. Emerging from this upheaval into adulthood relatively unscathed remains no easy feat. Young people remain at risk of developing mental health issues, a consistent finding among scholars (Byrne et al., 2017). Especially with respect to young women, the physical changes of adolescence and young adulthood move feminine bodies further away from the thin ideal (Tiggemann, 2011). Yet, it is also during this time that most women become vegans (Hancox, 2018; McCarthy & Dekoster, 2020). As McDonald (2000) noted over twenty years ago, young women are catapulted into veganism at this time by "catalytic

experiences" (p. 4), prompting an awareness of the unethical treatment of animals that could not be unseen (Cherry, 2015).

Yet, the maintenance of the vegan transformation depends on social support from friends and family (Asher & Cherry, 2015; Cherry, 2015; Hirschler, 2011). For young women in particular, real-life friends and peers remain more significant transmitters of socio-cultural norms than media influences (Sands & Wardle, 2003). Yet, family, friends, and peers also present some of the most difficult interactions for vegans in a non-vegan world: Teasing, mocking, interrogation, and parental worry about nutritional deficits paint the landscape of young vegan women (Cherry, 2015). Questions remain about whether this applies today in Aotearoa or if the iteration of veganism along the lines of postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism has changed the landscape for young vegan women today.

This chapter gave an impression of veganism, from its historical roots to its current form. The socio-cultural, political, and historical threads that form veganism's tapestry in current Aotearoa provide the context for my analysis. I have highlighted the importance of both gender and young people in thinking about the vegan movement. In the next chapter, I turn to my project's methodology, highlighting the ontology, epistemology, and method and the motivations behind these choices. In this way, my findings become contextualised, illustrating the rationale that led me to them transparently.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of how I conducted my research. First, I examine the ontology, epistemology, and theoretical orientation of my study. Then, I introduce the narrative discursive approach and illustrate the thinking and reasoning behind this choice. After, I discuss my ethical considerations including my positionality in the research. I give details about my recruitment process and my participants. An outline of the procedure for each iteration of data collection, the narrative interview and the social media 'go-along', follows. Subsequently, I give a snapshot of my analytical process.

My study aimed to understand how young vegan women in Aotearoa make sense of their experiences, how they negotiate mainstream norms and social pressures, and how they integrate these experiences into their everyday lives, including their presence online. To undertake this critically, I took counsel from Chamberlain's (2000) call for creative approaches that answer research questions rather than doing research in the "correct" way (p. 287). His plea for multifaceted approaches harked back to Kincheloe's (2005) conceptualisation of "researcher-as-bricoleur" (p. 324). Among the bricolage, the researcher negotiates methodological complexity by actively and continually engaging with the various elements of the research. In addition, they attend to the interconnections between to produce knowledge claims. In making claims, I have interwoven strands of feminist standpoint theory, feminist poststructuralism, narrative inquiry, discursive analytics, and personal sense-making into the storying of young women's vegan experiences in Aotearoa. These stories remain embedded among the situated-occasioned sociocultural contexts of my participants' meaning-making (Hiles & Cermak, 2017). The research bricolage enabled me to ground myself respectfully in my participants' complex vegan experiences without losing sight of their own contingencies.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

Feminist standpoint theory (FST) is grounded in an ontology that assumes that all knowledge forms are situated (Haraway, 2003). Situated knowledge challenges the assumed neutrality and universality of androcentric knowledge forms by conceptualising knowledge as enabled and limited by time and space. It is embodied both within people and the socio-cultural, political, and historical conditions that house knowledge claims.

FST rejects the notion that scientific understandings of the world should be objective, neutral, and universal to be considered valid (Harding, 2004). Instead, feminist standpoint theorists deem the separation of the science construct from its socio-political orientation as a politically motivated project. It subverts accountability for shaping the world in particular ways that often only benefit dominant knowledge producers. Often, the decision-making processes around studied objects becomes obscured, veiling the limitations of these knowledge claims. The contextual detachment results in less objective and accurate knowledge after all (Friesen, 2021). However, FST does not invalidate these knowledge claims. It merely demonstrates that Western science's claim of producing unequivocal truths falls apart when it is situated within its socio-cultural, political, and historical milieu.

Instead, FST contends that epistemologies of location, position, and situatedness where partiality is favoured over universality become the foundation on which knowledge claims rest (Haraway, 1988). Here, knowledge emanates from bodies that are complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured, housed by their historical specificities (Haraway, 1988; Rutherford et al., 2015). That is, women's experiences and meaning-making are embedded in the material and immaterial conditions of their specific socio-cultural, political, and historical contingencies that (re)produce the realities of their lives (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). In this way, the knowledge

claim becomes a function of complex factors that come together to reify it, gifting it with authenticity and nuance rather than validity and universality.

FST views knowledge and power as connected – they are co-emergent and co-productive (Harding, 1993). Traditional Western science remains heavily influenced by those in privileged positions, enabling the imposition of their knowledge forms over others. Yet, this is only half of the story: Knowledge and power are also intertwined, because dominant knowledge claims fashion the world as ontologically and perceptually conditioned to the dominant group's interest (Harding, 1993). This results in the ability of one knowledge system to articulate the world as intelligible, while erasing these possibilities for others. Hence, knowledge from subjugated standpoints has the potential to thwart oppression, resisting Western science's universalising institution (Harding & Norberg, 2005).

FST was uniquely suited to researching young vegan women's experiences in Aotearoa. Vegans remain a marginalised group and young women continue to be silenced in dominant spaces, including academia (Waitere & Johnston, 2009). By researching from the perspective of young vegan women, their experiences were legitimated as knowledge forms in their own right. Androcentric and universalising dynamics were countered (Henrich et al., 2010). FST allowed me to contextualise my participants' experiences among the grander socio-cultural, political, and historical narratives that encase and infiltrate them. Experiential multiplicities and intersecting oppressions such as race, ability, sexuality, class, etc. could be attended to (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Mikaere, 2019). Attention to intersectionality remains vital in Aotearoa, where wāhine Māori continue to experience intersecting sites of oppression through colonialism's long reach.

Herein lies recognition of critiques levelled at FST by Black, Third World, and indigenous feminism. They lament that mainstream feminism positions white, Western, middle-class women as the de facto knowledge producers for all women (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989; Salem,

2018; Simmonds, 2011). These criticisms sparked an interrogation of FST's praxis that has strengthened its theoretical bases. FST now examines a much wider range of power asymmetries including such identity categories as race, class, ability, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. and these become legitimated among diverse groups of women. Recently, FST illustrated the heterogeneity of vegan women's experiences where subtle nuances of difference emerged despite similar socio-cultural and material conditions (Yilmaz, 2019).

Narrative-discursive approach

Building on previous psychological scholarship in such areas as social constructionism (Burr, 2003), discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and narrative inquiry (Mishler, 1999), narrative discursive analytics investigate how participants engage in narratives within their contextual settings, while also attending to the grander socio-cultural scripts (Reynolds et al., 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Taylor and Littleton's (2006) approach highlights narrative action – what people do with their talk in specific situations at particular times and grounding this performative element within the interactive and contextual engagement in narration. Yet, the spotlight also illuminates the wider discursive landscape that houses personal narratives: The ways in which people reproduce, resist, or oscillate between meanings emphasises the socio-cultural, political, and historical environment (Wetherell, 1998). Hence, it is ideally suited to the analysis of interview narratives, where participants employ the available discursive resources in specific ways to confer, claim, or contest their positions to do identity work. Additionally, narrative discursive analytics underline the historical contingency of knowledge claims much like feminist standpoint epistemologies. These features were instrumental in my choice to use a narrative discursive approach. It enabled me to understand the complex and contingent practices and meanings that my participants engaged in biographically, discursively, and psychologically as they constructed and negotiated their vegan narratives among prevailing ideological scripts.

The approach has advantages over other discursive approaches. Narrators inhabit active roles where contesting or assuming the meanings of the wider discursive landscape present possibilities; they are not solely determined by them (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). With a nod to feminist poststructuralism (Gavey, 1989), subjectivities are understood as complex and overlapping. This subverts tendencies to reduce identity work to single, homogeneous entities. Rather, the approach highlights the fragmentary nature of subjectivities, multiple and contingent (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Finally, Taylor and Littleton (2006) emphasise the (re)production and (re)constitution that occurs with each new rehearsal of talk, sculpted by previous talk and wider discourses circulating in the socio-cultural realm (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Hence, subject formation is far from static or permanent, but shifts throughout the interview.

However, I deviated from the strategy laid out by Taylor and Littleton (2006) in two ways. They encourage a "bottom-up" approach rooted in the ethnographic tradition of "making the familiar strange" (p. 28). While I approached my data with an open mind and noted all meaningful items in my first round of coding, I did not consider this as an inductive, theory-neutral process. My standpoint, imbued with my assumptions and values, informed the entirety of my research process. I could not bracket out my involvement. In my view, my participants and I were (co)constructors of knowledge within the context of the interviews and informed by our standpoints (Davies & Gannon, 2005). These musings led me to conclude that any codes or themes that I developed remained value-laden and non-generalisable. Instead, I aimed to capture "traces of human lives" (Squire et al., 2013, p. 3), while searching for ways that assumptions were disrupted (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Moving away from a theoretically neutral position also aligned with FST, where knowledge is situated and embodied (Haraway, 1988). My own (research) story then is woven throughout my participants' stories. This research encompasses (co)constructed, transcribed, analysed, coded, (re)interpreted, and (re)written narratives that have had multiple sets of eyes on them (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The second way in which I strayed from Taylor and Littleton (2006) was their notion of discursive resources as "interpretative repertoire[s]" and "canonical narrative[s]" (see also, Bruner, 1991, p. 11; p. 26). Interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives describe ways of talking meaningfully about the world that rest on pre-existing ideas or associations circulating prior to occasions of talk and therefore, function as resources for talk (Edley, 2001, p. 198). Subjects and subjectivities are understood as "complex composites of […] who they create themselves as and present to the world, as a way of 'acting upon' it" and "who that world makes them and constrains them to be" (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 23). This alludes to a discursive analysis focused on micro-level interaction, on subjectivity continuity within the interview. I felt that the broader political context that houses participants and their standpoints was somewhat neglected (Morison & Macleod, 2013). Yet, a critical exploration of veganism in young women may benefit from investigating a wider assembly of discursive practices including both historical and contemporary understandings of gender, health, and the entanglement of neoliberal economies among these. Such discourses are productive, disciplinary, and diffuse in creating understandings that young vegan women use to make sense of themselves.

To interrogate the ideological and political processes at the macro level, I drew on Parker's (1990) Foucauldian theorisation where discourses categorise the world and bring phenomena into the light. Parker (2014) defines discourses as a "system[s] of statements which construct an object", allowing me to identify and see their fragmentary nature (Parker, 2014, p. 5). Interview data was treated as text, which Parker (2014) conceptualised as "tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss" (Parker, 2014, p. 6). Hence, discourses cannot be found somewhere out there, nor do they emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2019); they are fuzzy, embodied, and at work in pieces, interconnected in complementary and constitutive webs of meaning, always re-circulating and re-forming (Parker, 2014). Further, the researcher delimits how discourses are used,

how subjectivities are produced within them, and so, identifies how processes of ideology and power find their way into the little stories of everyday life.

Ethical considerations

The long-running feminist tradition of giving voice to silenced groups by highlighting the multiplicity of their experiences has been noted extensively (e.g., Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 2004; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Yet, scholars have questioned whether qualitative research as a form of representation truly allows marginalised voices to be heard (Riessman, 2002; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). While the Academy has attempted to make room for the marginalised to speak, often, these efforts in qualitative research (re)produce the socio-cultural, political, and historical power dynamics that they aim to subvert. By deciding whose voices may speak, when and how, and what stories will be shared, the status quo is maintained. I aimed to extend beyond this passive concept: I acknowledged that my participants had "enough insight, enough reflexivity, […] to see past the traps of ideological discourse, [to] speak beyond [their] own immediate experience" (Reyes Cruz, 2008, p. 656). My study flouted atomistic conventions of separating subject and object. Instead, my research embodies the spoken, fluid, and co-constructed narratives between each participant and I, which were then transcribed, interpretated, reduced into codes, assigned discursive themes, scattered, (re)grouped, and, with my supervisor's insight, (re)written about over and over.

Feminist research ethics

Scholarly feminist thinking has challenged notions of Western, androcentric conceptualisations of ethics and justice. While these are often assumed to be universal and objective (Henrich et al., 2010), feminist ethics privilege an ethical practice that is intertwined with social justice and deeply situated in women's particular standpoints (Harding, 2004). This framework

requires particular attention to power differentials across multiple contexts and thus, exceeds mere institutional ethics. For example, feminist scholarship emphasises interview techniques that value women's agency and wellbeing (Hydén, 2014). Rather than merely avoiding harm, a feminist ethos demands that participants are repaid for their gift to research. This includes an insistence that women are left feeling heard and valued (Oakely, 2016). I felt inspired by Hydén's (2014) conceptualisation of the interview process as a "relational practice" (p. 13), where institutional ethics are enhanced through notions of care and kindness. Her stance not only creates "relationally safe space[s]" but subverts institutional power differentials between researcher(s) and participants by resisting objective, value-free research practices (Hydén, 2014, p. 5). This makes room for subjective nuances, so inherently human. Storytellers are agents whose experiences are honoured, while positioning research participation as empowering. In this way, the stories privilege young women's knowledge forms and their legitimacy as knowers with vibrancy and relationality (Miller, 1986; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

Central to future developments in feminism both academically and beyond, the multiplicity of women's standpoints must be responded to. Notably, Black, queer, indigenous, and Third World feminists highlight the intersectional experience of gender with identity categories such as class, race, etc. where material and immaterial forces shape lived realities (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins et al., 2021; Hill Collins et al., 2021; Salem, 2018; Simmonds, 2011). To acknowledge and attend to this, feminist scholars draw on ethics that hold emotion, empathy, and relationality as foundational to research (Hill Collins, 2000; Hydén, 2014; Taylor et al., 1996). They assert that knowledge becomes validated among the standpoints that produce them through relationships, connection, and discussion (Hill Collins, 2000). In Aotearoa, colonial transgressions continue to harm Māori women personally and collectively (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Simmonds, 2011; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). While mainstream feminism's Eurocentric agenda has co-opted intersectionality, the voices of mana wāhine remain silenced in institutional spaces (Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Hence, listening to

mana wāhine is not enough: These voices need space to be heard, to (re)claim and (re)define what it means to be a Māori woman.

Stories as gifts in interviewing: A relational practice

As mentioned, Hydén's (2014) interviewing technique has left a lasting impression on me. Her style highlighted a "relationally safe space" (Hydén, 2014, p. 5) where women are enabled to share their stories with agency. Much like Hill Collins (2000) and Oakely (2016), Hydén (2014) stresses the significance of empathetic and caring human connection in the research process where the relationship between researcher(s) and participant takes on meaning beyond narrative co-construction. Hence, I aimed to create a space where my participants felt empowered and valued by sharing their stories. I treated their stories as gifts (Oakely, 2016).

Informed consent and confidentiality

I treated informed consent as open-ended, subject to negotiation throughout (Hydén, 2014). While I considered the 16-to-20-year-old age range competent enough to understand participation benefits and risks, I was also mindful of their, perhaps, limited life experience. To mitigate this, I encouraged them to discuss their potential participation with their support systems and stressed that I welcomed further questions and discussions. None took me up on this offer. Yet, it set the stage for open dialogue: It is impossible to anticipate every detail of the discursive and emotional interview landscape and ethical concerns are often responded to in situ, as they arise in "fields of uncertainty" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017, p. 264). So, in addition to gaining written informed consent (MUHEC, 2017), I looked for changes in tone of voice, posture, or evidence of deregulation (APA, 2013) that may have revealed some doubts about participating. Honouring an ethic of care (Hill Collins, 2000), I was ready to offer breaks, emotional support, interview termination, and referral to relevant local agencies in case of distress. In short, I was prepared to expect the unexpected. None

of this eventuated. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised how much my participants enjoyed talking all things veganism.

All records, including consent forms and transcripts, were secured to prevent third party access. All data was deidentified and pseudonyms assigned to protect the participants' anonymity.

Cultural responsiveness

Colonial injustices and decolonisation were integral when I reflected on cultural responsiveness. All research in Aotearoa is of relevance and importance to Māori and all research has a responsibility to work toward a Tiriti-based future (Hudson et al., 2010). While feminist ethics imply social justice activism, this study explicitly committed to exposing injustice and engaging in a co-intentional manner (Freire, 1996). Discriminatory state-enforced practices and institutionalised marginalisation have long operated in educational and research environments (Morgan et al., 2011; Timutimu et al., 1998). These forces continue to deprive, silence, and marginalise wāhine Māori in institutional spaces (Simmonds, 2011; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). In conversation with Te Tiriti o Waitangi activists, tino rangatiratanga (self-determination/sovereignty) stood out for its insistence on political equivalence between Māori and Pākehā (Smith, 2021). Tino rangatiratanga centres Māori autonomy as a legitimate claim owed to tangata whenua (original inhabitants of Aotearoa), although (shockingly) absent from *Massey University's Code of Ethics* (MUHEC, 2017). My stance ensured Māori political agency rather than positioning them at the other, a common occurrence in dominant Western knowledge systems and institutions (Morgan et al., 2011).

In discussion with my cultural advisor, Toni Peacock, I noted the intersections between Kaupapa Māori and feminist research ethics. I was aware that honouring my participants' contributions through koha was an important act of respect. However, Toni allowed me to see that my participants were also gifting me; their stories were, after all, central to my project (Oakely,

2016). Hence, koha became a conceptual marker of reciprocity and relationality (Hydén, 2014), paralleling feminist ethics (Hill Collins, 2000).

Ethical approval

This project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 22/13., Northern on the 25th of May 2022 before recruitment commenced (Appendix A).

Reflexivity and positionality

I am a German born mother in her forties and call Aotearoa home. I situate myself as both an insider and an outsider. I remain multiply positioned among dominant discourses of gender, veganism, psychology, and youth. As a vegan woman, I am an insider. Yet, veganism's boundaries are permeable and fluid, complicating my vegan label. When I came to veganism decades ago, I may have hoped that veganism would let me claw my way closer to the thin-ideal – something that I have been chasing explicitly and implicitly for as long as I can remember. In many ways, I fit the greater narratives of veganism as a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, and relatively slim woman. In the many retellings of my veganism however, my story has been sanitised of its postfeminist imperatives and cleansed of notions of healthism, and neoliberalism, lacking the dirty details. Today, I explain my veganism solely in the context of social justice. My story both challenges and upholds what it means to be the right kind of vegan.

Throughout the project, the question of whether I was the right kind of researcher for this study echoed around my head. Over and above my real and imagined inadequacies, I wondered whether a younger, less maternal researcher would have built better rapport with the young women and so, solicited more in-depth discussion. Yet, I also believe that my participants' willingness to expose their vulnerabilities and rub up against socio-cultural and political norms were facilitated by

their view of me as a maternal figure. Without a definitive, essentialist answer, these factors only attest to the complexity inherent in narrative co-construction (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021). In immeasurable ways, I am entangled in the data, its generation, and analysis – my own standpoint fusing with that of my participant's to weave the story of this research.

Whilst outlining my positionality, I also considered how to engage with reflexivity as a qualitative researcher. Without the illusionary cloak of objectivity that tends to dominate in Western science, qualitative researchers are strongly encouraged to make their role in crafting the research as transparent as possible (Etherington, 2007). Here, reflexivity refers to an ongoing process of self-reflection, where the researcher notes their reactions to the world and the objects within. Further, the researcher cultivates the ability to see how these responses inform and enact their feelings, thoughts, communication, and behaviour within the research context and beyond. This requires qualitative researchers to position themselves and disclose their own, fragile subjectivities. Yet, this has been criticised as amounting to little more than voyeurism and lacking benefit (Pillow, 2003).

I shift now to we, including myself among qualitative researchers. Revealing ourselves to the world creates a sense of vulnerability, and yet, we are commanded to go beyond this step. We must lay bare processes and praxis to public scrutiny in the most transparent ways, airing our dirty laundry for all to see. By letting the world see the messy, complex, and faulty embodied practice of our research, reflexivity becomes an important ethical tool. It holds us accountable for the reductionism that cannot be avoided in research. However, reflexivity does not amount to a qualitative version of increasing validity, legitimacy, or the truth of the knowledge claims made (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). Disrupting such taken-for-granted notions, my approach to reflexivity did not aim to bolster my research's validity (Pillow, 2003). It only served and continues to serve as a reminder that my findings are tainted by my partiality; the space I occupied as a researcher was full of the conflicting entanglement of collusion and incompatibility, collaboration and subversion (Pillow, 2003). Here,

boundaries were repeatedly crossed as I tried to build a rich and complex understanding of my participants' stories, situated and contingent.

My understanding of reflexivity required me to become accountable for the role my location, position, values, and beliefs played throughout the project – from its outset to its conclusion. Hence, I noted my thoughts, responses, and impressions in a diary. This became more meaningful during the recruitment and interview phases. While my observations and feelings often felt insubstantial at the time of notation, they became important points of reflection when revisited, particularly during analysis. Hence, my reflective practice was an ongoing, iterative, and self-critical process that wound its way back and forth throughout the research rather than a finite, one-time exercise (Pillow, 2003).

Attention to reflexivity also interrogates power relations (Pillow, 2003). Hydén (2014) stressed that a relationally safe space can only exist, if power differentials between researcher(s) and participant(s) are avoided. Yet, this remains a lofty ambition, when the researcher is institutionally privileged to define, conduct, and determine all parts of the research (Parker, 2004). Keenly aware of this, I tried to mitigate this power imbalance, especially throughout the interviews. For example, I reassured my participants that whatever they contributed would be interesting and valuable and let them know that there was nothing that I *needed* to hear. I also gave my participants the opportunity to amend their transcripts, although none took me up on this offer. Hence, I appeared to retain control over much of the research process and findings.

Prudently though, power is not a quality that the researcher inherently possesses. Instead, power is negotiated continuously between the researcher(s) and participant(s) and may ebb and flow throughout their relationship (Etherington, 2007). By attending to the micro-politics of interactions and the research process as a whole, it becomes clear that the power dynamics of the insider/outsider binary shift to and fro in complex ways (Hellawell, 2006). The criss-crossed

boundaries of my insider/outsider status positioned me both as powerful and subjugated (Pillow, 2003). While I was markedly older and more educated than my participants, my gender and vegan positioning meant that we shared common ground. All research participants were Pākehā, leaving a trail of silence where Māori voices could have been. This may have inadvertently positioned them as the other by virtue of exclusion. All but one of my participants were cis-gendered. I am a trans-inclusive feminist, embracing all complexities this perspective critically awards. My gender-queer participant offered me the opportunity to amplify a voice that may otherwise have been silenced.

However, common ground between researcher(s) and participant(s) does not necessarily enable better understanding of participants' viewpoints or the findings (Pillow, 2003). In essence, common ground and points of departure concurrently facilitate and constrict the manner in which talk takes place. This occurs in such complex and unique ways that it becomes difficult to articulate the ebb and flow of power among the researcher-participant(s) assemblage. At times, my participants and I were in sync and at others, we appeared at odds until we had spun a confusing web of collusion, complicity, and subversion. Ultimately, I used my reflexivity as a way of stepping out from the curtain of objectivity that could have hidden the pitfalls, the mistakes, and messiness of my research process. I aimed to make my role in the (co)construction of this piece of research visible.

Method

Participants

Self-identifying vegan women between the ages of 16 and 20 years were invited to participate. Participants were not required to have been vegan for any length of time. Rather, participants had to give themselves a vegan label. Interested parties who followed a prescribed diet were excluded as dietary choices made by medical necessity could not ascertain the way that young

women negotiate the pressures and challenges of veganism motivated by personal beliefs. Before the study went under way, I asked each of my participants whether they had been diagnosed with an eating disorder (APA, 2013). As none had, I felt reassured that my study would not cause distress in my participants.

The decision to recruit women between the ages of 16 to 20 years was motivated by both necessity and preference: Firstly, vegans are few and far between in Aotearoa. Yet, young women make up the bulk of this demographic. Secondly, veganism represents a distinctive set of experiences for this group. Some may still live at home or in shared living accommodation where parental and peer support or lack thereof enables or constrains their choices. This presents unique and interesting challenges to the adoption of veganism.

For young women, veganism tends to be negotiated among the attitudes that they have toward their bodies. Often, social comparisons, in real life and online, help to shape and solidify the developing sense of self (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). This feeds also into eating habits and embodiment. These play an instrumental role in establishing norms and boundaries. Hence, young women's experiences of veganism are of particular interest in a landscape shaped by postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism. Their standpoints as achievements and as social justice forces established the foundation of my analysis, where their stories wove the background tapestry of the larger analytic narrative.

Participants were also required to live in Aotearoa, where I reside, with the expectation of face-to-face interviews. Kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) meetings were my preference as I felt this reflected a feminist ethic of care (Hill Collins, 2002; Hydén, 2014). However, all except one participant preferred interviews via Zoom (Zoom Inc., 2022). A summary of the participants' demographic details is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' demographic details

Pseudonym	Gender identity	Education/Employment	Other details (provided voluntarily)
Adeline	Woman (she/her)	Full-time university student at Te Herenga Waka	Lives in Christchurch/Wellington, 20 years old, Pākehā, has been vegan for nearly eight years
Chanel	Woman (she/her)	Full-time education: Secondary school	Lives in Canterbury, Pākehā, vegan for six years
Ed	Woman (she/her)	Full-time education: Secondary school	Lives in Wellington, Pākehā, vegan for 3 years
Ella Jane	Woman (she/her)	Full-time education: Secondary school	Lives in New Plymouth, Pākehā, vegan for a year – on and off
Jane Doe	Woman (she/her)	Full-time education: Secondary school	Lives in Auckland, Pākehā, vegan for three years
Lobster	Trans (they/them)	Full-time education: Secondary school	Lives in Wellington, 18 years old, Pākehā
Rose	Woman (she/her)	Full-time university student at the University of Auckland, part-time waitress	Lives on Auckland's North Shore, 20 years old, Pākehā, vegan for one year
Winter	Woman (she/her)	Full-time university student at AUT, part-time job	Lives in Auckland/Whanganui, Pākehā, vegan for four years

Recruitment

With the restrictions on time and resources of a Master's project in mind (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013), I sought to include between seven to ten participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Recruitment started in May 2022 and finished in July 2022, when eight participants had agreed to take part. A digital poster graphic inviting potential participants was posted in relevant Facebook groups (Wellington Vegans, Auckland Vegans, and Vegans NZ; see Appendix B). The page administrators were given information on the study and had given consent to share the advertisement. Recruitment through Facebook groups allowed targeted recruitment of young vegan women (Whitaker et al., 2017). Yet, this strategy may have excluded younger participants who prefer alternative social media platforms including Instagram and Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

As requested, potential participants contacted me via email to register their interest. Participants then received the study's information sheet (see Appendix C) and an informed consent form (see Appendix D) as email attachments. In recognition of their contribution, participants received a $10 Countdown gift voucher for each interview.

Interviews

Data collection spanned June and July 2022 with two interviews per participant. After each participant filled in and signed their consent form, the interviews were arranged. Semi-structured, conversational interviews were chosen for their ability to enable rich data and establish greater rapport between researcher and participant(s) (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Mindful of Hydén (2014) and Waitere and Johnston (2009), my emphasis was on listening rather than speaking, although an interview schedule was on hand (see Appendix E). I had hoped that my participants would direct the conversations without probes and prompts, but this did not always happen. Where stories were not forthcoming and demeanour was hesitant, I actively inquired about their experiences, what

meanings veganism had for them, and how they felt as vegans in the world. In most instances though, participants shared openly and freely, allowing me to embrace my role as listener more fully.

All interviews were recorded with two devices: Unwilling to trust just one platform, I used a digital voice recorder and the Otter application (Otter, 2022) on my mobile phone to avoid technical mishaps. After interview completion, some off-the-record conversation took place. This enabled participants to wind down and allowed me to ensure that participants were indeed feeling good. All my participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences. I found this incredibly humbling considering that my research could not have gone ahead without them.

First interview

While I preferred kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) interviews, participants could choose to take part via Zoom (Zoom Inc., 2022). Giving participants these options was motivated by my interest in participant comfort, especially in the Covid-19 environment (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). Online mediums can provide an ideal alternative to face-to-face interviews with visual contact and participant interaction in real time. Yet, digital interviews can also hamper rapport and nonverbal communication, especially if technical or connectivity issues present themselves (Weller, 2017). Luckily, I did not experience any difficulties and enjoyed great rapport with my participants who shared their opinions, views, and experiences readily with me.

Social-media 'go-along'

The second interview featured a social media 'go-along' methodology (Hine, 2015; Jørgensen, 2016; Møller & Robards, 2019). Here, participants and I interactively viewed social media content with participants encouraged to reflect on their thoughts and feelings. Participants selected the content after the first interview with the previous discussion informing their choices. Once again,

all but one participant chose to conduct the interview via Zoom (Zoom Inc., 2022). Zoom offers desktop sharing functions, which enable both the researcher and participant to view social media content together. However, my participants preferred using their mobile phones, lifting their phones up to the computer's camera. This allowed me to see what content they were referring to in their talk. These chats took place approximately one week after the initial interviews to allow for transcription and (some) analysis. The lag also enabled the participants and I to reflect on the preceding interviews and crystallised which topics deserved further exploration.

The social-media 'go-along' enhanced the study with added sources of information over a standard interview alone. The verbal, visual, and kinetic elements of data extended the understandings of vegan experiences. Today's young people exist both in the real world and in the virtual world of social media (Kaess, 2020). Covid-19 restrictions have only cemented this further. Hence, exploring the dis-embodied existence of participants added criticality, especially among the grand narratives that circulate virtually around the globe but have material effects on young vegan women in Aotearoa. Also, looking at social media content together created a co-observational intimacy. This provided me something akin to insider status (Hellawell, 2006) with participants definitively positioned as experts of their virtual world (Jørgensen, 2016). Here, I took on a more passive role compared to the standard interview. Participants narrated more readily, while I inserted myself without necessarily asserting very much at all. While an interview schedule (see Appendix E) was available to act as a "thematic touring invitation" (Jørgensen, 2016, p. 40), most participants felt empowered to control and direct the discussion throughout.

Yet, digital data, although freely available to the public, remains ethically contested in academic circles (Walther, 2002). I harboured doubts about whether social media content falls outside the realm of human subject research. While social media posts are intended for public consumption, often they reveal intimate details about everyday lives. People may not always be

mindful that their posts could be used for research. Hence, when participants reflected on content posted by an individual, I viewed such content as a reflection of socially and culturally specific ideals, not the representation of one person's experience. My analysis did not reflect the people producing the digital content, but rather the participants' reactions to the content and the discourses it drew on.

Transcription

All interviews were transcribed into Word documents, where I allocated pseudonyms to each of my participants. I chose to do this at the outset to avoid having to retrain my memory at later stages and so, dove into each individual data set cloaked by the pseudonym straight away. I was careful to include changes in tone, laughter, pauses, use of sarcasm, interruptions, etc., as well as my own questions and comments. I wanted to maintain as much nuanced detail of the interviews as possible. Yet, transcription is necessarily a reductionist process, and I acknowledge that some of the conversational and contextual richness was lost. While transcription was a lengthy process, it allowed me to re-familiarise myself with the interviews as embodied experiences, a re-living of these events. Once completed, I immersed myself in the audio again with the completed transcripts in front of me, enveloping myself in the memories and ensuring that nothing was missed. My affective responses and sensory memories played a pivotal role during the analysis stage, guiding my interpretation of participants' stories.

Participants were given the opportunity to review, amend, and comment on their transcribed interviews, promoting autonomy and transparency in the research process (Hydén, 2014). I considered this a vital step in embracing an ethics of care and relationality (Hill Collins, 2000) and felt that it enhanced feelings of empowerment and agency among my participants. None requested changes. Once participants were satisfied, the transcripts were released for publication by signing the Transcript Release Form (see Appendix F).

Analysis

While I considered transcription the starting point of my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), my first ideas formed as I actively read, re-read, and checked the written transcripts against their audio recordings. These preliminary ideas about relationships and categories formed the basis of my first round of coding and included my own responses in the interviews. The generation of codes was very much an interpretative act from my limited standpoint, where I chose to highlight certain aspects of the data, because I recognised them as meaningful. Thus, I cannot claim that this was an inductive process. These tentative codes represented units of data that I then drilled into.

As a novice researcher, I felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data, leading me to look to Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis to make some form of sense of the vastness. I spent many hours reading and re-reading the entire data set, looking for repeating patterns that held significance in relation to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Only after feeling at ease with the rhythm of the data, did I look back to the narrative discursive approach. My focus was on repetition: I searched for phrases, terms, and ways that participants positioned themselves. Then, I represented these patterns as codes. In this way, I took the entire data set and fragmented it, breaking it into pieces of meaning. These units agreed and clashed in places - sometimes detached, sometimes overlapping. I considered these potential discursive resources (Taylor, 2006). Collating and (re)grouping these fractured pieces over and over was the most time-intensive part of my analysis, where I attempted to synthesise a cohesive, meaningful interpretation. To do this, I used Microsoft Office Excel to sort all my data into meaningful themes in separate spread sheets. By copying and pasting the data from the Word documents according to designated codes, I noted instances of coherence (as in like categories) and divergence (as in unlike categories) both among the codes themselves and the entire data corpus. This required a constant back and forth between each of the elements (the analytic theme, the coded extract of data, and the dataset as a whole)

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Significant time was spent ensuring that my interpretation matched the assigned themes and patterns. At the same time, I was open to singular moments of meaning-making that held substantial magnitude and weight.

As discussed, I broadly followed Taylor and Littleton's (2006) approach infused by the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives of FST, poststructuralism, and Foucauldian-informed theorising. I envisioned that my analytic processes would occur systematically in a prescribed, orderly fashion. In reality, it was a messy, iterative, and circular venture far removed from notions of straightforward, organised, or sequential. Firstly, I asked my data what discursive resources were drawn on in the participants' stories in order to construct their identities. I queried how each account was supported and constrained by larger discursive narratives circulating in the socio-cultural and political milieu, while ascertaining common patterns across and between the participants' stories (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). I wondered in which ways each narrator referred to existing norms in relation to gender and veganism, but also such things as sexuality, ability, ethnicity, etc. among which wider norms and social pressures are embedded. I looked for points of con- and divergence: Narrators chose to conform or transgress, ritualise or liberate, take on normative or counter narratives.

As a critical piece of qualitative research, I aimed to move beyond merely descriptive categories that summarised the content of the interviews. I strove for a rich, nuanced analysis, a "*story* about the 'so what' of the data" (Clarke & Braun, 2018, p. 109). While my first analytic task had identified descriptive categories of both conformity and divergence, my second task attended to the performative aspects of the participants' stories where the use of resources was considered among the wider discursive landscape. I wanted to know why things were told in these particular ways, at these particular times, in this place. In short, I looked to see what work the discourse did for the narrator. Hence, I considered how the participants positioned themselves in the performance of

the interview (Riessman, 2008; Taylor & Littleton, 2006) and how power ran as lines of force through their accounts (Riley et al., 2022). The data depicted discourses that revealed the participant's positioning as claimed, contested, and conferred. Rather than trapped in particular subject positions, participants clearly rebelled, resisted, and disrupted dominant discourses. While positioned by these dominant discourses as subjects, participants creatively located themselves within this in varying ways – in flux, at odds, or complicit (Davies & Harré, 1990). These varying ways of positioning illustrated the socio-cultural discourses and ideological narratives that participants negotiated to construct accounts with continuity. They also highlighted instances where participants faced "trouble" (Taylor, 2005, p. 47). I honed in on these as they reflected points where participants were at odds with previous claims or prior positionings (occasioned by their life circumstances). These instances, signified by ambiguity, inconsistency, and contradiction, signalled spaces for change where possibilities arose (Burman, 1991).

In this Chapter, I have discussed my methodology, giving detail about my epistemology, analytic approach, and the reasons behind these. My ethical considerations were illustrated, and a snapshot of my method was provided. In the next Chapter, Chapter 4, I move on to my findings with an integrated discussion. Then, Chapter 5 is dedicated to my conclusion.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

My participants were keen to tell me their vegan stories, often expressing gratitude for the research. All narratives told of continued struggles for value, legitimacy, and recognition as vegan subjectivities. The findings are split into two main discourses, waking up to vegan knowledge and negotiating (ab)normality. Waking up to abnormality covers how my participants came to veganism and the significance of veganism in their lives. In contrast, negotiating (ab)normality deals with the tensions that being a vegan in non-vegan world holds (see Table 2).

Table 2

Main discourses and constitutive parts

Waking up to vegan knowledge	
	Waking up to (ab)normality Vegan knowledge truths Vegan knowledge among multiple oppressions • Gendered ways of vegan knowledge Vegan knowledge as a spiritual movement Exercising vegan knowledge power
Negotiating (ab)normality	
	Coming out vegan? No, thank you. Managing awkward others Awkward vegans THAT vegan • Gendered: overly sentimental • Angry, weird, crazy Vegan (un)heteronormativity "It's my choice to be vegan" • Personal choice • Independence and empowerment • Postfeminist healthism o Food restriction as a challenge o Taking charge of health = taking charge of life o Health is happiness o Health panopticon

1 - Waking up to vegan knowledge

Typically, my participants learned about the cruelty in animal industries through footage circulating on social media. The availability of such imagery has increased dramatically with the proliferation of social media and streaming services (Mummery & Rodan, 2017). The experience of encountering and engaging with animal oppression generated *vegan knowledge* and woke my participants from a position of ignorance. They could no longer live their lives on "autopilot and continue what they [we]re doing" (Adeline). Adopting veganism became the only option in the face of *vegan knowledge*.

1.1 – Waking up to (ab)normality

All my participants' stories told of turning point moments or epiphanies which Denzin (2018) describes as existentially challenging points in time that shape human lives irrevocably. These points caused them to rethink and recalibrate the normativity of animal product consumption. In telling me of these moments, their bodies bore signs of distress, disbelief, and anger even though many months or years had passed. In effect, their awakening to and acceptance of *vegan knowledge* was an embodied and emotional experience that turned their worldviews upside down. McDonald (2000) describes these as "catalytic experience[s]" (p. 8), highlighting their generative potential. Rose, a twenty-year-old Pākehā university student from Auckland's North Shore, explained:

> *[…] lots of people just refuse to watch the awful videos… because I mean, I was like that! Because I knew that it was, like, you know, not nice, but I didn't want to watch the videos. I just didn't realize how bad it was 'till I actually did watch […] There's this documentary that'd been recommended to watch and people say that 'very few people can watch it and think that's all okay', like, you don't need to go vegan or vegetarian or anything. So, like 'okay, yeah, sure. Let's watch it'. That documentary was Dominion [exposes the inherent violence*

among animal agricultural practices with graphic footage, (Delforce, 2018)]. I don't know if you've heard about… but it's brutal.

Sarah: Graphic kind of content in terms of animals?

Rose: Yeah, hidden cameras in slaughterhouses that…. Yeah. And it's really well-made and methodically goes through each animal that's used not just for food, but also for, like, entertainment, for science for fur, for all that kind of thing. And yeah, I hadn't really thought about it before. It was just like 'oh my God, how is this normal?' So, yeah, so that was where it really started.

Rose's excerpt typified *waking up to abnormality*. Initially, Rose grouped herself among the mainstream who "refuse to watch the awful videos". By watching however, Rose positioned herself as a rational and autonomous knowledge seeker, willing to go where others would not. Rose reframed routine slaughter as "brutal", deeming them abnormal and excessively violent ("oh my God, how is this normal?"). Her vegan turning point moment, "where it really started", came from gaining *vegan knowledge*, radically shifting her outlook, attitude, and behaviour. *Vegan knowledge* became the catalyst for adopting veganism. She explicitly questioned carnism's normativity ("how is this normal?"), while invoking a higher power ("God"). This likened the transformation to a spiritual experience. A sense of enlightenment has been noted in other research on vegan turning points (Hirschler, 2011; McDonald, 2000) and echoed throughout all the narratives. For example, Ed articulated it as "quite like… an awakening… like, surprising". Expressing the vegan turning point in such a way emphasised the powerful meaning-making that took place.

V*egan knowledge* also captured a point of resistance to dominant discourses around mainstream consumption norms. Discourses that position animal product consumption as normal, necessary, and nice, align with mainstream norms that regulate the consumption habits of ideal

neoliberal citizens in Western countries (Čakardić, 2017). Yet, my participants' turning point shattered these "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). The rejection of mainstream discourses and adopting *vegan knowledge* propelled my participants' subjectivities to the edges of normativity. As Ed put it, "it makes me feel, like, powerful that I can break through this societal, like, barrier, like, align my actions with my morals". *Vegan knowledge* led my participants to inhabit positionalities that continuously challenged the boundaries of normativity, often making their lives difficult.

1.2 – Vegan knowledge truths

Arguably, the accessibility of such footage can also be envisaged as a part of a general shift in "regimes of truth" with the advent of the internet (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Foucault (1977) saw systems of knowledge as organised by discursive arrangements and governed by professional experts legitimated by their ability to access knowledge (Foucault, 1977). He added that power and knowledge are intimately connected, and that power was diffuse with discourses traversing not only people but also institutions and other knowledge production bodies (Foucault, 1980). After watching *vegan knowledge* footage, my participants felt that they could no longer trust professional actors, bodies, and institutions that circulate mainstream discourses because these had been dishonest. Adeline, a 20-year-old Pākehā university student illustrated this:

> *I watched some of the documentaries and researched into the cruelty aspect, and it was initially very much the cruelty that was convincing me. […] But yeah, then, I was really angry at the fact that I hadn't been told this and this was going on without my knowledge.*

Adeline called attention to how conventional knowledge claims become validated, legitimated, and circulated as truth. My participants regularly challenged both the power of truth notions and the powers that created these. To resist, my participants often constructed themselves as privileged and informed learners who challenge canonical knowledge in favour of researching their own truths. These truths represent a unique set of *vegan knowledges* that position vegan

subjectivities as having access to secret or hidden information (Gvion, 2020). My participants' *vegan knowledge* claims represented sites of resistance potent with the possibilities of challenging conventional knowledge, disrupting power structures, and ending animal oppression.

Yet, they were quick to point out that that this did not mean that they were "better than or more educated than" (Adeline). Explicitly moving away from perceptions of vegans as morally superior and judgemental (Cole & Morgan, 2011; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017), my participants tended to take up subjectivities with less problematic positionalities. Lobster, an 18-year-old high school student, elaborated:

> *So, ideally, there'd be a world where we could all be vegan, but the truth is that at the moment, that's just not possible. […] Because the truth is, is that cruelty towards animals has just become completely normalized in our society. And big corporations running that and running these farms and stuff like that are the ones that are really to blame, you know?! So, I think that if people are in a space where they can re-evaluate their choices and become vegan, and then they absolutely should, and then when more people who are able to do that, then more options will become available, and then it'll become more accessible for everybody. That's the way that I see, going forward. Because the truth is, that yes, you can go vegan with pretty much any medical thing today, but it's just so [pause]… it can be expensive… if you have medical needs or and like people with like sensory issues and stuff like that, it's just, it's just not feasible for everybody at the moment, you know.*

I found Lobster's excerpt meaningful, because it highlighted the greater contextual environment that houses both veganism and mainstream lifestyles. While vegan truth narratives depict the commodification of animals as violent (Twine, 2014), Lobster complicated this by drawing on the entanglement between consumption and ideology. Neoliberal economic interventions in Aotearoa's industries have seen the rise of large cooperations and their regulating bodies overseeing, managing, and controlling every aspect of animal production and consumption

(Lawrence & Campbell, 2013; Reynolds & Mirosa, 2021). As Rose illustrated, “it's definitely not always your happy farmer on his little organic farm”. My participants deflected blame away from individuals and instead, problematised structural and institutional aspects of existing food systems (Ko & Ko, 2017) . My participants neither derived moral solace for their veganism nor did they ignore inequalities that complicate the adoption of veganism for some (Guthman, 2008; Harrington et al., 2019). Instead, their transition to veganism made them “a lot more sympathetic and empathetic”, caring “a lot more about people and about things in general” (Ed). Their subjectivities challenged popular discursive constructions of vegans as militant, judgemental, and moralistic (Cole & Stewart, 2021). Rather, my participants’ narratives featured high levels of empathy not only for the oppression of animals but other (intersecting) oppressions.

1.3 – ‘Vegan knowledge’ among multiple intersecting oppressions

While their new *vegan knowledge* created a more compassionate outlook, their subjectivities were peppered with difficulties, at least initially. All my participants indicated that their encounter with *vegan knowledge* and the resulting anger destroyed the world that they thought they knew (Stallwood, 2014).

> *Rose: In general, so, I had a fat crisis about this at first... So, it was just like ‘oh, my God, humanity is evil’.*

> *Winter: At the start, I had a lot of grief and the sense that the world is so lacking and how we're so cruel. I still do.*

> *Jane Doe: I do see a lot more, like, violence now. Well, but that's,… it's not that that wasn't there before. It's just now that… I'm just thinking about it a bit more.*

However, the disillusion and anger served as a form of politicised emotion (Oliver, 2020). Rather than destructive, their feelings became an impetus for change, a (re)imagination of the world as more

just. Their *vegan knowledge* spawned collective political action in the form of activism. Most frequently, my participants cited action against environmental degradation, sexism, heteronormativity, and racism.

Winter, a 20-year-old Pākehā university student from Whanganui, highlighted how *vegan knowledg*e enabled her to see how the normalisation and legitimatisation of animal oppression served as a framework by which groups of people can be dehumanised:

> *I think racism is the biggest example for it. Where… it's the biggest example, where the white people would treat, back in the slavery times, treat them as animals, not humans and not equal. And then, it just shows that that's also how they treat animals and it's crossed over into the humans and found a way to mark them as 'not equal', even though we are. Yeah, if that makes sense***.**

It is important to point out that none of my participants conflated the differences between historically specific forms oppressions (Ko, 2017). Rather, they acknowledged the shared root of oppressions. Rose's sentiment that "the 'holocaust', which obviously sounds really bad… because, yeah, it's different, but at the same time, it's, like, when you actually think about it, scarily similar" signalled the subtle nuance necessary in articulating these ideas and were common across all narratives. These constructions of intersecting oppressions are noteworthy as this research positions vegans outside popular discourses that suggest vegans are prone to drawing simplistic comparisons between oppressions (Kim, 2011). Instead, my participants' stories challenged the ontological and epistemological foundations of oppression: The encounter and acceptance of *vegan knowledge* functioned as the springboard from which oppression's ideology could be interrogated.

1.3.1 – Gendered ways of vegan knowledge

When I asked my participants why they thought veganism was such a gendered movement, they noted that *vegan knowledge* was particularly salient for women because of their own oppression. Traditionally, the link between femininity and veganism has been explained through discourses that qualify women as naturally and inherently more nurturing and empathetic (Gaarder, 2011; Greenebaum, 2018; Herzog, 2007). My participants recognised this trope in the "natural attitudes that are around" (Adeline), but often felt that this only reflected "the patriarchy sneering that compassion is only for women, which is stupid, obviously" (Lobster). By describing the entangled web of patriarchal discourses, human bodies, and institutions as "natural", they recognised that these forces shaped their lives in invisible but very powerful ways. My participants were well versed in gender politics and understood that the link between femininity, empathy, and care was often invoked against them (Hill Collins, 2000), especially in the context of veganism. Yet, discursively positioning these gendered power differentials as "natural attitudes" only illustrated their ordinariness in the lives of my participants (Lazar, 2014). Their taken-for-granted status made them illusive and stifled direct critique. Rather, gender inequality was addressed more subtly. For example, Adeline demonstrated the nuanced way in which my participants typically framed gender with veganism in mind:

> *Because I think people get angry when you compare animal experience to human experience, because they don't view animals in a similar light at all to humans. But when you do and when you have empathy, you know, they're sentient beings, and they have emotions and all that, then it's really upsetting. And I think when you're considering the effects of those kinds of practices, they definitely tie into how women are treated - the oppression and how we're going backwards in time and there's no privacy now, Roe v. Wade, that makes all of the other privacy acts, too, like same-sex marriage, interracial marriage, contraception, all of those things are in jeopardy now. And it's not what any of us think we're gonna have growing up in this day and*

age. We're trying to move forward and become better and improved and it feels like we're going backwards, which is just very scary. I'd like to be thinking that it's getting better not worse. I think it ties in more so than people think, into animal oppression as well and that, like everything apart from white men is under threat at the moment. It's very scary.

Rather than using first person, Adeline embedded herself among young vegan women collectively ("you") to tell me that directly comparing human and animal experiences generates negative responses among non-vegans. Her *vegan knowledge* views "animals in a similar light to all humans", setting her apart from the mainstream. Mainstream consumers, not privy to *vegan knowledge*, were implied to lack empathy compared to vegans, positioning them less favourably. Young women bolstered *vegan knowledge* inhabited more positive subjectivities who recognise the "upsetting" aspects of animal agriculture. "[U]psetting" as a politicised emotion served to question the foundations of oppression leading to the consideration of the "effects of those kinds of practices". This honed in on the ideological framework that permits and legitimates oppression, interrogating how it may "definitely tie into how women are treated - the oppression". Rather than drawing simple comparisons between the (historic) oppression of women and animals, she centred interlocking systems of violence that work in diffuse and disciplinary ways through a shared ideology (Hamilton, 2019). Here, *vegan knowledge* created capacities to explore oppressions on a deeper level. All of my participants did this on some level, often noting the entanglement of different oppressions.

The reversal of the right to abortion in the U.S.A. was a hot topic for all participants and signified to them that oppression was increasing globally. Adeline expressed fear that multiple oppressions including racism ("interracial marriage") and heterosexism ("same-sex marriage") may rise in response to the repeal of Roe v. Wade. Her sentiment that "[W]e're going backwards" invoked a return to the Dark Ages, the wrong way along a developmental trajectory toward

equality/equity. Here, *vegan knowledge* truths painted a bleak future instead of "becom[ing] better and improving". Yet, this positioned *vegan knowledge* as ways to resist these oppressions. In delimiting that "everything apart from white men is under threat", my participants frequently emphasised interlocking systems of violence and multiple oppressions, raising concern. Concern, worry, and fear can be seen as a form of politicised emotion, providing fertile ground from which possibilities for political action may follow. Across and between narratives, *vegan knowledge* and feminism became united with the political goal of ending all oppression.

1.4 – Vegan knowledge as a spiritual movement

As discussed, *vegan knowledge* was typically presented as a form of enlightenment, seeking to end animal oppression. *Vegan knowledge* led to epiphanies, positioning *vegan knowledge* akin to spiritual doctrine. This conceptually propelled veganism into the sphere of quasi-religion. Scholars remain locked in a struggle to differentiate religion from spirituality (Paloutzian & Park, 2021). While Hill et al. (2000) note that spirituality is a more nebulous concept, they assert that it provides a sense of divinity, an "Ultimate Truth" (p. 66), nonetheless. They also illustrate that spirituality encompasses a form of knowledge that is felt, an embodied experience. As noted, my participants considered *vegan knowledge* an embodied and emotional knowledge much like what Hill et al. (2000) describe. Veganism then represented a form of spirituality and *vegan knowledge* an "Ultimate Truth" for most of my participants (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66). These similarities were bolstered by the shared sentiment that a vegan transition was akin to an epiphany. Consequently, my participants were highly motivated to spread vegan gospel with either voicing a desire for involvement or direct involvement in vegan activism.

Ed: I'd love to become an animal rights activist and protest, but I'm a bit too shy right now.

Lobster: We do chalking, like chalking activism, chalking stuff on the waterfront, which is quite good. And I'm definitely kind of vegan for the animals, you know, that's my reason.

Chanel: We went to this protest against the rodeo and back then I had Instagram and so I posted photos of us to, yeah, advertise it more. Yeah.

Notably, the narratives mainly provided forms of vegan activism that relied on group action, based on a strong collective identity and community much like forms of organised religion that provide social cohesion (Durkheim et al., 2001). One vegan activist featured numerous times: Earthling Ed has become one of the key players in sharing vegan ethics both on social media (e.g., Earthling Ed, 2022) and literature (Winters, 2022). Rose illustrated the admiration my participants had:

[…] because Earthling Ed is kind of 'Vegan Jesus' like he knows all about it […] but he is, like, the biggest, you know, activist for me. Yeah, I think he's the coolest and he's done quite a lot. And he like argues the ethics of it and also, the environmental impact of it. And he does it in a very cool, cool-headed way and, like, just, yeah, a very good way.

Earthling Ed was positioned as a prophet ("Vegan Jesus") who bears and projects the ethical spirit of veganism "in a very cool, cool-headed way and, like, just, yeah, a very good way". Rose positioned him as logical, rational, and knowledgeable, endowing him with esteemed scientific qualities. Calling him "Vegan Jesus" also bequeathed him with Christian religious powers. Drawing on such discourses, she presented veganism as a set of organised moral values and beliefs, reminiscent of religious doctrine with Earthling Ed at the helm. This served to normalise vegan activism and underpinned it with associated discourses such as traditional, conservative family values (Durkheim, 2012). These associated discourses worked to legitimate veganism, so that *vegan knowledge* could be understood as normal and natural. In addition, veganism was presented as an alternative to traditional religious practices that dominate the West. Johnson (2018) argues that

veganism fits the legal definition of religion, lending credibility to the notion that veganism's belief system is similar to those seen in religious movements.

Most of my participants hailed from secular perspectives but invoked Christian discourse. This pointed to the centrality of Christianity in the Western world. Yet, framing vegan outreach in such a way also worked to privilege the white, Western, male, theistic, able-bodied, and heteronormative elite of old (Wrenn, 2015). This group has often used religious rhetoric to oppress and yet, it is also the group that *vegan knowledge* aimed to usurp. This indicated an absence of secular moral discourses through which to communicate *vegan knowledge* in the West and may stifle *vegan knowledge*'s potential to interrogate oppression, especially as "everything apart from white men is under threat" (Adeline).

1.5 – Exercising vegan knowledge power

The power of *vegan knowledge* was most concretely exercised in the marketplace. Individualised consumerism was seen as a political statement that made participants feel powerful. When I asked Ed, if veganism had impacted the way she sees the world, she told me:

> *I think it's made me feel like I have a lot more power. Simply, because of this 'buying and demand', ummm, not theory, like, fact. Where… if I'm not paying for this, that that company isn't getting my money, and so, I'm directly not supporting it. Well, I try not to support <u>any</u> company, when I can. Like, I don't buy anything that I don't desperately need… only something that looks like it's going to last, even though it's a bit hard to tell nowadays. Yeah, just companies that seem like they have good values. And often, like, especially ones that you can, like, see the people behind them, which means that they're a bit small scale. So, it really makes me feel like small actions, that I think in my everyday life, are lot more impactful than maybe... So, it's like the ripple effect of small actions can actually be quite big. Yeah.*

I found Ed engaging with a powerful set of discourses that interpolate neoliberal citizens to view themselves mainly as consumers (Bauman, 2007). Often, people's lives are structured and managed as commercially appropriate through neoliberal constructs of freedom and autonomous choice (Rose, 1996). In a Foucauldian sense, free and agentic consumption practices were envisioned by most of my participants as technologies of the self through which disciplinary and diffuse power was felt (Foucault, 2008). Hence, neoliberal consumerism represented one of the main avenues through which power relations were played out. Ed took these discourses up readily and presented her consumption as ways to feel powerful. As a free, autonomous, and rational consumer who was aware of "buy and demand" dynamics, Ed exercised her *vegan knowledge* through her purchasing choices, producing powerful affective responses ("feel like I have a lot more power"). She only supported companies that "seem like they have good values" and where she can "see the people behind them". Like the others, Ed's peek behind the veil of obscurity of animal industries generated *vegan knowledge.* Subsequently, *vegan knowledge* led her to problematise dis-embodied corporations, expressing preference for the "small-scale" visibility of human bodies. While she referred to individualised modes of consumption through her use of first person, she also spoke to a collective vegan identity and the political potential of cumulative individual consumption practices by noting that "the ripple effect of small actions can actually be quite big".

Despite Ed's uptake of neoliberal discourses, she also resists as evidenced by "Well, I try not to support any company, when I can. Like, I don't buy anything that I don't desperately need…". Here, the fragmentary nature of her subjectivity shone as she actively defied all forms of consumption. This represented a tactic committed to broader political agendas, seeking to interrupt neoliberal capitalism. In this way, other oppressive ideologies that are intertwined among modes of consumption such as colonialism (Harper, 2010a) and patriarchy (Winch, 2011) also become challenged. Ed's individual resistance alongside an (imagined) collective vegan community illustrated

that veganism often asserts itself in the hinterland between organised social justice movement and everyday decolonial activism, in spaces not strictly allocated to overt activist tactics.

At the same time however, gendered dimensions of *vegan knowledge* made young women more likely to become invested in neoliberal consumption practices. Ella Jane explained how femininity allows for greater exposure to consumerism:

> *I would say, like, like…women are able to make choices a bit better. And, I feel like, obviously, with, like, a lot of, ummm, skincare and stuff like that, there's a lot more of vegan stuff. So, women are like 'oh yeah, like, that's great'. Whereas guys, like, they don't even get really exposed to any type of vegan stuff. And, especially, because guys aren't really into clothes and stuff like leather, like, it wouldn't bother them. And, in skincare as well. They're not really exposed. They're not really exposed to the problems that come from that type of stuff.*

Ella Jane was drawing on popular discourses that depict women as greater beneficiaries among neoliberal ideals of choice and freedom (Rutherford, 2018). These ideals beckon women to consume to become empowered, promising gender equality in doing so. Despite recognition that structural and systemic gaps in the context of gender, class, and race are expanding in neoliberal times (Gonick et al., 2009; Mohanty, 2013), young women today understand themselves as needing consistent consumption to live their best lives (Lazar, 2011). Ella Jane highlighted the gendered aspects of consumption where women welcome a greater availability of vegan cosmetics and clothing. The explosion in availability of vegan products in recent years (White, 2018) has already been commented on. Ella Jane's remarks only emphasised that the majority of these products are marketed at women, backing claims that neoliberal vegan femininity is produced through consumptive practices.

Yet, Ella Jane added complexity to feminine vegan subjectivities by pointing out that interpellation into consumption also facilitated encounters with the darker side of animal

agriculture. Men, not required to consume in the same way, were positioned as lacking exposure to "the problems that come from that type of stuff", "because guys aren't really into" cosmetics or clothes, products that women consume in vast numbers to produce ideal neoliberal feminine citizenship (Jones, 2008). While Ella Jane illustrated that consumption remained an ever-present form of disciplinary power gripping young vegan women (Foucault, 1977), these same consumption practices enabled new capacities in the context of veganism (Heyes, 2007). Here, exposure to products in the marketplace held the potential to create and embody *vegan knowledge* in mainstream consumers.

Summary of vegan knowledge

My participants described an epiphany, a turning point of waking up to a truth that had previously been hidden – vegan knowledge. Vegan knowledge produced unique truths that centred on the commodification of animals as violent, contrasting traditional mainstream claims. These vegan knowledge truths spawned motivations to end intersecting oppressions and positioned veganism as a concurrently spiritual and political movement. Yet, in the current neoliberal climate, the power of vegan knowledge can most concretely be exercised in the marketplace by choosing, as far as possible, cruelty-free consumerism as a form of political resistance. Of course, engaging in neoliberal capitalism only interpellates young vegan women further into neoliberal modes of thinking and curbs veganism's radical political potential.

2 - Negotiating (ab)normality

This section covers some of the challenges my participants encountered in their lives. They remarked that interactions with others, countering vegan stereotypes, rubbing up against heteronormativity, and imperatives to be perfect presented some of the most difficult elements of being a vegan in a non-vegan world. Negotiating their vegan subjectivities among mainstream norms

was ongoing and evident in all facets of life, leading to constant self-surveillance and (imagined) surveillance by others.

My participants felt that transitioning to veganism initiated a positive change in their self-image. For example, Lobster highlighted the significant meaning-making: “I mean, I've had a lot of problems with how I see myself, but my veganism has always been something that I've been able to be proud of, I suppose”. These sentiments echoed throughout the narratives and filled my participants with gratitude and pride. Often, the intention of *vegan knowledge* and its perception and reception wildly diverged, necessitating strategies to save face (Greenebaum, 2012).

2.1 – ‘Coming out’ vegan? No, thank you.

My participants consistently described their vegan subjectivities as malleable and fluid across social contexts, always negotiated among processes of regulation and normalisation. All participants concealed their veganism at some point. Disclosure was always carefully considered and never just a given.

Adeline: Yeah, well, I think I never want to tell people initially…

Ed: I don't go around telling people that I'm vegan.

Lobster: Usually, I tend not to tell people unless they bring it up, you know.

Winter: I never bring it up.

Rose: I just, I just don't bring it up.

The unwillingness to disclose spoke to the high level of stigma that vegan subjectivities experience (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Drawing on Goffman’s (1990) work on stigmatised identities, veganism became the type of trait that could “obtrude itself upon attention” (p. 5). However,

nondisclosure did not seem to come from overt negative experiences with the mainstream. In absence of these, it is likely that negative stereotypes of veganism are to blame where the unwillingness to disclose can be tethered to a potential for negativity. Cole and Morgan (2011) highlighted "vegaphobic" discourses that characterise vegans as overly sentimental, hostile, ascetic, and faddist (p. 149). They argue that these everyday symbols combined with a lack of vegan voices leads to the "marginalisation of vegans themselves, evidenced through the ubiquity of the imagined omnivorous reader" (Cole & Morgan, 2011, p. 149). With a lack of options through which vegan subjectivities can view themselves, my participants often felt forced to see themselves through the eyes of the mainstream. The resulting (imagined) transgression against the power of normativity seemed to elicit aversive reactions and feelings. In effect, they developed internalised stigma, interfering with their ability to live true to their vegan subjectivities. Internalised stigma is felt and enacted for such subjectivities in relation to what their identities and practices represent to others (Ahmed, 2004). The internalised stigmatisation of vegan subjectivities along with anti-vegan discourses in media and government (by promoting omnivorous diets, for example) acted as an all-powerful dispositif that muffled some of the political potential of *vegan knowledge* (Foucault, 1977).

Nondisclosure helped my participants avoid real or imagined uncomfortable interactions and pass as "normal" (Goffman, 1990, p. 6). Yet, the highly social nature of eating made this near impossible. All of my participants were full-time students at secondary schools or tertiary education providers. As young people at transitional periods, they encountered a great number of commensal partners in a variety of contexts. Especially for those at university, shared living arrangements brought their veganism to others' attention. When I asked Rose how she felt about telling people that she's vegan, she explained:

> *Um, again, it depends on the mentality… you don't want to come out as the person who's like, like, the first thing that you say when you meet someone… It's like 'hi, I'm Rose, I'm*

vegan'. You know, that's like… I've noticed actually, like, food is a lot more…. Like, I didn't realize it before, but now that I'm vegan… like, I eat food around people a lot, so it comes up a lot, which I don't think it used to before, but now it really does.

"[D]epending on the mentality" illustrated that Rose gaged how receptive her company may be. Before veganism, Rose understood eating as an unreflective practice that did not bear much consideration ("didn't realise it before"). Social eating only became an issue once Rose transitioned. "[E]at[ing] food around people a lot" forced the issue, rendering veganism visible. Strategic negotiation with non-vegans was required. She routinely chose to "save face" (Greenebaum, 2012, p. 309) by refraining from "com[ing] out as the person who's like, like, the first thing that you say when you meet someone… It's like 'hi, I'm Rose, I'm vegan'". It was clear that Rose anticipated stigma and worked hard to facilitate smooth interactions. When I asked her if there was a part of her that felt ashamed of her veganism, she assured me of her unapologetic pride. This paradox – of hiding parts of subjectivities, while concurrently feeling unashamed – highlighted that vegan (stigmatised) subjectivities are often called upon to position themselves as gracefully accepting and presenting themselves as "normal" (Goffman, 1990, p. 6). The voluntary concealment ensures that the mainstream remains comfortable in situations where they would be required to display similar levels of acceptance, something that is not guaranteed. This pattern occurred through all the stories and told of awkward moments in engaging with non-vegans which is discussed below.

2.2 – Managing awkward others

Managing their presentation to the world became particularly salient for my participants when others probed about their motivations. They were acutely aware that discussing vegan ethics could be perceived as threatening or implying judgement (Greenebaum, 2012). To mitigate possible social disapproval, they rarely revealed their true reasons. Instead, they opted to cite health and environmental degradation. Adeline told me that she constantly engages in "filtering what you're

saying" and that she tries hard to highlight the "good [environmental and health] parts of veganism, not why, to justify without hurting other people's feelings". In seeking socially acceptable positionalities, my participants often mentioned that they felt lucky that veganism was increasingly hailed as a way to circumvent chronic disease and environmental degradation (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). In this way, they could avoid ethical confrontations. Concurrently, there was evidence of nuanced anger. Winter emphasised some of the negative emotions that vegan subjectivities must negotiate:

> *It's soooooo frustrating. For sure. That's what I was talking about, the people take it personally, every time! I wouldn't say shit, because like, not my place […] when he found out I was vegan. He'd be like, 'don't worry. She's one of the cool vegans'. Ah, yeah! What does that mean? If you met me in person, like you should see my social media! Then you wouldn't think that. And if you know me, you'd know like, I'm a normal vegan. I'm like every other ethical vegan. Yeah, what just because I don't complain? So, I try not to now and only if it comes up. Yeah, I just save that specific side of myself. But yeah, which is kind of sad. It's like, 'well, why can't we express that when everyone else expresses themselves?' It's awkward.*

Winter demonstrated that vegan ethical discussions usually foster negative emotions in non-vegans ("the people take it personally"). "[E]very time", so routinely, her mere presence rubbed up against mainstream norms as non-vegans feel confronted by her perceived or actual criticism (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Like most of my participants, Winter reiterated that non-vegan discomfort was in no way provoked. She did not "say shit" or "complain", although finding it "soooooo frustrating". Winter positioned herself as working strategically to ensure smooth communication with non-vegans. Through strategic communication that avoids non-vegan defensive behaviour, she became "one of the cool vegans", a preferred subject position considering the many stereotypes of vegans.

Yet, Winter also illustrated that the fragmentary nature of her "cool vegan" subjectivity, letting me know that she does not behave as conciliatory in all contexts. On social media, she embraced her ethical veganism, showing the world a different side. She revealed her awareness that such selective disclosure across contexts is common among vegans. "If you kn[e]w her" called on a more authentic subjectivity, a real self. This "normal vegan" subjectivity who saved that "specific [ethical] side" remained reserved for the people closest to her and the anonymous masses on the internet. In the space between these two subjectivities, Winter's discomfort arose. She questioned why mainstream consumers are privileged to express themselves freely, while vegans must hide or at least downplay their values. Her unwillingness to stand up against regulatory norms may make non-vegans feel more comfortable, but Winter knew that "every other" vegan pays a price: While non-vegans are guaranteed smooth interactions, vegans are left feeling "kind of sad".

This excerpt also illustrated that Winter's comments had been shaped by previous talk. She "no longer" "complain[ed]", illustrating that there had been a time, when she shared her *vegan knowledge* more openly. When I asked why, she explained that she was ostracised in high school, telling me "they just stopped talking to me, because it wasn't something normal, especially in a small town". While this level of social exclusion was unusual among my participants, they all experienced forms of microaggression such as being told that they "eat grass on the daily" (Jane Doe) or being "ripped into by family" (Adeline). Yet, the two participants who hailed from small, rural towns in Aotearoa experienced the highest levels discrimination. White and Potts (2008) suggest that animal product consumption represents dominant symbols of Aotearoa's nationhood, positioning veganism as something akin to unpatriotic (White & Potts, 2008). This line held particularly salience in rural communities, where "a lot of my family and my friends are farmers and their whole lifestyles depend on the income" and "they provide for our country" (Ella Jane). Popular rhetoric in these regions often presented farming as a testament to ingenuity and self-reliance without attending to environmental degradation and lack of sustainability. Hence, discourses in support of carnism's

ideology (Joy, 2020) caused much more strife in the lives of my rural participants, positioning their vegan subjectivities as hyper-abnormal.

2.3 – Awkward vegans

Vegan-non-vegan interactions were often positioned as "awkward". "Awkward" came up a lot when my participants described their daily lives. "[N]othing vegan at AUT, awkward" (Winter), "there was no V for vegan, awkward" (Jane Doe), "they made me bring all my own stuff. It was so awkward" (Ella Jane) showed that awkwardness was a thread that wound itself through the fabric of the narratives. Reframing Ahmed's (2010) concept of the "feminist killjoy" (p. 571), Twine (2014) invokes the "vegan killjoy" in explaining the sense of awkwardness that vegans introduce among non-vegans (p. 623). He centres the "sense of embodied questioning, a discomfort to the habitual normativity of meat culture" that veganism brings (Twine, 2014, p. 632). Lobster recounted an instance where awkwardness was the name of the game:

> *Usually, I tend not to tell people unless they bring it up, you know. Yeah, it can be a little bit of a worry, just because of how people are, what people are gonna say, and how they're gonna react, and stuff like that. It can be… you get some interesting stuff. There are some times… one of my most awkward ones, I think, was when I mentioned that I was vegan to someone and he said, 'Oh, well, you know, at least you seem like one of those normal vegans as opposed to, you know, the nutters that are standing on Cuba Street' and I was like, 'so, those are some of my friends and I have been to events like that in the past'. Nutters! That's a strong word to use…*

While my participants all ascribed to selective disclosure, none outright lied. Yet, when they must gage how their *vegan knowledge* will be received, all expressed uncertainty. As Lobster noted, "it can be a little bit of a worry, just because of how people are, what people are gonna say, and how

they're gonna react, and stuff like that". Often these were anxious moments for them as they waited to see what "interesting stuff" would occur during these interactions. "Interesting" here served as a form of downplaying, deflecting away from the potential for serious unpleasantness (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Rather than overt, Lobster was faced with a more typical form of aggression commonly used against vegans. Often, soft (non-violent) repression in the form of ridicule is used to silence veganism's political message (Ferree, 2004). While Lobster fit in among "those normal vegans as opposed to, you know, the nutters", the underlying message remained that veganism is a form of deviance. Vegan "nutters" were therefore strange, almost mentally disturbed.

Yet, Lobster refused the favourable position in the encounter. While Lobster normally accepted silencing ("tend not to tell people"), they aligned themselves with "some of my friends", engaging in peaceful activism by "standing on Cuba Street", hardly worthy of disparage. Notably, discursive practices often position vegans as "crazy" regardless of their actions (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019, p. 4). My insider-status facilitated an open-end to the story as vegans are collectively aware of this trope. There was no explanation necessary in these moments, rather they presented opportunities for collusion. With stereotypes permeating a collective vegan identity, subjectivities must either choose to accept or refute non-vegan perceptions (Meisenbach, 2010). As Lobster's narrative showed, vegan subjectivities negotiate these challenging encounters in variable ways depending on the contextual details of the situation. While a considerable amount of time and effort is spent in ensuring harmony, these moments always feel "most awkward".

2.4 – THAT vegan

Jane Doe: "You know, I believe people think all vegans are that person"

One of the most difficult aspects of living a vegan life for my participants centred around existing negative stereotypes. Cole and Morgan (2011) demonstrated the vegaphobic discourses that

position vegans as overly sentimental, faddy, ascetic, extreme, or hostile. These discourses project notions of deviance that defile veganism and vegans, tainting them with irrationality and danger. My participants wrestled with these depictions as these shaped their decisions, actions, and word choices in the world. Firstly, I discuss how the participants deal with gender and empathy, and thinness ideals, and then the tensions of working against THAT vegan.

2.4.1 – Gendered: Overly sentimental

While mainstream consumers may feel that they actively foreground care, empathy, and compassion as they negotiate the (human) world, vegans also include animals as worthy of consideration (Doyle, 2016). Adeline explained, "I think it's all about how we treat our most vulnerable members, animals included". Combatting notions that non-vegans are callous in this regard however, vegans are often depicted as overly compassionate, going above and beyond normative levels of empathy. This is invoked particularly against women (Cole & Morgan, 2011) There may have been truthful elements: Certainly, my participants all described themselves as very empathetic with great zeal for making the world a better place. While deployed by all genders, the overly sensitive discourse is largely feminised (Cairns et al., 2010). This feminisation was often experienced as unfair when levelled against my participants, but also when used against men. In telling me why veganism remained a gendered movement, Adeline thought:

> *[O]bviously, there's a stereotype that women are more empathetic that we're allowed to express our emotions in society much more than men. And I feel like you could be perceived as weak as a man if you weren't eating meat, that kind of thing. Like, if you don't eat meat, you won't be as strong, so I feel like there's a lot of toxic masculinity. And like, the way that we view masculinity, that will tie into the stereotype of women being vegan. But yeah, I don't agree with the whole masculine toxicity. I just think that's still a contributing factor to men… that he'd be ripped into.*

Adeline called on feminist discourses that resist notions of women as inherently more empathetic than men (Appignanesi, 2008). By using the word "allowed", she hit on gendered norms of being in the world that regulate all conduct – thinking, feeling, and behaviour (Foucault, 1977). In her view, women had permission to express their emotions freely, arguably because social and ideological forces have already positioned them as excessively sentimental and irrational (Appignanesi, 2008). The same expressive freedom, however, was not available to men. They may not express emotions freely, risking harsher social sanctions in the context of veganism. This binary thinking remains common in the West, where men/women, rational/emotional, and masculinity/femininity are situated as polar opposites, yet always with one preferentially positioned over the other (Derrida, 1988). Adeline considered that men's favourable position as "strong" comes with a drawback; pressure to uphold "toxic masculinity" rendered veganism unintelligible to men. Masculine veganism was a stigmatised trait worthy of being "ripped into", while "meat" consumption produced a preferential form of masculinity. Adeline clearly recognised that the link between animal products and masculinity/power (Potts & Parry, 2010) leads to an amalgamation of anti-vegan and sexist discourses that problematises vegan masculinity. For Adeline, this reflected that gender and animal oppression share commonalities rooted in patriarchy (Adams, 2016). While the focus is often on the harm that gender inequality poses for women, Adeline illustrated that these dynamics also hurt men. In this way, vegan men face more precarity. By delimiting these dynamics as "the whole masculine toxicity", Adeline opened up possibilities for renegotiation among the entanglement of gender and animal oppression.

2.4.2 – Angry, weird, crazy

Another dominant stereotype in the narratives was the angry vegan. This stereotype was ever present and had to be actively resisted. When I asked how vegans were perceived, my participants responded:

> *Adeline: …it was more of like, 'oh, those angry vegans putting their opinions on everyone'. But I think it's interesting that the perception is that it is vegans who are forcing their views on people when, really, it is this huge issue that everyone else doesn't want to acknowledge.*

> *Chanel: Probably that they're angry sometimes. Loud.*

> *Winter: It's got such negative stereotypes. They think that vegans are angry, and things like that. And that we hate and criticize everyone loudly for their life choices. As soon as you're like 'I'm vegan', me saying that is not me judging you.*

> *Rose: [Y]ou know, go into a McDonald's covered in blood and, like, holding signs and looking crazy.*

The excerpts attested to the depiction of vegans as tiresome figures that "hate and criticise everyone loudly." This stereotype rested on the fact that vegans (supposedly) always talk about veganism to everyone that they encounter. As discussed however, my participants were reluctant to reveal their veganism and went to great lengths to ensure smooth interactions with non-vegans wherever possible. Of course, my participants felt that this created an impossible situation for them: While they were strong proponents of vegan ethics, the only way to defy the angry vegan stereotype was to stay quiet. This silenced core parts of their subjectivities, always mindful to set "the example of a good vegan [because] I don't want to be perceived as someone who's forcing it, which I guess ties into the angry vegan thing" (Adeline).

The “angry vegan” stereotype also decontextualised the ideological dominance of animal product consumption, ever-present yet invisible. Much like Adeline above, Jane Doe spoke to the invisible normativity:

> *That we force them to, like, force our opinions down other people's throats and, you know, we care what other people eat so much and just we're in everybody else's business. Yeah, a lot of hate for it. And, I guess this sort of… forcing their non-vegan opinions on you,… it's not as visible, because it’s just how it is. It is that kind of… like, the feeling...frustration.*

The ubiquity of animal product consumption meant that “it’s not as visible, because it’s just how it is”. Yet, Jane Doe resisted this and turned the tables on non-vegans. Rather than vegans “forc[ing] our opinions down other people's throats”, *vegan knowledge* created a version of truth where mainstream consumers were indeed the ones that “forc[e] their non-vegan opinions” on vegans. In reframing who is forcing their opinion on who, she demonstrated that the delivery of pro-carnist propaganda is so ordinary and ubiquitous that the idea of non-vegans as forceful remains unintelligible. Against such engrained normativity, vegans are always seen as pushing a vegan agenda.

Jane Doe also evidenced “like, the feeling…frustration” that the angry vegan stereotype created among my participants. Acutely aware, they often explained that “the best thing to do is, only if people ask, you explain why” (Lobster). Yet, this constant self-surveillance and surveillance by others caused strife. Feelings like frustration, unease, even unhappiness arose within the narrow band of acceptable vegan behaviour. These feelings became the condition from which possibilities could arise, however. The negative affective responses had the potential to interrogate mainstream consumption. For example, Winter occasionally resorted to brusque retorts, when frustration bubbled over: “I'm like, ’okay, your shit’s not my problem. Have fun dying at fifty! I'm out of here’”. Moments like these invited change, exposing the anger, frustration, and annoyance that my

participants experienced when interacting with non-vegans. Here, these feelings culminated in letting non-vegans know about some of the (possibly) unsavoury consequences of a diet rich in animal products. In effect, these moments shattered an assumed shared happiness between vegans and non-vegans, exposing a rift between worldviews (Twine, 2014). When *vegan knowledge* spills out in response to frustration, it inevitably disrupts the happiness of non-vegans. *Vegan knowledge* recognises violence in places where mainstream consumers see none (Twine, 2014). Any time "we're outspoken" about oppression and violence, it is perceived "as like, some kind of extreme activism" (Winter).

Later in Jane Doe's narrative, she circled back to the invisible normativity of animal product consumption. We had finished commiserating about the hopelessness of being perceived as nonchalant, when she recounted an anecdote where animal product normativity legitimated forms of non-vegan propaganda that inched close to physical harassment:

> *Whereas, when you bring up something else, it's like 'yeah, she's shoving her [opinions on us]'. It was funny. Well, not funny, but my… my boyfriend, he literally shoved a meat pie onto my face. Umm, it's as if he was literally trying to shove meat down me, like, to make me different?! And, it was so gross, but… and he says it was a joke, but, you know, that's not funny to a vegan.*

As noted, animal products represent important ideas about masculinity and power (Potts & Parry, 2010). In fact, meat's association with masculine power is so strong that it has been delimited as *the* symbol of patriarchy (Adams, 2016). For Adams (2016), veganism functions to overthrow patriarchal norms by destabilising patriarchal forms of consumption. Not just symbolic as Adams (2016) indicates, Jane Doe demonstrated a gendered oppression via meat; her boyfriend "literally shoved a meat pie onto [her] face". She astutely connected the literal consumption of meat and its symbolic gendered oppression by saying "it's as if he was literally trying to shove meat down me,

like, to make me different". In this context, "mak[ing] me different" represented a double negative, where the ingestion of meat would make her comply with norms. Reversing her difference by thrusting symbolic normativity into her remained contrasted against a public perception of vegans as "shoving" their opinion onto others. With Adams's (2016) in mind, her boyfriend's actions can be read as wanting her to physically become a better patriarchal subject. More than "not funny", his behaviour bears semblance to an aggravated act. In some ways, it is a subjugation of feminine veganism. Her narrative also spoke to the banality of gendered oppression. Its ordinariness was denoted by "[i]t was funny. Well, not funny, but…". By positioning it as amusing, Jane Doe deflected away from the event's seriousness (Hlavka, 2014). These dynamics reminded of the way young women become interpellated into patriarchal regimes that normalise masculine aggression through heterosexuality (Tolman, 2006) and heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005). Vegan or not, couching masculine aggression within the bounds of comedy made critiquing these forms of oppression untenable for my participants. Often, the existing power differentials were upheld.

2.5 – Vegan (un)heteronormativity

This section holds three ideas about vegan (un)heteronormativity. Heteronormativity in the context of romance, partners, and family dynamics all featured in my participants' narratives about veganism. Many participants felt that veganism was a barrier to finding a romantic partner. They felt that veganism positioned them as deviant, unable to fulfil their feminine gender role among ideas around the ideal heterosexual relationship. Nearly all were single but open to finding someone. The search for intimate relationships had increased salience for my participants. As young people, initiating and maintaining romantic relationships was a prime developmental task (Kansky & Allen, 2018). They noted that the gendered split of vegans and their scarcity made finding a vegan partner next to impossible. Faced with this, most iterated that "[t]hem being vegan is no big deal as long as they try to understand" (Jane Doe). Mindful of the angry vegan stereotype, they also stressed that

they were "not going to, you know, force my partner to be vegan". When I asked Ella Jane why it was hard to find a romantic partner, she replied:

> *Yeah, I have… when guys know that I'm vegan they're like 'yuck', the guys in Taranaki like hunting and farming and that stuff. They're like 'nooooo'… I feel like it comes back to the feminine role of, you know, being a part of … family… and stuff like that, you know?!*

Ella Jane described the reaction that men in Taranaki have to her veganism as disgust, "yuck". She linked this to traditional masculine performances. "[H]unting and farming and stuff" are all part of doing masculinity, invoking notions of good masculine citizenship in line with the neoliberal project (Burton et al., 2021). Particularly in rural regions like Taranaki, good masculinity entails providing for the family through pursuits like hunting and fishing or financially through animal agriculture. This version of masculinity remains implicitly understood as heterosexual and heteronormative and therefore, tied to gendered divisions of labour within families. In many ways, Ella Jane was drawing on historic constructions of family that are complicit in sustaining oppressive social norms (DeVault, 1994). For Ella Jane, cooking meat (from hunting and farming) is positioned as the performance of femininity in the nuclear family. DeVault (1994) highlights that cooking meat is an expression of care within heteronormative relationships and functions as a way through which young women can conduct their femininity recognisably. Ella Jane felt that men perceived veganism as an obstacle in meal provision and its symbolic meaning within heteronormative family structures. Men found her veganism insurmountable; they were indiscriminately "like 'nooooo'". This positions feminine vegan subjectivities as the abject other within the heteronormative family matrix - unworthy of long-term romantic relationships. These developments are particularly troubling, because the neoliberal project celebrates long-lasting relationships as the centrepiece of living the good life for young women (Reynolds et al., 2007). While single women must still negotiate a socio-political environment imbued by strong patriarchal expectations for women's relationship roles, Ella

Jane and some of my other participants highlighted that this remains next to impossible to master for feminine vegan subjectivities. They were always positioned outside of normative consumption, yet also beyond happy, conventional family arrangements. No good life here.

Ella Jane also raised that families remained primary sites where food negotiations occur. Often, my participants were expected to cook meat for the male omnivores in their lives. While they noted that "it is gross cooking meat" (Chanel), this remained uncontested in their families of origin. My participants often expressed frustration when omnivores "perceived that they don't get the whole protein, which is rubbish, because you'll be getting all the dietary needs, for sure". Yet, against the singular focus of health discourses on nutrition that presume animal products are essential (Scott, 2020) and food's symbolic meaning, none could assert veganism in their families.

> *Adeline: Yeah, I did think when I first went vegan, that by the time I was vegan for like five years or something that my family would have joined, come on board. That is, I guess, frustrating to be eight years in and then still waiting… my mom is the closest one 'cuz she doesn't really like eating a lot of meat and stuff and if it wasn't for the boys, she'd be vegan. I definitely think there's that kind of male presence in the house, where they want meat at every meal, which is really hard to tackle. They have to be receptive to it, but I don't think that are…*

Among my participants, Adeline had been vegan the longest and had tried numerous times to convince her family to go vegan by explaining and showing animal agriculture's cruelty and the environmental stakes. Although her family had become more supportive, none had "joined, came on board". Adeline positioned veganism as a social justice movement, something that you can "join" with an agenda that you can come "on board" with. Yet, when she talked about her family, dietary preferences ("eating a lot of meat and stuff") became the baseline by which veganism could be measured. Taste and other dietary preferences were often used by my participants to explain why

the mainstream did not convert to veganism. Adeline's quote highlighted that vegan subjectivities understand veganism as more than a diet, infused with ethics. Yet, their families, representative of the mainstream, positioned it as merely a diet.

Gendered power dynamics came up in this quote, too. Adeline's mum was the "closest one" to embracing veganism, "if it wasn't for the boys". This pointed to the power that men hold in the heteronormative family matrix. As noted, men produce their masculinity through animal product consumption (Burton et al., 2021) and therefore, "want meat at every meal". Despite the intimacy that family conjures and her own preferences, Adeline's mum was expected to cater to masculine tastes. Adeline held the "male presence in the house" responsible, indicating that family meals were masculine meals. This reflects and reproduces wider cultural patterns of masculine dominance and feminine subordination where family food choices function as a gender regime with veganism positioned as a threat to the natural (gendered) order of society (Burton et al., 2021). As Adeline recognised, this gendered locus of control within the patriarchal institution of family remained "really hard to tackle", when every aspect of veganism is entangled among interlocking systems of oppression.

This section showed the uneasy relationship between veganism and heteronormativity. Food choices and their symbolic meaning are integrally entangled with romantic relationships, the family matrix, and gender. Here, veganism serves as a distinct barrier to practicing good femininity in the context of romance and family, necessitating careful negotiation of the traditional (gendered) order of things.

2.6 – "It's my choice to be vegan"

Throughout most narratives, a neoliberally infused postfeminist sensibility couched the political potential of veganism. Between and across these ideological strands, a complex web of

politically motivated interrogation and repressive regimes of the body painted the landscape that housed my participants' subjectivities. I discuss veganism's role in personal choice, empowerment, followed by discussion of postfeminism's role in healthism.

2.6.1 – Personal choice

In light of the pervasive vegan stereotypes and the resulting friction, my participants took special care in how they presented themselves. As noted, the onus was always on avoiding the perceptions of vegan women as killjoys - overly critical, extreme, and hostile (Twine, 2014). Unable to communicate vegan ethics effectively without causing upset, they performed their vegan subjectivities among notions of personal choice.

> *Ella Jane: They kind of, like, 'oh, you're vegan. You're gonna start protesting' and stuff. And I'm like 'no, like, it's just a personal thing'.*

> *Winter: If you look at it simplistically, we're choosing what we're following and it's no one else's business.*

> *Chanel: People are like, 'oh, just you being vegan isn't going to change the whole world.' And I'm like, 'well, yes, I know that, but it's my choice.'*

> *Lobster: [I]t's been absolutely my personal choice, mine alone.*

These excerpts attested to the disjunction between my participants' ethical commitments and their beliefs' presentation to the world. All felt that veganism was "absolutely the right decision" (Lobster), positioning veganism as a moral imperative. Yet, by individualising their positions, the emphasis remained on personal choice implying that veganism should not be imposed on others (Turner, 2019). These sentiments contrasted with their engagement in vegan activism. They attended protests and promoted veganism on social media, illustrating a political dimension with a

zeal for making the world a better place. Between and across narratives, they showed wider knowledge and concern for interlocking systems of oppression such as feminism, racism, and ableism. Yet, in talking to non-vegans about their vegan practice, they often resorted to reasoning that highlighted a neoliberal and postfeminist mode of being.

Neoliberal and postfeminist discursive regimes have become so omnipresent and embedded into the everyday that they provide clear horizons of intelligibility (Gill, 2007b). They regulate what becomes possible to discuss and therefore provide fertile ground for non-vegans on which veganism can be understood. On an individual level, cloaking veganism in personal choice allowed my participants to maintain harmony and save face (Greenebaum, 2012). But on the collective level, downplaying vegan ethics failed to interrogate the foundations of oppression. Here, the valorisation of personal choice depoliticises the vegan movement. Ella Jane illustrated the confusing entanglement of postfeminist discourses and a radical vegan political praxis:

> *And, like, I'm not 100% a National supporter, I like being able to see what else is happening. And, it has made me think a lot about, like, deforestation and what we're putting into our oceans and stuff like that. Which may not relate to being vegan, but I still think 'yeah!', because I would have never looked at that type of stuff. I feel like, 'cause I have been vegan, I understand more about this type of issue. And, I just feel like, personally, I want to make a difference and I want to carry on this lifestyle. So, I'm gonna try my best to, you know, keep it up, because being vegan…it just makes me feel more proud about myself and bein' able to make those choices for myself. Especially, because it is, like, a personal reason that I'm vegan. So, I feel like, if there are people who are very strong about animal cruelty and climate change and stuff out there, then yeah, obviously, they are going to fight back and they are going to, you know, allow others to see their perspective. Which I know, like, it's great, but I quite like to just keep it to myself.*

Throughout her narrative, Ella Jane stressed that veganism had strengthened her commitment to making the world a better place. She positioned herself outside of the neoliberal, more right-wing political tradition that reigns in her native Taranaki by not being a "100% National supporter". Her more liberal attitude allowed her "to see what else is happening" and spoke to wider political debates among climate change ("deforestation and what we're putting into our oceans"). She highlighted that *vegan knowledge* permitted her "to understand more about this type of issue". In linking her veganism to political matters and other social justice issues, she positioned her veganism as a form of activism designed to "make a difference". In this way, she actively resisted the idea that veganism is a form of individualised consumption, drawing on notions of veganism as a socio-political movement.

While her talk this far held political potentially, she went on to qualify this: Ella Jane only wanted to "carry on this lifestyle" "personally" for "personal reasons". She positioned her vegan subjectivity as adhering to an individualised diet rather than taking part in a broader social justice movement (Haenfler et al., 2012). Further, "keep it up, because being vegan…it just makes me feel more proud" served to reframe veganism as a form of personal, psychological, and ethical self-development. She fully took up a position that demarcates her praxis as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1977), interpellating her into a self-transformation paradigm (Rutherford, 2018). This line of thinking was backed by "bein' able to make those choices for myself" and her assertions in earlier parts of the interview where she implored "that women are just able to make these choices a bit better" and "I can do it, if I want". For Ella Jane, embracing veganism had been a form of empowerment, synonymous with self-improvement. Her choices became a source of pride and self-fulfilment in producing her vegan femininity. These sentiments echoed the neoliberal postfeminist imperatives that oblige (gendered) subjects to be free to choose (Rose, 1996) as long as it is the right choice.

Yet, the right choice is balanced between a moral imperative to end oppressions and non-vegan consumption norms: “I quite like to keep it to myself” curbed political potential, despite a general feeling that “people who are very strong about animal cruelty and climate change and stuff [and] allow others to see their perspective […] it’s great”. These dynamics where vegan subjectivities oscillated between veganism as a personalised mode of consumption and veganism as a radical political movement were common throughout the narratives. They attested to the difficulty that vegan subjectivities encounter among wanting to make the world a better place and postfeminist imperatives.

2.6.2 – Independence and empowerment

While strands of neoliberalism and the postfeminist sensibility weaved themselves through most narratives, Ella Jane consistently returned to these. She struggled with her veganism among peers in Taranaki, causing strife with both friends and potential boyfriends. In fact, the difficulties she encountered led her to flit in and out of veganism, although at the time of the interview she had been vegan for six months. When I asked her what happened, she told me:

> *But, like, like, really difficult, especially being with friends and stuff. Like, I feel really too awkward being like ‘ohhh, I can’t eat this, like, I’m vegan’. So, that’s why I stopped. But…, since I’ve become a bit more independent, like I’ve got my license, I’m making money, like I’m…it’s easier for me to… And, just feeling a bit more like empowered.*

Most participants noted that their age group “care what everyone else thinks” (Jane Doe), demonstrating their dependence on social support derived from family and friends (Cherry, 2015; Hirschler, 2011). For my participants, real life friends and peers remained more significant transmitters of socio-cultural norms than media influence (Sands & Wardle, 2003). Yet, peers, friends, and romantic interests presented some of the most difficult interactions where teasing,

mocking, and interrogation painted a deficit landscape for vegan feminine subjectivities. For Ella Jane, an inability to communicate her *vegan knowledge* effectively among stereotypes and hegemonic norms made life as a vegan "really too awkward" at times, resulting in a lapse. She credited "becom[ing] a bit more independent, like I've got my license, I'm making money" for her renewed engagement, leading to "feeling a bit more empowered".

While these events reflected milestones on her journey to adulthood, they also spoke to a view of the self where her subjectivity was produced through consumptive practices (i.e., driving) and the acquisition of wealth in neoliberal society (Lazar, 2011). In this landscape, independence was coded through these neoliberal markers of success. Among the preceding discourses signifying an individualised freedom to choose, Ella Jane's newfound independence led her to experience herself as empowered. Notions of empowerment invoked the type of discursive arrangements that position gender equality as already achieved, belying the repressive context (Butler, 2013). Her return to veganism was then also positioned as a result of empowerment rather than a political motivation. These factors made it hard for Ella Jane to critique the lack of support from her friends. Rather, non-vegan normativity positioned her as an awkward killjoy (Twine, 2014) in need of neoliberal and postfeminist promises of actualisation. This pre-empted any interrogation of the structural and institutional barriers to veganism. Once again, vegan ethics' entanglement with neoliberal and postfeminist imperatives signalled complexity, confusion, and collusion in equal measures.

2.6.3 – Postfeminist healthism

The previous sections highlighted that despite veganism's core ethical and political commitments, vegan feminine subjectivities remained plagued by neoliberal ideals and a postfeminist sensibility. Throughout and between narratives, radical political potential to interrogate oppression was stifled by notions of personal choice, individual responsibility, empowerment, and

self-improvement. These also became apparent in the context of health. All my participants experienced varying degrees of the reverberant call of postfeminist healthism.

2.6.3.1 – Food restriction as a challenge, yet spiritually uplifting

For most of my participants, tropes of self-fulfilment, empowerment, self-improvement, choice, and individualisation positioned veganism as a healthy-but-restrictive eating regime. Ella Jane explained to me how her newfound self-confidence led her to consider taking on a more restrictive style of veganism – raw vegan. She described raw veganism as a vegan diet that excludes foods heated above 50 degrees Celsius, believing that heat-processing strips foods of nutrients. When I asked her why she was interested in giving raw veganism a go, she said:

> *Being able to say, like, 'yeah, I can be raw vegan. Yeah, I can do it if I want to do it'. Yeah, just makes me feel a bit more empowered! For me, raw vegan would be more of a challenge. I guess, for other people, it would be them being able to stick more strict to being vegan. But, I am pretty strict as it is, so it's kind of more the challenge part and more health sides. But, I would say, if you keep the balanced diet as like just a regular vegan, like, you can be healthy and you'll be fine.*

Restricting a vegan diet further by excluding cooked food does not have any overt links to ethical motivations. Instead, it is housed by healthism discourses that position understandings of health as a function of individual responsibility, attainable through lifestyle management (Cheek, 2008; Crawford, 1980, 2006). Healthism connects to broader neoliberal rationalities through the consumption of health, which Ella Jane also linked to personal choice and empowerment discourses. In doing so, she demonstrated the entanglement between healthism and postfeminism. "I can do it if I want to do it" and "makes me feel a bit more empowered" reframed increased dietary restrictions as pleasurable ways to take charge of health. Ella Jane fully took up a self-transformation

paradigm that would make her feel a sense of achievement: Raw veganism became a challenge to be mastered, a way for her future subjectivity to understand itself as healthy depending on the success of a raw practice. Further restriction was desirable because she was "pretty strict as it is", but "for other[s]", the achievement derived from food restriction "would be them being able to stick more strict to being vegan". This positioned her subjectivity as already working harder at the self than others and therefore, more successful. She explicitly connected "the challenge part and more health sides", reiterating that her body remained the dominant site where successful transformation was enacted. Considering that Ella Jane's veganism was already exacting, the desire to step up restriction levels laid claim to an understanding of the self as flawed (Berlant, 2011) and so, in constant need of self-transformation (Berlant, 2011), all to chase both health and success. These dynamics work to depoliticise veganism, linking it to an individualised wellness diet, a technology of the self (Foucault, 1977).

However, the next part of her narrative diverged from perceptions of raw veganism as inherently healthier. She highlighted that raw vegans must pay attention to dietary balance, so "you can be healthy". This illustrated the positioning of her subjectivity away from notions of being too obsessive or restrictive, opting to embrace balance instead. Discursive arrangements that rested on desiring balance and moderation positioned her favourably, while the subtext still welcomed restriction. In this complex and contradictory nexus of subjectivities, eating the right thing, at the right time, in the right ratios became a difficult concept to grasp, inviting ever-increasing levels of self-discipline. When I asked Ella Jane about the appeal of raw veganism, she elaborated:

> *Ella Jane: So, yeah…the purity… I mean, it is, like, spiritually more for me. And, just being able to…*
>
> *Sarah: So, would it be spiritually uplifting?*

Ella Jane: Yeah.

Sarah: Why would it be uplifting spiritually to restrict yourself?

Ella Jane: Because, the willpower.

The word "purity" invoked notions of religious dictates that promise renewal and redemption (Riley et al., 2018). The raw vegan health transformation was positioned as surpassing the physical limitations of the body and encroaching on spiritual elevation, a make-over for the soul (Gill, 2007b). Here, Ella Jane's vegan subjectivity actively chose spiritual enlightenment through bodily self-discipline and dietary control, evidenced by "willpower". The emphasis on restriction as "spiritually more for me" positioned her as employing it as a form of self-care. Such self-care concepts became coded as health related work on the self, elevating her subjectivity to spiritual virtue (Lupton, 1996). Once again, a restrictive vegan eating practices was untethered from political motivations. Instead, it was rationalised as a spiritual lifestyle choice, promising a healthy body, mind, and a sense of enlightenment. Such potent promises appear to transcend structural and systemic inequities that dominate the lives of young vegan women. Instead, vegan femininities are called on to produce neoliberal and postfeminist versions of success through food restriction (Ronald, 2019). Here, raw veganism promised all essential components of the good life.

2.6.3.2 – Taking charge of health = taking charge of life

Health and discourses surrounding healthism were abundant in all narratives. Overall, health imperatives were heartily embraced but in conflicting ways where individual and collective uptake of healthism became juxtaposed. Perhaps, because my participants were all able-bodied young people, there was a lack of urgency to adhere to healthy eating at all times. For example, Rose illustrated that her age played a role in her health behaviours: "I'm just like 'I'm young, I'll be fine', which is obviously not great, because it's not entirely true… we should always try to be healthy". The

admonishment of using youth as a way to rationalise ("be fine") positioned the choice as morally questionable ("not great") and invoked healthism directly ("we should always try to be healthy"). This attested to the dichotomisation of healthy eating as morally superior, although Rose also showed forms of resistance. Such patterns were common across and between narratives, where a balance between "super strict on being healthy all the time" (Ella Jane) and "junk food vegan[ism]" (Winter) signalled the good life and the ideal in terms of lifestyle (Adams, 2019).

Yet, this was mediated by the construction of veganism as inherently healthier than other diets (Braun & Carruthers, 2020) regardless of the nutrient composition of the food in question. Statements like "well, we're not saying that [vegan junk food]'s healthy, but we're saying it's healthier" (Rose) and "[vegan food] is healthier, they just don't want to admit it" (Winter) attested to a general feeling amongst my participants that veganism provided some solace from healthism's constant self-surveillance. In other parts of the narratives, self-surveillance was abundant: "Because, I'm constantly focusing on what's in my food, and is it helping me? Is it, you know, bad? But it's about balance" (Ella Jane). Overall, healthy eating was constructed as the nexus of control over health enabled by routine scrutiny of food ingredients. Reading long lists of ingredients was common as they tried to ascertain whether particular foods contained animal ingredients. Rather than finding this laborious though, they felt that this represented a unique pedagogy that facilitated both health and happiness, even life in general:

> *Because, I'm, like, taking charge. Health stuff and of, like, my life. I'm always thinking about what's in the ingredients and stuff. Which, I feel that a lot of other people wouldn't have that for not being vegan. And, yeah. That's just, yeah, empowers me to feel happy that I'm taking charge of it. (Ella Jane)*

Ella Jane illustrated how healthism became connected to discourses of empowerment and autonomy, where veganism functioned as a way to take charge of "[h]ealth stuff and of, like, my

life". In a landscape where nutritional recommendations often send conflicting messages about what is healthy (Sikka, 2019), Ella Jane positioned her subjectivity as more knowledgeable than the mainstream. This allowed her to navigate health risks surrounding food choice (Lupton, 1995) more competently, leading her to feel empowered and happy. While this represented affirmative health outcomes in some way, it also illustrated modes of self-surveillance in "always thinking about what's in the ingredients". For Ella Jane, idealised versions health and the good life they represent became achievable through personalised lifestyle management, yet required self-control and discipline (Crawford, 2006; Riley & Evans, 2018).

2.6.3.3 – Health is happiness

As Ella Jane illustrated, taking charge of health and feeling happy were intertwined. This was the case for my other participants as well, as they often described that feeling healthy was akin to feeling happy, lighter, and more energised.

> *Jane Doe: So yeah, definitely. I feel like I'm doing better, yes, I have been feeling a lot better as a vegan, lighter. And happier.*
>
> *Winter: I feel a lot more energized and lighter, happier.*
>
> *Ed: I don't feel guilty. Lighter, eating that food makes me happy.*
>
> *Ella Jane: I'm definitely less tired all the time. I have…I feel like I do get more energy and, obviously, I'm a lot more happier.*

Despite my probing, the association between feeling lighter, more energised, and happier was not clarified further by participants. Often, they responded with "you know…" accompanied by a little laugh, making me feel like we were bonded together in some sort of secret pact. In these moments, I did not feel comfortable breaking the sense of feminine collusion with urgent

questioning. None explicitly linked feeling lighter with weight, but it was clear that it represented a desirable feeling linked to vegan foods and how a body may feel after consuming these. The connection between feeling lighter, more energetic, happiness, and health were striking, but the unwillingness to explore its meaning left a rather potent silence in the data.

Among the confusing entanglement between feminist and postfeminist thinking, young women have been schooled to distance themselves from discussing weight or body image concerns (Gill, 2017). By selectively drawing on feminist ideals that champion overt critique of patriarchal body image standards, postfeminism has made it increasingly difficult to talk about weight without fear of dismissal as backward and/or obsessive in the era of body-positivity. While some manifestations of the body positive movement have no doubt delivered scathing critiques of power structures that support narrow beauty standards, some mainstream iterations only perpetuate the status quo (Sastre, 2014). When only normatively beautiful bodies are invited to become visible, the resulting message bids women to become psychologically accustomed to the existing socio-cultural norms. Of course, this fails to disrupt heteropatriarchal norms. Instead, women are urged to love their bodies, effectively skirting over the material and structural realities of bodies. These dynamics are further qualified by the ever-increasing self-surveillance and self-objectification necessary to meet beauty norms. With these thoughts framing my reading, my participants' talk of feeling lighter, more energised, and happier through veganism represented a way for them to talk about their bodies. Through notions of health, they did not have to explicitly mention weight to refer to the concepts that house it. I am not implying that this pattern masked body image concern in a straightforward way. Rather, it highlighted the complex ways through which feminine vegan subjectivities could intelligibly communicate about the topic of their bodies. By talking in this way, subjectivities do not solicit reprisal in the context of self-worth and love your body discourses that often continue to maintain repressive beauty standards. My participants' talk positioned them as an

ongoing physical and psychological project. The physical manifestations of veganism were coded as feeling healthy ("energised" and "lighter") and became conflated with feeling happy.

All these happy feelings positioned their subjectivities favourably within a neoliberal and postfeminist economy of emotion that prizes feeling good and happy above all other feelings (Rose, 1996). Feeling positive and happy then operated as a form of governmentality (Foucault, 1980), awarding high socio-cultural capital among mainstream norms. These instances in the narratives refuted the many negative encounters with dominant ideological forces, denying the highly regulated gendered and vegan realities that my participants faced. This left my participants' former omnivorous subjectivities positioned as unenergetic and unhappy, outside of (neoliberal) postfeminist understandings of ideal and happy subjects. By extension, all non-vegan subjectivities became devalued.

However, it is noteworthy that this line of thinking assumed that the happiness construct is a function of singular bodies and minds rather than one located in relationality (Holmes & McKenzie, 2019). By individualising happiness through health imperatives, it was depoliticised, removing it from wider socio-political contexts that house gendered veganism.

2.6.3.4 – Health panopticon

Debates over the nutritional value of certain diets over others made doing veganism well difficult. Against a backdrop of scientific claims that make animal products a necessary part of a balanced diet, parents and friends often worried about my participants' ability to meet nutritional requirements. Although nutritional guidelines promoting veganism are slowly increasing, dispositifs still construct vegan bodies as deviant, malnourished and in need of expert intervention (Aavik, 2021). This view of veganism reverberated among my participants' parents, who were concerned about their child's transition to veganism. Adeline demonstrated:

I remember having difficult conversations with my parents about wanting to go vegan and them being like, 'how will you meet your nutritional needs?' Then I started researching the health aspect, because my parents said until I had researched it well, I couldn't become vegan. They couldn't argue with facts. And I did it all.

The "difficult conversations" Adeline had with her parents illustrated that doing healthy veganism required unlearning normative eating conventions and learning new ways. These had to be grounded in expert knowledge, "researched […] well". Yet, expert nutrition advice is inherently political (e.g., Moore, 2010), pushing my participants to seek information in online forums and on social media. These spaces represented crucial sites where "researching the health aspect" took place. However, advice was usually dished out by veteran vegans rather than by professionals. While some seemed to trust this information blindly, others were critical of this approach, deeming it haphazard. Often, the nutritional information from these sites was evaluated against the guidelines put forth by reputable vegan organisations.

The acquisition of vegan nutritional knowledge can be seen as a protective strategy where vegan subjectivities could defend themselves, because "they couldn't argue with facts". Armed with knowledge, their subjectivities became equipped with the ability to rebut negative encounters. This nutritional research invoked discourses of the Western scientific enterprise and biomedical understandings of the body as a mechanistic entity in need of the right fuel. To meet the requirements of the body-as-a-machine, my participants presented themselves as rational and autonomous (neoliberal) citizens who objectively appraise and make decisions "backed by facts" (Rose). By drawing on the powerful discourses associated with Western science and the biomedical paradigm, Adeline and my other participants convinced concerned parents that veganism was indeed a viable option – "[t]hey couldn't argue" with the cold, hard facts. Such discursive arrangements also positioned their neoliberal vegan femininities in a favourable light, adding

dimensions of normativity to their vegan deviance. Yet, as Rose noted, it "was more an education thing than that they were supportive from the beginning, because they still think it's weird", demonstrating that even scientific biomedical discourses failed to shatter veganism's non-normativity.

All my participants took their health seriously with multiple instances of talk about supplementation, blood tests, and encounters with medical and allied health staff both within and between narratives. While these moments framed vegan food as fuel for the body through their discursive associations, at other times vegan food and its preparation became associated with leisure and pleasure.

Ed: ...And, I often cook for all of us. I just love cooking.

Jane Doe: I love cooking, it's so creative. And, I love food. Yeah, so I just know how to incorporate all the different flavours and everything just to make it the best it can be.

Adeline: Those I definitely follow because they make me excited to cook new things or excited to go somewhere new… Yeah, it's less of a 'I need to copy them' or 'have a that', it's more inspirational, to try things.

Rose: So yeah, I really didn't care before, but now it's definitely increased my interest, and I never used to cook either. But my parents were like 'yeah, we're not cooking for you. You can cook your own things'. I had to figure out how to cook, which has been quite fun actually.

Rose noted that she "really didn't care before" about cooking, but that veganism "definitely increased" her interest. Although in Rose's case this was mediated by her parents' refusal to cook for her, the idea that veganism sparked enthusiasm for the pleasures of cooking was repeated with surprising consistency. The fun and joy of cooking mostly came from trying novel ways of

preparation (“there’s other techniques as well, like, soaking cashews, blending them up, making a cheesy sauce”, Rose), the increased availability of vegan food (“more vegan food is becoming mainstream in supermarkets”, Adeline), exposure to food from other cultures (“learn about a lot more cultures’ traditional foods”, Ed), and showing others how much you care about them (“food is love”, Ed). In part, these patterns reflected ways that my participants normalised their vegan practice. As seen, doing vegan eating well required the acquisition of nutritional knowledge, ingredient-checking, social competency, and novel cooking skills (Twine, 2017). Set against omnivorous normativity, loving to cook positioned the labour associated with veganism as worthwhile, repackaging it as pleasant and therefore appealing to non-vegans. In this way, loving to cook became a political endeavour, paving the way for mainstream acceptance and recruitment. As Ed told me, “[i]t's just quite fun, like, giving people vegan food and then, telling them it's vegan; they’re always surprised, it’s my mini activism”.

In some cases, cooking was coded as a way to achieve. For example, Jane Doe illustrated that cooking was an opportunity to showcase her creativity and ability to make vegan food “just […] the best it can be”. At these points in the narratives, my participants invoked visions of ideal domesticity where cooking represented a gender retraditionalisation. Retraditionalisation has been theorised as part of the postfeminist sensibility in which traditionally feminine practices have been reframed as pleasurable and fun (Gill, 2007a). By emphasising choice and empowerment, retraditionalisation has been linked to notions of seeking comfort in normativity within a context of (supposed) gender equality (McRobbie, 2009) where traditionally feminine practices become a safe haven for young women (McRobbie, 2020). Here, cooking vegan food and doing it well operated as an escape from the negativity of a non-vegan world, including the inequities of a gendered society and omnivorous normativity. Cooking represented a safe space for my participants, a place free of judgement. Yet, I do not claim that my participants’ zeal for cooking was solely a function of either retraditionalisation or normalisation. Rather, I felt that their narratives reflected a complex

entanglement of gendered and non-vegan pressures, both everywhere and nowhere but felt, nonetheless.

Retraditionalisation has also been investigated in the context of the clean eating movement on social media, where housework is often refashioned as a stress-reliefer in women's hectic lives (Casey & Littler, 2022). In digital spaces, clean-eating and veganism share a strong association, although veganism is re-branded as whole food plant-based or simply plant-based. Much like veganism, whole food plant-based refers to the exclusion of all dietary animal products. Unlike veganism however, there is great emphasis on minimizing all processed foods including refined grains, sugar, fats, and meat-replacement alternatives. All participants were critical of the conflation of veganism with whole food plant-based's clean eating, saying things like "they don't want to admit that they eat vegan food" (Winter) and "they're just like fitness gurus that only eat, literally, salads and smoothies" (Jane Doe). Yet, they often encountered clean-fluencers on social media platforms, while searching for recipes.

Using #vegan, the recipe inspirations that my participants sought out on platforms like Instagram and TikTok generated content that was more aligned with #plant-based and #fitspo. The algorithms behind these platforms continuously adapt their recommendations for users, leaving the door open for content that endorses restrictive ways of eating. These suggestions required thoughtful and active negotiation by "catch[ing] yourself" to subvert messages "that can really get to you and stick with you" (Winter). Across the board, the content that affected my participants the most were messages urging an "aesthetic of health" (Jutel, 2005, p. 113) that celebrate white, slender femininities above all. At times, the content bordered on sinister. With surprising regularity, Winter showed me posts that proclaimed things like "once you can control if you eat, you can you control all!". The most common trend that my participants referred to was "That Girl". This trend represented a lifestyle prescription without a trace of recipes.

Yeah, That Girl trend. And it kind of ties into food and what they're eating as well. But yeah, the need to be like absolutely perfect - from waking up to showing your full morning routine, where you have to exercise, eating really healthy, maintain your room into perfection, all while looking good. And it's so… only slim, pretty women who are making these videos. But yeah, so many girls are making these videos and there's very few comments that I'm noticing that are critiquing the trend. So, living up to the standard just because you see people online doing it. But regardless, it's still really popular, not trying to be anyone else, just be the best you. I think people feel 'less than' if they their house isn't like an aesthetic or that they're not eating constantly green vegetables and all raw food and therefore their food which is probably perfectly healthy is just not good enough. It's kind of disguised into 'a bettering-yourself-self-help train' which is, you know, in some ways good. But then if actually, it's causing more harm than good, then I think 'yeah'…(pause) and that definitely ties into a lot of the influencers who like to use the word 'vegan' today. Because I think using the word in social media is also a really big appeal for people. There's no equivalent at all for guys or there's no appeal for that. (Adeline)

Adeline referred to a new trend that has taken my participants' virtual world by storm. The #ThatGirl hashtag generated a slew of short videos that encourage their viewers to become that girl – one who works out, eats a plant-based breakfast, and journals all before the day has genuinely started. As Adeline noted, the trend "ties into food" and discursively connects it with healthism through a #cleaneating hashtag where the onus is on whole foods plant-based to attain health. Influencers "like to use the word 'vegan' today" because it subsumes both people interested in veganism and plant-based eating. "That Girl" depicted plan-based eating as intrinsically healthier than other ways of eating, something that has become routine across social media (Wrenn, 2017). In "That Girl", plant-based eating promises a fit and healthy body energetic enough to endure a stringent morning routine.

Adeline also astutely hit on notions of morality. "[P]eople feel 'less than' if […] they're not eating constantly green vegetables and all raw food" coded these as symbols of health and morality. Adeline remained critical, commenting that people's "food which is probably perfectly healthy is just not good enough". She drew parallels between people's diminished self-worth ("feeling 'less than'") and the (supposed) inferior health status of their diet ("not good enough") compared to the idealised, "green vegetables and all raw food". This invoked visions of ethical redemption through an unprocessed, natural diet. These dynamics have been noted in the clean-eating movement (Casey & Littler, 2022) and provide a subject position that can be both ethical (as in vegan) and concerned with health (Cairns & Johnston, 2015a). Adeline did not take up this subject position, choosing instead to describe the trend in the third person and asserting her critique.

Adeline's excerpt also emphasised the shifting boundaries of what constitutes health; exercising, eating, looking good, and impeccable surroundings are rolled into a glamorous aesthetic that represents what it means to be "absolutely perfect"ly healthy. "[A]bsolutely perfect" also incorporated feminine appearance norms, demonstrating that patriarchal beauty standards remain relevant in the context of veganism. Through ubiquitous visibility online, vegan women who want to be "That Girl" are still required to be conventionally beautiful ("slim and pretty"). In addition, a focus on low-calorie foods ("green vegetables") also illustrated a conflation between weight, health, and appearance (Riley et al., 2018). For a perceptive Adeline, "That Girl" read as a way of taking charge of vegan feminine bodies, where endeavours related to weight loss and attractiveness are rebranded as becoming "the best you".

Adeline demonstrated another pillar of the "That Girl" trend: "Not trying to be anyone else, just be the best you" explained that a competitive lens was turned toward the self. While neoliberalism promotes individualised modes of competition (Labica, 2020), "That Girl" invited subjectivities to strive for an improved version of the self – continuously stuck in a competitive

cycle, yet never attained. This interpretation is further complicated by the multiple gazes it invites: On the surface, it is the young feminine influencers that are objectified by watchers' gazes, welcoming judgement on routines, appearance, and health. In turn though, watchers quickly become objects themselves as they measure themselves against the influencer-object. Watchers are then commanded to compete simultaneously against the influencer-object and the self-object. This makes for a rather cut-throat environment, where attaining the desired health aesthetic is only a faint possibility (Berlant, 2011). A "bettering-yourself-self-help-train" on the road to nowhere, no final stop in sight.

Summary of negotiating (ab)normality

While awakening to vegan knowledge held much radical political potential, my participants' vegan subjectivities faced numerous challenges living their vegan lives. As stigmatised identities, they consistently had to negotiate their vegan (ab)normality. They worked hard to facilitate smooth interactions with non-vegans, despite juggling vegan stereotypes, rubbing up against heteronormativity, and the imperative to be the perfect vegan. Effectively, contemporary mainstream norms and pressures were difficult to negotiate for my participant's vegan subjectivities.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I provide a summary of my findings and discussion and relate these back to my research questions. Vegan women's voices were at the heart of my theorising as I sought to ascertain how young women were negotiating the limits and contradictions of veganism in the early 21st century in Aotearoa. Three questions were at the core of my inquiry: First, I aimed to find out how young vegan women were living their lives among mainstream norms and pressures. Second, I wanted to see how their experiences intersected with veganism as a social justice movement. Lastly, I was curious as to how social media engagement influenced all this. Despite the initial separation of social media from the other two questions, the distinction resolved itself as my research developed. My participants' existence in the real and virtual world was so intertwined that the findings from the social media 'go-along' are integrated throughout as material and immaterial experiences became indistinguishable from each other.

Overall, the young women in this study experienced veganism as transformative on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. Although their veganism was the source of great meaning-making, their ethical commitments required constant negotiation of a vegan marginalised identity in all facets of life. Their identities also had to be reconciled among greater ideological tensions such as postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism. In terms of social justice, their veganism served as a platform from which to engage with other causes such as racism, sexism, reproductive justice, and ablism. This led to a great degree of political activism, particularly on social media, where they could enact their identities more freely than in real life.

To make sense of my participants' experiences, I have leaned heavily on postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism as lenses through which to derive meaning. It is important to note that these only represent a limited set of conceptual and theoretical frameworks through which I interpreted my data. In doing so, I was able to attend to the socio-cultural, political, and historical

specificities that structure young women's experiences and allow them to make sense of themselves in Aotearoa today. Necessarily, this was at the expense of other theories and conceptual frameworks that may have garnered insights of a different sort. I also drew heavily on Goffman's (1959, 1990) theories encompassing stigma and impression management. Despite their age, they fit my thinking beautifully and yet, the relative lack of newer theories left me wishing for more research at the intersection of veganism, stigma, and its negotiation.

To revisit the project: Epistemologically, I came from a feminist standpoint position that privileges situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). I used a narrative discursive approach, because it highlights the interactional dynamics of talk and the reflexivity of speakers (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Yet, I infused this with a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse to orient the analysis toward dimensions of power (Parker, 2014). I interviewed eight self-identifying vegan women between the ages of 16 and 20 years. Here, I would like to clarify my use of the word woman against a background of exclusionary discourses toward trans folk evident among some feminist scholarship and greater society (e.g., Pearce et al., 2020). I welcomed all women, including trans-identities, to my project. My stance reflects that of Ahmed (2017) who astutely recognises that policing the boundaries of feminism can only end in disaster. She argues for feminist theorising that holds the sentiment that women's lives must be free of "other people's assignments" as foundational (Ahmed, 2017, p. 270). Indeed, I felt that my trans participant, Lobster, often added critical insight to the negotiation of gender in veganism, perhaps because their standpoint spurned normative conventions. I consider this a strength of my project.

Two broad discursive arrangements: Vegan knowledge and negotiating (ab)normality

The findings revealed two core insights for how young women in Aotearoa were experiencing their veganism. All my research aims were captured by two broad discursive arrangements. Firstly, vegan knowledge held great political potential in making the world a better place, producing a shift

in worldview that interrogated multiple, intersecting oppressions. In doing this, vegan knowledge exhibited both gendered and spiritual dimensions, although some of the radicality of vegan knowledge was curbed by the existing neoliberal ideologies that position power as exercised individually in the marketplace. However, my participants acknowledged that consumption is a necessary part of life and actioning change requires the use of existing systems. While women were more likely to become interpellated into regimes of vegan consumption, this also opened up possibilities for creating and engaging with vegan knowledge.

Secondly, I discuss vegan identities and negotiating (ab)normality. Vegan identities were fluid and flexible in line with social contexts. Their (ab)normality had to be managed actively through the conceptual prism of normalisation, leading to high levels of (imagined) surveillance and self-surveillance. Postfeminist imperatives and healthism discourses only added to the struggle of negotiating vegan (ab)normality, while infusing this difficulty with a cruel slant of optimism. Even when there was active resistance, these discursive arrangements were felt, nonetheless. In fact, stigma and other factors of marginalisation were significant in how my participants were making sense of their vegan femininities.

Vegan knowledge

Vegan knowledge was generated through encountering the routine practices of animal agriculture on social media platforms in my study. Through harrowing video exposés and still images, animal suffering was communicated visually and affectively; my participants experienced strong negative feelings in their retellings of these moments despite the many months or years that had passed. This illustrates the significant meaning-making that takes place during these moments, a distinct shift in being, experiencing, and acting upon the world. These emotions, however, served as forms of politicised emotion with potential for change for my participants (Oliver, 2020). Vegan activism in this form is incredibly effective in the neoliberal context (Mummery & Rodan, 2017).

Activism has been hindered by ag-gag laws that prioritise the economic interests of animal industries over animal welfare (Wright, 2015). In addition, anthropocentric notions about wellbeing, both on individual and collective levels, remain advanced through the encouragement of market logic in economic, political, and social spheres. Consequentially, individualised solutions to injustices are promoted over collective action as the state's responsibility for quality-of-life issues has shrunk considerably (McLagan & McKee, 2012). As seen in this study, animal product consumption is so engrained and normative in neoliberal societies (Joy, 2020) that encouraging top-down changes via governmental structures and institutions tends to generate strong resistance both by the bodies themselves and society (Judge et al., 2022). Without avenues for collective change, vegan activism has had to adapt to more individualised forms to reach young people. My participants showed significant levels of engagement with social justice issues on social media (Cho et al., 2020; Kim & Ringrose, 2018), advancing both awareness and recruitment. Hence, vegan social media activism represents a low cost yet effective way to promote veganism, virtually unstoppable.

Social-media-mediated vegan knowledge and its emotional response clearly served as catalysts for turning points (Denzin, 2018) in the lives of my participants. In response, all normative conventions of animal product consumption were revised, revamping all consumption patterns (Goodman et al., 2017). These vegan knowledge moments appear to be the most crucial in participants' decisions to go vegan, and yet inadvertently positioned them outside of idealised norms. This highlights the ideological normalisation of animal product consumption (Joy, 2020). Rather than a free and rational decision, historical contingencies have positioned this consumption pattern as an unquestionable norm, particularly in Western countries (Joy, 2020; Kearney, 2019; Piazza et al., 2015). This is significant, because it articulates what is the normal and idealised way of being and consuming within the Western socio-cultural and political environments (Foucault, 1977; Stephens Griffin, 2017). Animal product consumption is continuously normalised through a web of social processes, meaning that these become taken-for-granted, reinscribing their regulatory power

while soliciting powerful positive affective responses when norms are met (Davies, 2013). As vegan identities, my participants continually violated these norms, showing the depth of their commitment to living a life true to their ethical values. This is particularly significant when considered against research that illustrates that although animal products' underlying practices oppose people's wider ethical stances (Loughnan et al., 2014), people continue to consume these products readily, especially in Aotearoa (Ritchie & Poser, 2019). To explain this, theories of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) have often been invoked, illustrating that individuals are motivated to provide post-hoc rationalisations for behaviour that is inconsistent with their values.

Vegan knowledge also created a shift in regimes of knowledge among my participants, challenging evidence-based truth claims by experts within the Western scientific enterprise (Foucault, 1980). As "digital natives" (Milkman, 2017, p. 1), young vegan women in Aotearoa today have had unparalleled access to virtual information. When young vegan femininities encountered animal suffering and oppression, a sense of betrayal resounded widely. As such, vegan knowledge radically defied assumptions that position legitimate knowledge as objective and apolitical. Instead, it acknowledges the context in which such knowledge is produced, contra to Western constructs of science (Eagly & Riger, 2014). The critique of Western institutions was extended to include neoliberal capitalism and the unmet promises and expectations that go along with living in a (supposedly) post-racial and gender-equal society (Scott, 2017). In this way, vegan knowledge truths become the platform from which to interrogate other, interlocking oppressions. For the young vegan women in my study, the emphasis was not on comparing the specific struggles at the heart of different social justice causes. Rather, veganism was an instigator to potent discussions that contest particular social configurations and the harms that these perpetuate (Ko & Ko, 2017). Vegan knowledge spawned powerful meaning-making that functions as a pseudo-spiritual doctrine and is full of potential to reconceptualise the world. Across the board, my young vegan women endeavoured to make the world a better place that not only reimagined human-animal relations but

also the relationships among fellow (wo)man. Thus, veganism can be seen as a gateway into social justice activism.

For women, vegan consumption is also tied to notions of neoliberal femininities who produce their empowerment through marketplace participation (Rutherford, 2018). These fears proved somewhat unfounded among my participants, preferring to err on the side of consumer boycott whenever possible. Although there was some evidence of high engagement in vegan consumerism individually, this still held potential for political activism. The traditionally feminine engagement with various novel and exciting vegan products including cosmetics and skincare products may lead to greater exposure to vegan ethics. Also of note, buying as individual acts does inevitably coalesce into collective purchasing power (Evans et al., 2017). As my participants pointed out, collective modes of consumption constituted through individual acts does hold hope for broader changes. While veganism has not always been the easiest practice from a consumer perspective, young vegan women now have a plethora of products to choose from and therefore, the ability to exercise their power in the marketplace (White, 2018). Some aspects of this, however, are problematic; participating in neoliberal markets uncritically only perpetuates the idea that veganism is a single-politics issue that aims to end (only) animal oppression (Kim, 2011). The danger remains that this shuts down the emerging articulation of interlocking systems of violence that connect social justice movements to each other.

Crucially, vegan knowledge became intertwined with high levels of empathy, leading to increased understanding of other peoples' standpoints. This became significant not only in attending to other forms of oppression but also when barriers toward veganism were considered. Vegan rhetoric that assumes a universalised experience of autonomy, social environment, and power (Harper, 2010a) was vehemently challenged in favour of acknowledging that veganism remains inaccessible to some. The women in my study recognised that not everyone can overcome structural

and institutional obstacles (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017), even if this would hypothetically align with goals to end oppressions of any kind. When this is considered in the context of differing socio-historically racialised epistemologies (Harper, 2012), it articulates a nuanced awareness that marginalised groups including indigenous people may feel excluded from a vegan movement steeped in white, middle-class privilege (Brueck, 2017). In Aotearoa, Māori may have particularly ambivalent feelings about veganism (Dunn, 2019). The ongoing repercussions of colonial practices (Smith, 2021) have positioned food practices as instrumental tools with which Māori can affirm their cultural identity and connect to Te ao Māori. The imposition of vegan ethics founded on Western-centric thinking then only serves as another way through which to colonise: Such dynamics do not hold space for Māori experiences, values, or knowledge, despite centering the end of all oppression. My vegan women understood that veganism cannot and perhaps, should not serve everyone and that kindness should rule vegan activism above all.

Overall, vegan knowledge distinguishes veganism from other forms of food culture. Vegan knowledge positions veganism as much 'more than' a diet. Clearly, veganism does go beyond the boundaries of food practices by incorporating its ethics into all forms of consumption. Crucially though, vegan knowledge communicates the broader ethical implications of veganism: It interrogates both human-animal and human-human relationships and situates the foundations of oppression at the helm of its political goals. Here, veganism intersects with other social justice movements that aim to usurp oppression such as ablism, sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, etc. The radical political potential of vegan knowledge is palpable, even if this must be negotiated among neoliberal markets, social arrangements, and discourses that curb some of the revolutionary possibilities.

Negotiating (ab)normality

Despite veganism's increased popularity, living a vegan life in a non-vegan world remains difficult with attrition rates estimated at nearly 70% (Milyavskaya, 2022). In part, this can be attributed to the many stereotypes in circulation (Cole & Morgan, 2011) that make veganism socially challenging (Greenebaum, 2012; Twine, 2014; White & Potts, 2008). Although overt negative experiences were rare among my participants, their reluctance to disclose their veganism speaks to the high levels of stigma experienced (Bresnahan et al., 2016). Goffman (1990) illustrates that any trait that sets individuals apart from normativity has the potential to cause stigma. In this way, veganism represents an overt deviance from mainstream worldviews, forcing vegans into the uncomfortable position of abject other (Quinn, 2021). This seems to be particularly true for women who have already been positioned as inferior in the West (Appignanesi, 2008). Hence, vegan women must work hard to manage the impression they give of themselves among non-vegans (Greenebaum, 2012). To circumvent non-vegan discomfort in the face of vegan ethics and politics, vegans are expected to perform their identities with discipline and self-control (Goffman, 1959) even if this means obscuring the deep ethical commitment they feel toward ending animal oppression.

Goffman's (1959) seminal work on impression management illustrates that life is a stage on which people act out roles, performing the various aspects of their life. Multiple performances are enacted depending on the contextual details of situations. In keeping with the dramaturgy metaphor, frontstage behaviour relates to the viewable performance, while backstage refers to an authentic self that can only reveal itself in privacy. In my study, vegan women employed frontstage behaviour strategically by managing their presentation to the world and ensuring smooth interactions with the mainstream. Further, as private moments between my participants and I have shown, vegans also engage in backstage behaviour where they may air grievances, interpret reactions, and negotiate future face-to-face reactions. Past experiences have shown my vegan

women that their ethical motivations can elicit forceful defence of non-vegan moral boundaries. This has led them to adopt prophylactic strategies in engaging with non-vegans. They avoid discussing their veganism, waiting until they can no longer escape insistent inquiries. Other research has had similar findings in this regard (Greenebaum, 2012; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2018).

However, backstage behaviour (Goffman, 1959) could be enacted publicly through virtual mediums. Social media provided a platform that could be used to claim ethical and political positions fully. In these spaces, behaviour did not have to be managed in the same way and authentic, true selves could shine in ways that real life could not afford. Here, the transgressive power of veganism could be celebrated in carnivalesque opulence. Virtual engagement acted as a form of activism that would not lead to repercussions in the real world. In this way, online engagement with veganism may allow freedoms of expression that are not otherwise available to vegan subjectivities.

While stigma and impression management (Goffman, 1959) helped to explain some of the work done by the young women, other psy-discourses also featured heavily. These were often invoked to skirt over the struggles of being a vegan woman in a non-vegan world, rationalising the inherently gendered difficulties. In Rose's (1996) conceptualisation of psy-courses, neoliberal subjectivity is achieved by welcoming freedom of choice and autonomy into our inner lives. By believing these inner truths, subjects can perform unified identities that make sense in postfeminist and neoliberal contexts. Despite deep ethical and therefore, political commitments, the motivation to be vegan had to be supported by invoking personal choice and autonomy to be intelligible in the contemporary context. Even for the women themselves, postfeminist and neoliberal notions of independence and empowerment facilitated their performance of vegan femininity. These simulate discourses that position gender equality as already achieved (Gill, 2007a) and therefore, seemed to embolden my vegan women. These dynamics belie the repressive context (Butler, 2013) in which

vegan femininity exists, obscuring the myriad of social, structural, and institutional barriers to veganism (Turner, 2019).

Vegan empowerment was chiefly enacted in the context of health narratives, illustrating strong associations between the discursive arrangements associated with healthism and postfeminist discourses (Braun & Carruthers, 2020; Scott, 2020). This was particularly felt when women restricted their diets further as in the case of raw veganism. Dietary restriction became positioned as pleasurable and something that one can be good at (Riley & Evans, 2018), leading to feeling light, happy, and achieved. Yet, these forms of restrictive dieting presented themselves as non-diets after all (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b). Rather, they were tethered to notions of improving health without clear links to nutritional advice or guidelines. Via restrictive eating, health improvements came from psychological constructs, arguably located on the interior: Self-discipline and willpower imbued participants with a sense of virtue and spirituality (McDonald & Braun, 2022; Riley et al., 2018). As the silence in the data showed, restrictive eating's link to weight loss could not be discussed explicitly (Sastre, 2014). Yet, the implied outcome did seem to be a thinner body and thus, a closer emulation of the thin ideal (Bordo, 2004). Instead, diet and dietary restriction was seen as the nexus of control over how life could and should play out with ideas of taking charge of one's health coded as a way to live the good life (Crawford, 2006). The numerous instances of talk that emphasise feeling lighter, happier, and more spiritual explained away the high levels of surveillance, self-surveillance, and self-objectification that vegan women are subjected to both in real life and on social media. This is especially significant when earlier invocations of heteronormativity are considered and serve as a framework for interpretation.

My vegan women expressed many more positive feelings compared to the difficulties and struggles they faced. In reflecting on the many moments of positive feelings talk, an emotions framework became apparent. Kanai (2019) locates such sense making in the postfeminist sensibility,

where young women are incited to communicate about life struggles with positivity and humour. Similarly, Calder-Dawe et al. (2021) note that women's ongoing repertoire of positivity positions them beneficially in a neoliberal context that holds good women responsible for producing other people's happiness (Ahmed, 2010). This may be particular true for vegan women, who along with being feminist killjoys (Ahmed, 2010) must also contend with killing joy among non-vegans (Twine, 2014). This signals that vegan femininity may virtuously decline negativity and choose to take up celebratory positivity instead. In this way, vegan femininity can hold on to highly prized subjectivities in the neoliberal context regardless of non-normative consumption habits.

However, the disavowal of negative feelings among vegan women only articulates and reinscribes unequal gendered patterns of regulating feelings. A postfeminist feeling framework that prizes positivity above all then becomes the ultimate form of governmentality (Foucault, 1980). It links the vegan body, spirituality, and emotion in such ways that women must work happily on all aspects despite existing material and immaterial limitations. This adds a troubling layer to the self-transformation paradigm (Evans et al., 2020) for vegan women, especially as vegan ethics contrast this line of thinking so starkly (Adams & Gruen, 2022). Rather, vegan ethics hold the various ways in which speciesism, sexism, heteronormativity, colonialism, racism, ablism, etc. support and perpetuate each other in view. They interrogate the intersection and foundations of -isms to make the world more just overall. Vegan women have always been subject to normalisation pressures in social and practical arenas (Greenebaum, 2012). Yet, veganism's own normalisation within postfeminist healthism with the subtext of living an optimal life seems to have led to confusion and contradiction in some ways. Here, veganism takes the shape of just another diet, obscuring its political potential.

The confusing entanglement between radical vegan ethics that call for ending all oppression and a normalised version of veganism imbued by a postfeminist transformation paradigm was

particularly noticeable in virtual spaces. Short video-clips inciting viewers to be the perfect vegan woman, ThatGirl, dominated the social media feeds of my participants. Monopolising on #vegan subsumed veganism into plant-based (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b) and clean-eating movements (Casey & Littler, 2022). This positioned veganism as a mere diet, a steppingstone in a prescriptive lifestyle initiative. Restrictive dieting, morality, and appearance norms became incorporated under the vegan umbrella, promising a make-over of body, mind, and soul. Really, ThatGirl represented the ultimate self-help package (Riley et al., 2019) on the way to becoming the perfect vegan woman (McRobbie, 2015). In this view, ThatGirl can be seen as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) through which young vegan women can work on their subjectivities. On the surface, the tone of these social media technologies is decidedly positive: Rather than comparing the self to content creators, the self is implored to become only the best version of herself. Of course, these sentiments obscure both the material realities of bodies and their wider socio-political locations.

More troubling though, the trend brings about surveillance and self-surveillance through the number of gazes that it invites: Watchers must compete against the content creator and themselves, all the while objectifying the self and creator in equal measure. Couched in feeling good and being the best you, the cut-throat environment of feminine vegan competition to gain what amounts to little more than the thin ideal of old (Bordo, 2004) illustrates Berlant's (2011) concept of cruel optimism. For Berlant (2011), the proximity or attainment of desired objects is imbued with optimism. And yet, directing vegan women's desiring gazes back at themselves (and others) only reinscribes regulatory norms onto women's bodies – still unattainable. Crucially, these dynamics do not gel with vegan ethics that implore vegan women to challenge the status quo and create mechanisms for change.

On the whole, negotiating (ab)normality lays claim to the ambivalence that contemporary veganism poses for young women today. Despite radical vegan ethics, veganism must be negotiated

among normalising pressures and regimes of regulation that convey what it means to be the ideal vegan woman. As these tensions reverberate, veganism is often presented as a personalised food choice, an intelligible framework both to vegans and non-vegans alike. Here, the difficulties of veganism are smoothed out in favour of placating social pressures and the three pervasive ideologies that dominate the lives of young vegan women in Aotearoa – postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism. Veganism becomes 'just a diet', stifling the political potential that forms the basis of its theoretical foundations.

Vegan tensions: Oscillating between 'more than' and 'just a diet'…

In contemplating the ways feminine vegan subjectivities oscillated between the conceptualisation of veganism as 'more than' and 'just a diet', I looked for some sort of silver lining. I wondered if veganism was enduring the same fate as some strands of feminism, repackaged without collective political potential and reinscribing patriarchal norms through the postfeminist sensibility (McRobbie, 2004). Would today's Western-centric iteration of veganism cease to draw on and invoke collective political action and instead, only perpetuate a type of consumption norm to satisfy neoliberal markets? In some ways, my participants' stories did exhibit a sanitisation of vegan ethics, a definitive lean toward the beckoning of postfeminism and neoliberalism. At times, the narratives illustrated appeasement of mainstream norms and social pressures. Yet, they also offered resistance that did not fit snugly into this line of thinking. These moments of misfit offered subjectivities that were simultaneously aware of the harms imposed by oppressive socio-cultural, political, and historical contingencies and that also recognised their vulnerabilities to thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that perpetuate these. Perhaps, the misfitting and its acknowledgement are indeed enough in maintaining the political potential of 'more than'. In weaving together these consistencies and contradictions, I thought of "the joining of partial and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of

living within limits and contradiction – of views from somewhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 590). Here, the fragmentary vulnerability of vegan feminine subjectivities must not be transcended. Constrained and enabled by individual standpoints, they form a collective vulnerability that opens up possibilities for change because of the inherent contradictions and limits. They yearn for being and becoming different despite the narrow range of possibilities that postfeminism and neoliberalism deem intelligible (Rose, 1996). To break out of the confusing entanglement of 'more than' and 'just', vegan women misfits may turn gazes away from themselves and others and toward the limits and contradictions of their vulnerabilities. They may look for the ways that systems and structures impose misfitting and in doing so, honour the feminist mantra, "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 2006, p. 1).

Overall, tensions exist for young vegan women in Aotearoa today as they live, enact, and hold true to vegan knowledge, subjectivities, and identities. The barriers, contradictions, and limitations of veganism in today's world surround young vegan women with a nebulous vulnerability. A confusing set of discursive arrangement, pressure to experience positive affect, technologies of the self, technology, and the material limitations of bodies and their locations propel Aotearoa's young vegan women into an impossible space. Here, taking up positions that are favourable to attaining the good life concurrently spell difficulty and awkwardness in the context of postfeminist healthism and historical power relations (e.g., heteronormativity, ablism, racism, sexism, etc.). Veganism thus requires theories and research that can attend to the complexities, intersectional oppressions, and the difficulties of this position without reductionism. Carefully crafted, nuanced methodologies including FST, narrative approaches, and postfeminism allow intricacies to shine and allow us to think through the subtleties of being vegan in a non-vegan world.

Boundaries and limitations

In closing, I reflect on the necessary boundaries and limitations of this project. With veganism increasingly positioned as a sensible solution in mitigating climate change and chronic disease (Clay et al., 2020), future research on veganism is important. As the focus of my study was rather narrow, the sample was not representative of the population. I did not seek broad generalisations about women's negotiation of veganism. Rather, the purpose of my narrow focus was to gain a deeper and richer understanding of vegan women's experiences from their standpoints.

Any research is conducted in a network of practical constraints. To make research doable, it must fit in among limitations related to time, finances, and resources. Considering the scant number of vegans and the constraints of a Master's project, my sample was inevitably impacted. The main limitation of my project remains the lack of diversity in terms of race, sexuality, and class – too white, too straight, and too privileged. This project reflects a mostly Pākehā, heterosexual, and middle-class narrative of veganism. In this way, I fear that it reproduces the dominant representations and discursive arrangements that are in circulation. As discussed, it is this narrative of veganism that dominates virtual spaces (Wrenn, 2017), the very place that I recruited my participants from. Hence, it largely replicates patterns of erasure of non-white and non-heteronormative voices from diverse standpoints. Yet, these voices are so often disregarded, ignored, and silenced, particularly young women. While my study provides valuable insight into young women's experiences of veganism in Aotearoa, transparency is needed in terms of these limitations.

Moving forward

While veganism may be experiencing a bout of popularity, my study has shown that veganism always exists in opposition to more normative conventions. Even within the intimate contexts of

family and romantic relationships, my participants struggled to assert themselves against heteronormative notions that seemed to necessitate animal product consumption. Not only were vegan women required to cater to masculine tastes in their nuclear families, but they were eclipsed out of long-term romantic relationships. Heterosexual vegan women were unsuitable for heterosexual omnivorous men and veganism strayed too far from normative masculinity to be a viable option. This deviance from the normative assumptions about gender and sexuality points to utility in examining veganism from the perspective of queer theory. Queer theory seeks to fundamentally contest the constructs of identity (Simonsen, 2012) by interrogating these normative assumptions and exploring those experiences that exist on the margins. The emphasis is squarely on binary conceptualisation of deviance and normativity, concerning itself with how processes of normalisation construct queer identities as the other (Stephens Griffin, 2017). As Adams (2016) and Potts (2017) point out, meat consumption is often associated with masculinity and the reproductive potential of heterosexual unions. Hence, veganism and queerness resist patriarchy and heteronormativity. Both Stephens Griffin (2017) and Simonsen (2012) draw parallels between veganism and queerness in such areas as coming out, vegansexuality, and normalcy by interrogating the perceived neutrality and objectivity of normativity. Thus, investigation through the lens of queer theory may prove fertile.

At the outset of this project, I also encountered assumptions about veganism as a function of racial and classed privilege. Future studies would benefit from adding the perspectives of people of colour and those with varying standpoints. Harper (2013) writes extensively on the complexities of studying veganism and its representation. She emphasises the need to recognise the overlap between racialised and classed inequalities of food systems and how this is inevitably bound up with ethical veganism. Here, veganism has the potential to challenge Western colonialism's propensity to take advantage of the natural world (Robinson, 2014). Echoing other indigenous scholars, Dunn (2019) highlights that such a challenge is in line with Te ao Māori. She notes that korero (discussion)

at the intersection of kaimangatanga (plant-based living), Māoritanga (Māori culture, traditions, and way of life), and vegan ethics are already ongoing among families and communities. The korero centres veganism as a tool of decolonisation, while acknowledging the fallacies of Western veganism and its barriers for certain groups. Investigating kaimangatanga as one indigenous iteration of veganism that serves as a decolonial food ethic may be of particular interest in Aotearoa.

Final thoughts

Evidence is mounting that animal products and their consumption have grave consequences for animal welfare, human health, global food security - the whole planet, really. And yet, the idea that humans will cease to consume such products in the future remains somewhat absurd to me, never to become a reality. The young vegan women in my study, however, gave me some hope: Their nuanced understanding of vegan ethics cemented that veganism is not a distraction from other ethical commitments, entanglements, or political struggles. Rather, contextual vegan ethics complement and embolden critiques of postfeminism, healthism, and neoliberalism, while simultaneous attending to socio-political and historical power differentials. To me, a vegan practice remains a political statement rooted in kindness and empathy. As such, it can acknowledge commonalities and differences housed and housing multiple histories, unstable ways of being, and most of all, imperfection. Veganism holds space for humanity's imperfection, its ambivalence and idiosyncrasies, without judgement. At the same time, moment by moment, day by day, veganism makes the world a better place without really doing anything at all. Vegan ethics radically (re)imagine the world. Here, not "everything apart from white men is under threat". There is hope instead.

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Appendix A: Ethical approval

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Dear: Sarah Markert

Re: Ethics Notification – NOR 22/13: Exploring Veganism Among Young women in Aotearoa

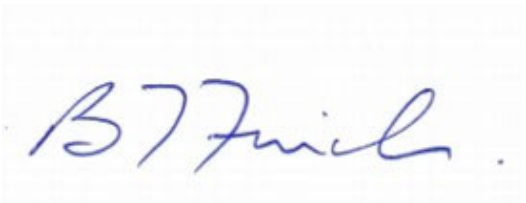
Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Northern Committee at their meeting held on Wednesday, 25th of May, 2022.

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

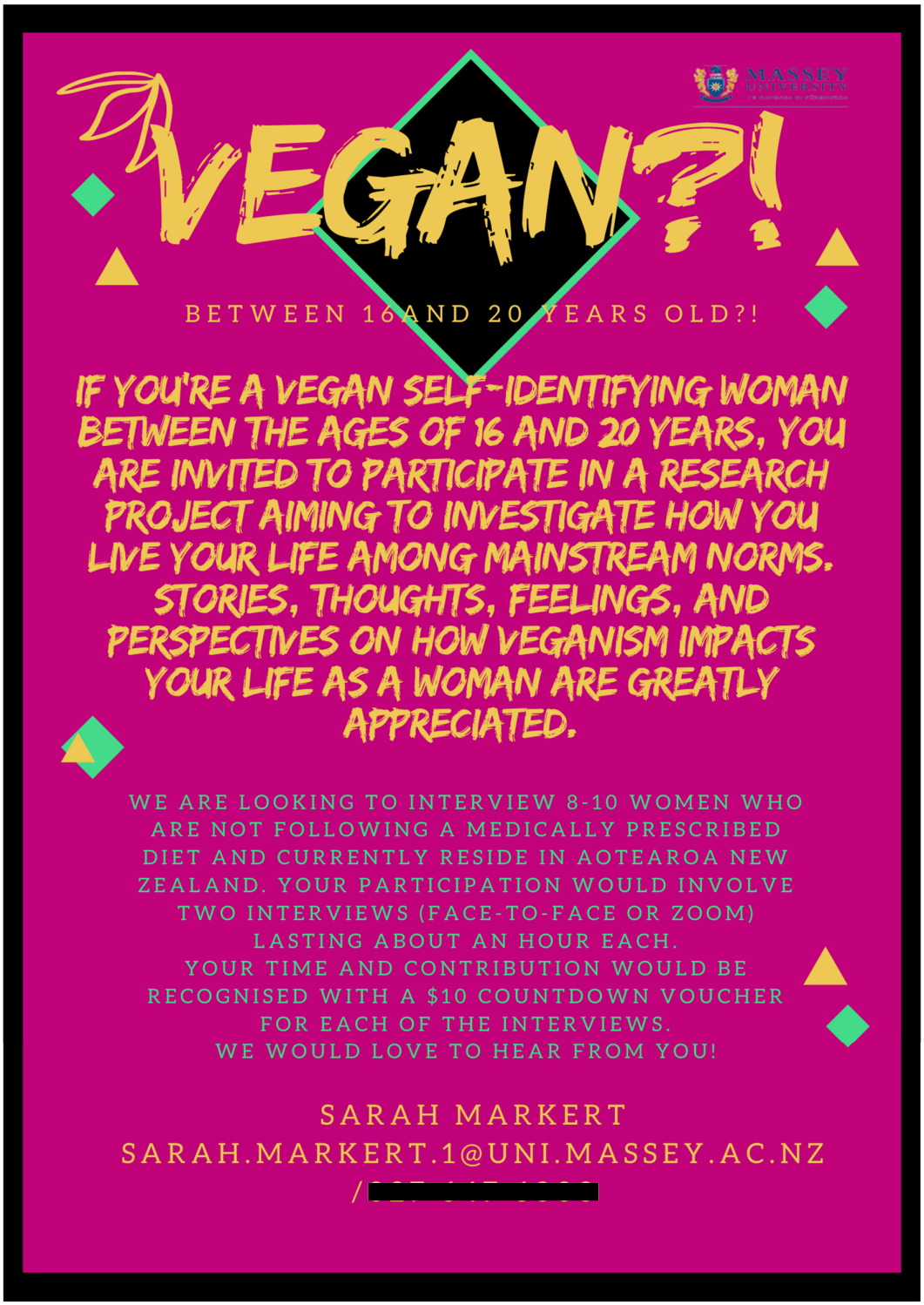
If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Dr Brian Finch Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Appendix B: Digital advertisement



Appendix C: Information sheet

Exploring Veganism Among Young Women in Aotearoa New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

Tēnā koe. My name is Sarah Markert, and I am doing this research for my Master's in psychology with the supervision of Dr. Kathryn McGuigan, School of Psychology, Massey University, Albany Campus, Auckland. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either me or my supervisor (details given at the end).

Project details: This research aims to increase understanding about how vegan adolescent girls negotiate their lifestyles among mainstream norms. I hope the findings may contribute to expanding knowledge around veganism and other eating practices during adolescence. If you choose to take part, you will receive a $10 Countdown voucher for each interview attended as a token of appreciation. You may want to talk with friends and whanau about this project to help you decide.

Participants: Participation is limited to self-identifying girls/women between the ages of 16 and 20 years, proficient in English, and located in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants need to identify as vegan. You cannot be currently following a medically prescribed diet. Please note that written informed consent is needed.

What this project will involve: If you decide to take part in this research, you will have two interviews with me, Sarah. I am a middle-aged, 'sometimes-fully vegan' mother of three who are 7, 11, and 16 years old. My preference is for a face-to-face interview, if you are located in the wider New Plymouth region, because it will help me get to know you better. However, if you feel more comfortable with an online interview, I am happy to accommodate your wishes. While I will have some questions prepared, I would like the interview to be conversational and I want you to feel comfortable in sharing whatever you want. I am very happy to meet with you before the start of the project to discuss the research and establish rapport. The interviews will take approximately one hour each. The interviews will take place at the private meeting rooms of a public library (ex: Puke Ariki in New Plymouth) if face-to-face or via Zoom.

During the first interview, I will ask you a range of questions about your vegan life and what your daily eating practices mean to you. I am really interested to find out more about your life as a vegan. After the first interview, I will ask you to choose some content from any social media accounts that you follow. The content you choose will form the basis of discussion for the second interview. You could choose any posts related to veganism that you think are significant or inspire you; the posts could also be confronting or challenging. If you have chosen to be interviewed online, I will ask you to share your desktop with me via Zoom. However, if you do not feel comfortable showing me your social media feeds, I am happy just to chat to you about it. I do not have to see your feed for you to participate. If you have any concerns about your privacy, I am happy to chat with you and find a way

that makes you feel comfortable. I will only audio record the interviews (no video) regardless of interview style.

If the interviews bring up distressing feelings for you, I will make time at the end of the interview to reflect with you on what was discussed. If you need further support, I will provide you with the contact details of three local support agencies. To protect your confidentiality, I cannot contact them on your behalf, but I can support you with my presence or a phone. Details of the support agencies are also at the end. I would also encourage you to talk about the interview and the feelings you may have with your support network.

Procedures: Participation is confidential and there are several ways in which I will work to protect your privacy. All interviews will be digitally audio recorded and stored on a password-protected device and cloud. I will transcribe the interviews myself and participants' names and identifying details will not be included in the transcripts. You will be able to choose your own pseudonym. The digital recordings will be destroyed after transcription, but the digital notes from the research will be kept on a password-protected cloud until the thesis has been graded. The consent forms and transcripts, however, will be kept for a minimum of five years.

Before I start to analyse the transcripts, I would like to meet with you again to give you a copy of your transcript and any notes I might have taken. Alternatively, I can email the transcripts to you. This gives you the opportunity to look over the data, reflect on it, and request any changes where you would like to clarify what was said. You will have two weeks to do this. If you are happy with the transcript/notes and consent for me to use any extracts in my thesis, I will ask you to sign a transcript release form. You can choose to withdraw from the research up until the transcripts/notes are released for analysis. After the research is completed, I will contact you again to discuss my findings and give you the opportunity for feedback. Please know that your consent only allows me (Sarah) and my supervisor (Dr. Kathryn McGuigan) to analyse the transcripts.

Your rights:

Your participation is purely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you have the right to

- Decline to answer any questions I pose.
- You can leave the project and withdraw any information up until you release your transcript/notes via the transcript consent form, which I will email to you after your interview has been transcribed.
- Ask any questions about the research at any time during the duration of the project.
- Provide information to me knowing that your name will not be used.
- Request that sound-recording is turned off at any point during the interviews.

Project Contacts:

Researcher	Supervisor
Sarah Markert	Dr. Kathryn McGuigan
School of Psychology	School of Psychology
Massey University	Massey University
Albany, Auckland	Albany, Auckland
Sarah.Markert.1@uni.massey.ac.nz; [redacted]	K.McGuigan@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in my research.

Support agencies:

- **Youthline**
  Free call 0800 376 633
  Free text 234
  talk@youthline.co.nz
  https://www.youthline.co.nz/get-help.html

- **Overeaters Anonymous**
  St Mary's Peace Lounge
  37 Vivian Street
  New Plymouth 4310
  OAtaranaki@yahoo.co.nz
  Phone: 06 751 3299/027 243 1718
  www.oaregion10.org

- **Healthline**
  General health advice and information
  0800 611 116 (anytime)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 22/13. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact A/Prof Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800, x 43347, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz .

Appendix D: Participant consent form

Exploring Veganism Among Young Women in Aotearoa

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the information provided on the study. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the Information Sheet, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have been given sufficient time to consider whether I want to participate in this research. I understand that my participation is purely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, up until signing the 'Authority for the Release of Transcript' form.

- I agree to the audio recording of the interviews.
- I understand that the audio recording of the interviews will be destroyed after transcription and will not be returned to me.
- I understand that I will have the chance to make changes to the transcripts or notes of my interviews if I choose to do so.
- I understand that I will be given a summary of the findings once the research is complete.
- I agree to participate in this research under the conditions set out by the 'Information Sheet'.

Participant Declaration:

I _____(printed) agree to take part in this study as described in the 'Information Sheet'.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix E: Interview schedules

Exploring Veganism Among Young Women in Aotearoa

The first interview will be semi-structured with an introduction to open the conversation and build rapport. Ideally, the interview will be conversational and there may be some diversions from the schedule depending on participants' answers. Before the start of the interview, the participant and I will get to know each other a little bit and establish a little bit of whanaugtanga (sense of belonging). This will facilitate a connection and put the participants at ease.

Before (applies to both interviews):

- Bring voucher, water, and a snack, if face-to-face.
- Bring copy of information sheet.
- Ensure that consent form has been understood and signed (before the meeting via Qualtrics or email OR bring hardcopy to interview).
- Ask and note if the participant would like a summary of the findings and what pseudonym they would like to use
- Explain about the interview (some questions, but semi-structure, may not get to all questions, etc.)
- Phone needs to be on Do Not Disturb; "Audio recording is being turned on now, is that ok?"
- Remind intermittently that the participants can take a break and/or withdraw from the research at any time. Watch for signs of distress.

Introduction statement: Kia ora. Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in my research and taking time out of your day to be interviewed. To start, I am going to ask you some questions about your veganism and how it fits into your life. There are no right or wrong answers – I really just want

you to feel comfortable and share any thoughts, feelings, or perspectives with me. The interview is about your story, a story that I just want to listen to.

Interview 1: Semi-structured, conversational style

1. To start, could you tell me a bit about yourself? What makes you want to be a vegan?
2. (If the participant became a vegan by choice rather than family enculturation.) Did you have any expectations about veganism before you became one? Have these changed?
    a. Was veganism ever discussed in your family?
    b. Have you known any vegans growing up?
    c. Maybe even, anyone famous?
3. What does your day-to-day diet look like (e.g., foods that are regularly consumed, food groups that have been eliminated additionally)?
4. What has motivated you to adopt this diet?
5. Have you ever followed any other diets?
    a. YES – Which one? What motivated this?
    b. NO – Is there anything that would motivate you to change the way you eat?
6. What is the main benefit of veganism for you?
7. Do you feel feminism and veganism go well together?
    a. If Yes – How?
8. Are their expectations of women that go well with veganism?
    a. Is it easier for women to be vegan? Does veganism make you more feminine?
9. Are expectations of you as a vegan similar to those of you as a woman?
    a. If YES – How?
10. How does eating this way make you feel about yourself?

11. Do you take into consideration how eating this way may affect your body? The way you look?
12. Do you feel that eating this way limits you in any way?
13. How do other people in your life (friends, family, teachers, etc.) respond to your lifestyle?
    a. E. g. What happens when people find out that you are a vegan?
14. Has veganism impacted the way you see the world and yourself in it?
15. How do you negotiate a non-vegan world as a vegan?
16. Is there any pressure to join other social justice causes or movements beside veganism?
    a. If yes, where does this pressure come from?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share with me? Any thoughts or stories that come to mind?

After (applies to both interviews):

- Thank the participants for their contributions.
- Check how the participants are feeling; take time to talk and ask if they are ok.
- Explain that transcripts will be emailed to them for checking/amending once they are ready. Offer a short meeting to discuss transcripts further.
- After completion of research, email a short synopsis to the participants if they indicated that they would like a copy
- Email gift voucher, if via Zoom. Give gift voucher, if face-to-face.

Interview 2: Social media 'go-along'

- Remind the participant(s) of the sensitive nature of online content and ensure that the participant(s) get the opportunity to remove and/or close down any content that do not

wish me to see. Get verbal confirmation that it is ok to see social media feed. If they hesitate, let them know that they can just chat to you about the feed. My observations is not a requirement.

1. Has social media content played a role in your veganism?
2. How is what you eat day-to-day influenced by the social media content that you engage with?
3. Do you follow anyone that does not share your perspective on veganism?
4. Do you try to 'live' what you see in your social media feed?
5. Do you ever feel influenced to imitate what you see in popular culture? In which way?
6. How does the social media content you follow make you feel?
7. Is some content better than other content on social media?

Appendix F: Transcript release form

Exploring Veganism Among Young Women in Aotearoa

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcripts or notes of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcripts or notes of the interview(s) and extracts from either of these may be used in any reports or publications arising from the research.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name (printed):