“More than a diet”: a qualitative investigation of young vegan women's relationship to food

Abstract

One's relationship to food is an important factor that can contribute to wellbeing but can also lead to eating disturbances. Research in this area has linked vegetarianism and veganism to disordered eating. However, through social media, many young women have recently started to share their vegan experiences with many highlighting the role that veganism may have on promoting a 'healthier' psychosocial relationship to food. The current study aims to qualitatively explore the role that veganism plays in young women's wellbeing and relationship to food. Participants were ten young vegan women aged 18 to 25. Semi-structured interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). These women were found to passionately engage in a vegan lifestyle, as opposed to just a vegan diet, which appeared to have a number of positive effects such as a healthier lifestyle, a stronger sense of control and agency, more meaningful social relationships, and a sense of connection to a vegan sub-culture. Through veganism, many of the women transitioned from social disconnection and a focus on body image, to a stronger emotional (empathic), cognitive (knowledge of animal cruelty and healthy eating), and behavioural (diet and consumption choices, actions towards other) investment in their social worlds. We suggest that the healing potential of veganism, is derived from this passionate investment of the self that redefines young women's ways of being in the world. The healing benefits of engaging in a vegan lifestyle may have clinical significance for working with young women who are socially disengaged or who are at risk of disordered eating.

Introduction

Food can act as a social agent used to establish and manage social connections, and can become part of people's identity and self-image (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Rozin, 2005). From a psychosocial perspective, one's relationship to food has been found to be an important contributing factor in wellbeing as well as disordered eating (Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarubin & Wrzesniewski, 1999). Despite this, there is relatively limited research that has examined the influence of dietary and lifestyle choices such as vegetarianism, and in particular veganism, on wellbeing, identity, and disordered eating (Bardone-Cone et al., 2012; Dyett, Sabaté, Haddad, Rajaram & Shavlik, 2013; Radnitz, Beezhold & DiMatteo, 2015). For this reason, the present study will explore young women's experiences of veganism and their psychosocial relationship to food.

Food and Psychosocial Wellbeing

Psychosocial wellbeing can be defined as the intersection and synergy between social, cultural and psychic processes and elements of self (Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003). In today's societies, food has a deep symbolic meaning, and is more than just a source of nutrients (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Rozin, 2005). Food has become a social agent used by people to interact with one another and establish social connections. Accordingly, given its social significance, food and dietary choice are now positioned as an important component of people's identity and self-image. From a psychosocial perspective, food is often a salient factor contributing to wellbeing, but also to disorders such as disordered eating. For example, choosing a particular dietary lifestyle is an expression of the self, and sharing a dietary lifestyle with others helps facilitate a sense of social connection (Dyett, et al., 2013; Fox & Ward, 2008). In addition, the symbolic connection between food and perceived physical attractiveness, means that food is intrinsically tied to emotion and self-esteem.

It also appears that because of gendered beauty ideals, women's psychosocial relationship to food is more complex and problematic than men's (Cheney, 2011; Lake, Staiger & Glowinski, 2000). In particular, the internalisation of skewed ideals of thinness as beauty, may put women at risk of becoming dissatisfied with their own bodies (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). This dissatisfaction can have a negative impact on women's mental health, their sense of connection to their social worlds, and their eating behaviours. For example, it has been reported that body image dissatisfaction and concern about calories can result in the replacement of pleasant, instinctive feelings associated with eating, with feelings of guilt and anxiety (Rozin, Bauer & Catanese, 2003).

Vegetarianism, Veganism and Psychosocial Wellbeing

Given the importance of food to the ways we perceive ourselves within our social worlds, and ultimately to our health and wellbeing, research has begun to examine the psychosocial importance of dietary choice. Vegetarians do not consume meat, poultry, fish or seafood (Hoffman, Stallings, Bessinger, & Brooks, 2013). Vegans exclude meat, poultry, fish, seafood, dairy, eggs and any other animal-derived food from their diet (Greenebaum & Dexter, 2017; Timko, Hormes & Chubski, 2012). There has been an increase worldwide in the number of people adopting these diets. A 2016 poll found that in the UK the number of vegans increased from 150.000 to 542.000 within a decade (Hancox, 2018). In America, "the number of vegans grew by 600% from nearly 4 million in 2014 to 19.6 million in 2017" (https://www.vegansociety.com). Vegetarianism and veganism are associated with many health benefits, such as lower risk of cardiovascular diseases (Bardone-Cone et al., 2012; Radnitz et al., 2015; Rajaram & Sabaté, 2000), lower blood pressure, blood cholesterol and reduced risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and colon cancer (Alewaeters, Clarys, Hebbelinck, Deriemaeker & Clarys, 2005). Vegetarianism and veganism are also associated with a moral and ethical stance, and can be an identity component based on core ethical values (Stets &

Burke, 2000). For example, research suggests that veganism can become a form of activism, a political diet that allows individuals to align their dietary choices to their ethics and morals and act as allies for exploited animals (Chuck, Fernandes & Hyers, 2016; Hirschler, 2011; Paxman, 2016).

Despite its potential health benefits, and its role in one's identity formation, vegetarianism has been found to be associated with dietary restriction. An extensive amount of research has investigated the role played by vegetarianism in people's weight-control behaviours and eating disorders. Ryan (1997) found that 75% of female adolescents who had reduced their meat consumption, were more likely to want to be slimmer and had attempted to lose weight more often, than the females who had not lowered their meat consumption. Society's ideals of thinness and beauty and today's dietary recommendations of reducing one's fat intake, in particular animal derived fat, are two possible factors that have connected vegetarianism and weight control (Gilbody, Kirk, & Hill; 1998). It has also been suggested that modern capitalist society positions young women to seek external sources of self-esteem (competition, academics, appearance), rather than internal (virtue, family, religion) sources (Liu & Huang, 2018).

Vegetarianism and veganism are often seen as diets that can become a more social and acceptable way to validate one's food avoidance and calorie restriction (Bardone-Cone et al., 2012). If not addressed, food restriction can progress into more severe and disordered patterns, characteristics of eating disturbances, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2000). People with eating disorders report high levels of anxiety associated with eating behaviours (Webb et al., 2011). Food can become a source of stress, eliciting a strong anxiety response. It is argued that disordered eating can be seen as a continuum with normal dieting on one end and clinically diagnosed eating disorders on the other end (Patton et al., 1997; Shisslak, Crago & Estes, 1994). Therefore, the focus is no

longer on whether or not the individual has a certain disorder but rather on the severity of the symptoms (Eddy & Kim, 2016; Szmukler, 1985). This could explain the great number of studies, which found that patients with eating disorders were more likely to be following a vegetarian diet than an omnivorous diet (Alloway, Reynolds, Spargo & Russel, 1985; Forestell, Spaeth & Kane, 2012; Gilbody, et. al., 1998; Kadambari, Gowers & Crisp, 1986).

Veganism as a Means of Healing One's Relationship to Food. Most research on the psychosocial significance of dietary choice has focused on vegetarianism, as well as links to disordered eating. There is a need for more research to examine a broader range of experiences with a vegan diet. For example, recently, many young women have used social media to share their experiences of veganism and have emphasised the effect veganism has had on their relationship to food. Many have argued that veganism has actually helped them heal their negative relationship to food and overcome their disturbed eating behaviours and eating disorders (Anonymous, 2015; Briones, 2015; Holland, 2016; Ribar, 2016). For example Jasmine Briones, an American influential vegan Youtuber, has shared the role played by veganism in her relationship to food. In her in-depth online blog post, Briones (2015) shares her personal experience of veganism and discusses how through a transforming learning experience veganism has helped improve her relationship to food and helped heal her disordered eating. Briones talks about how in her first year of college, her need for acceptance and her wish to be able to look in the mirror and love her own self led her to restrict her caloric intake to lose weight. This harmful desire of further restricting her food intake led her to research online the best ways to lose weight fast. This is when Briones came across Veganism and for the first time. Briones revealed that she initially used veganism to restrict calories and became ill. Gradually over time, Briones educated herself on veganism and began eating for health and liking herself for who she is. She is now an advocate for a vegan lifestyle. Recent research suggests that these experiences may not be isolated to a

handful of individuals. According to Paxman (2016 and Wilson (2019), veganism can be a powerful way of life that helps shape identity and the ways vegans interact with others. McDonald (2000) suggests that one of the seven elements that leads the individual to become vegan is learning. This learning process involves researching information that eventually broadens one's knowledge on environmental matters and animal cruelty. The acquisition of this knowledge is often a catalytic experience that motivates the individual to change their entire lifestyle (Ferree & Miller, 1985; Cherry, 2015; Greenebaum, 2012). As currently there is limited research evidence, there is a need for research into the psychosocial processes involved with being vegan.

Aims

The present study seeks to fill the significant gap in the existing literature by exploring the role that veganism can play in young women's relationship to food and psychosocial wellbeing. This study will focus on the psychosocial significance of a vegan diet for young females.

Methodology

Design

The present research was informed by a constructivist epistemology. A key tenet of the constructivist paradigm is that there is no objective truth nor meaning to be discovered, as knowledge is constructed through the interaction between the subject and the object (Crotty, 1998). Consistent with this framework, a qualitative research design was adopted to explore the role that veganism plays in young women's psychosocial wellbeing. A qualitative methodology emphasises the importance of meanings and seeks to further understand how individuals experience and make sense of the world around them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Due to the nature of the research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was

regarded as the most suitable approach to use. IPA draws on the theoretical principles of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography. Phenomenology, a method developed by Edmund Husserl, is concerned with the individual's unique account of an object or experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Therefore, based on this principle, IPA enables the researcher to further investigate how singular individuals make sense of a certain phenomenon under investigation, in this case the role of veganism in relation to one's relationship to food and psychosocial wellbeing, and recognise its essential components (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

A key principle underlying IPA is acknowledgment that description and interpretation are intertwined (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Willig, 2013). IPA involves a double hermeneutic of the researcher trying to interpret or make sense of a participant's description/ sense making during the interview process. There are also different layers of interpretation in which the researcher adopts a hermeneutic of empathy together with a hermeneutic of suspicion (Eatough & Smith, 2017). A hermeneutic of empathy involves trying to understand and empathise with the participant's standpoint. Whereas a hermeneutic of suspicion involves probing for psychological meaning that goes beyond what the participant is perhaps willing or able to do themselves (Eatough & Smith, 2017). In probing for meaning in this way, we aim for theoretical generalisation (Tracy, 2010), where the psychosocial processes derived through analysis inform our broader understanding of the relationships between diet and wellbeing. We also present personal statements for each participant (Table 1), and illustrative quotes from participants in the findings, so that the participants' experiences resonate with the reader's personal experiences, facilitating naturalistic generalisation (Smith, 2018).

Personal reflexivity

Research informed by a qualitative methodology, recognises the importance of locating and highlighting the central voices informing the research process (Medico &

Santiago-Delefosse, 2014; Gough & Madill, 2012; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Wilkinson, 1988; Willig, 2013). This paper has been heavily informed by the standpoint of the first author who identifies as vegan and the second author who has a non-vegan diet but who gained interest through listening to the first author's accounts. The second authors role was to assist the first author throughout the research process and to also reflect and critically engage on her relationship and motivation for conducting the study, and the ways it has informed the study aims, design and analysis.

I [first author] have struggled with food related anxiety, harmful weight-control behaviours and body-image for many years. It needs to be acknowledged that my own experiences have been shaped by the society I live in. My history of unhealthy eating behaviours and my own struggles with my body have been conditioned by the western ideals of beauty. These unrealistic beauty ideals and the pressure that today is placed on women and their bodies have led me to research ways I could use to transform my own body to fit society's beauty standards. This is how I first came in contact with veganism. At the beginning, I went vegan with the desire of further restricting my calorie intake through a more socially accepted way. However, by slowly educating myself on the ethical, environmental and health related ideas promoted by veganism, I have been able to experience a shift in the way I look at food, which in turn has helped me start my own journey of healing my relationship with food. Taking this account, each step of the research process was significantly influenced by my own personal experiences. From the research question to the sampling criteria and the interview schedule, each step of this research was influenced by my own relationship to food and the meaning I have given to veganism, as well as by my gender identity and age. Sharing similar experiences with the research participants also created a safe and non-judgmental space where participants might have felt more comfortable opening up about their own accounts of veganism, and struggles with eating disturbances. This may have

been different if I had not been vegan and had not shared similar experiences of veganism, food restriction, and struggles with body-image.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from a University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. An online advertisement was published on the Facebook group page 'Vegan Girls Melbourne' as well as on the first author's Facebook page. The advertisement called for young women who were interested in sharing their experiences of Veganism. Interested participants then contacted the researcher/ interviewer by phone or email to arrange an interview. The researcher explained the aims of the research, and the expectations and rights of potential participants. Consent was obtained both orally and through a signed consent form. Semi-structured interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes were conducted and digitally recorded. Two were phone interviews and eight were face-to-face. All face-to-face interviews were carried out at three different cafés located in Melbourne. Participants were made aware of the limits to confidentiality of being interviewed in a public space, and agreed to these locations. The interview schedule explored participants' individual and unique experience of veganism, their personal meaning of veganism, what challenges they faced and consequences of becoming vegan. Questions also assessed participants' relationship to food prior to and after going vegan. Examples include "*could you please talk about your relationship to food prior to going vegan?"*, and *"has your relationship to food changed after going vegan".* Overall, circa 6 hours of material were collected with each interview ranging between 45 and 60 minutes.

Participants

In total, ten participants participated in this study. The demographic information emerged during the course of the interviews. All ten participants were women who identified as vegan and were between the ages of 18 and 25. Nine participants were Australian, and one

was American. In line with qualitative methodology, participants' demographic details are presented in Table 1 in a qualitative format for contextual purposes. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, participant's names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant demographic information

Ana, 24, became vegan in 2017 after researching veganism following a discussion with some vegan friends. Prior to going vegan she had been vegetarian for 8 years. Initially, veganism helped Ana hide her negative eating behaviours. However, learning more about the ethical and environmental issues of consuming animal products helped her transition to more healthy eating behaviours.

Billie, 21, is VCE educated and works in hospitality. Billie lives with her non-vegan mum and step-dad. Since Billie has adopted a vegan lifestyle, both her mum and step-dad have decreased their consumption of animal products. Billie decided to adopt a vegan lifestyle in 2016 after several years following a vegetarian diet because of her compassion for the animals. Through veganism she learnt to stand up for animals whose voices are silenced, and take better care of her health.

Nadia, 20, does not want to leave any marks on the planet after she is gone. She is vegan and low waste. At the time of the interview, Nadia was in a relationship with a non-vegan partner and was struggling to navigate the relationship due to moral and ethical differences.

Carrie, 22, is VCE educated and transitioned from a vegetarian diet to a vegan lifestyle. Her concern for animal treatment was a catalyst for change. At the time of the interview, she lived with her family and worked as a bartender. Since adopting a vegan diet, she feels more enthusiastic about her everyday life and feels more energetic.

Grace, 19, adopted a vegan lifestyle in 2016. Her decision has been influenced by her sister. Grace lives with her supportive parents and older brother. She completed an advanced diploma of screen and media and works as a camera operator. Since becoming vegan, she has discovered a new interest in cooking. In particular, she is really interested in re-creating non-vegan foods using vegan ingredients.

Jess, 23, is an American youtuber and vegan influencer. She completed a bachelor degree in Nutritional Science. She went vegan when she was 18 and in 2013 she opened her personal website to share her vegan journey and her vegan recipes. Jess decided to make veganism her mission, teaching people about veganism, health, and animal ethics.

Julia, 21, lives with her family who is very supportive of her vegan lifestyle. She transitioned from vegetarian to vegan together with her sister in 2015. For her, social media was the biggest source of information about veganism. The main reason behind her vegan lifestyle is environmental. She stands by the idea of living a more sustainable life and leaving a minimal footprint.

Mel, 23, works as a police officer. She went vegan in 2016. At the time of the interview, she was in a 3-year relationship with her vegan boyfriend. She likes to educate people on the ethical, health and environmental issues behind the consumption of animal products.

Miranda, 20, is a make-up artist who, at the time of the interview, was in a relationship with a non-vegan partner who had drastically reduced the consumption of animal products and had started considering transitioning to a vegetarian diet. Miranda adopted a vegan lifestyle in 2016 after being vegetarian for several years. Miranda has a history of binge eating and calorie restriction. She believes that veganism helped her eat more mindfully.

Rebecca, 23, was living with her family and vegetarian partner. Both her parents and partner later transitioned to veganism. She completed a bachelor of Psychology and at the time was studying a graduate diploma in

Psychology. She firstl did a 30-day vegan challenge inspired by the diet book "Skinny Bitch", but after doing her own research, she decided to completely embrace a vegan lifestyle. This decision was driven by her ethics around animal cruelty and her health.

Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed following IPA guidelines (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al.,1999; Willig, 2013). Although the steps are described in a linear fashion, analysis was an iterative process moving from 'presuppositions' to interpretation and back again. Firstly, each transcript was read several number of times in order to gain a deeper understanding of each individual experience. Potentially significant insights were noted down on the left-side margin of the document. The next stage of analysis involved the identification and labelling of emergent themes which were noted on the other side of the margin, such as: love for the animals, relationship to food, mental health, physical health, and social health etc. Emerging themes were then listed on a separate sheet to facilitate clustering/ identification of connections between themes. For instance, mental health, physical health and social health were clustered together as positive aspects of veganism perceived by participants. A summary table was then produced with cluster themes and quotations from the interview transcript. The final stage of analysis involved integration of cases, individual summary tables were consolidated to generate a list of master themes and their constituent themes. A diagram (see Figure 1.) was then created to facilitate the presentation of each themes and corresponding sub-themes and represents a process of change. The co-authors were involved in discussions regarding coding and interpretation throughout the analysis process, often using a whiteboard to discuss and work through the clustering of themes.

Findings and Discussion

The main focus of the present study was to explore the role of veganism in young women's relationship to food and psychosocial wellbeing. The women spoke in terms of comparisons

between their past non-vegan and current vegan lifestyle, and in terms of a personal narrative with a past, a present, and an imagined future. As such, analysis revealed a process of change beginning with ethical motivation and culminating with healing through connection with others (Figure 1). This psychosocial healing process, described by participants, and explicated in analysis, is the focus of our discussion.

Consistent with past research (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Rozin, 2005), the women spoke about the **ethics** underpinning their transition to veganism. The women's strong ethical stance towards animal rights, provided the energy and is the catalyst for them to adopt a vegan lifestyle. Participants saw veganism as a means by which they could express their ethical and moral beliefs, particularly their love for animals and the importance of avoiding any type of animal cruelty. Consistent with past research (Fox & Ward, 2008; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017), this transition and commitment involves a process of **identification with the vegan sub-culture** as different from mainstream society. In choosing to join a vegan sub-culture group, the women gained solidarity with a new in-group, grew through learning about food, but also experienced stigma and disconnection from mainstream society. In particular, most women experienced some degree of disconnection with non-vegan individuals based on frustration with non-vegans' perceived disinterest in learning the reasons behind their transition to veganism. Going vegan was more than just a change in their diet, *"its a lifestyle change, is a long term thing"*. Participants' adoption of veganism as a **profound lifestyle change** has also had a significant influence on their overall self, identities and life whereby "Veganism became a big part of me and my life" "veganism is my lifestyle (Hirschler, 2011; Paxman, 2016). I like how it represents who I am", "Veganism is like who I am now. It's like your morals, I am always thinking and it's like every decision".

This transition and commitment to a new lifestyle and identity involved education about the importance of veganism and about healthy eating. Once on this path, these women

recounted a series of transformations, which provide a deeper connection and sense of belonging, as well as greater empathy and compassion. Veganism appeared to play a significant role for these young women by bringing about **profound healing**, which has positively impacted several aspects of their lives including their relationship with themselves, others, animals, and the environment.

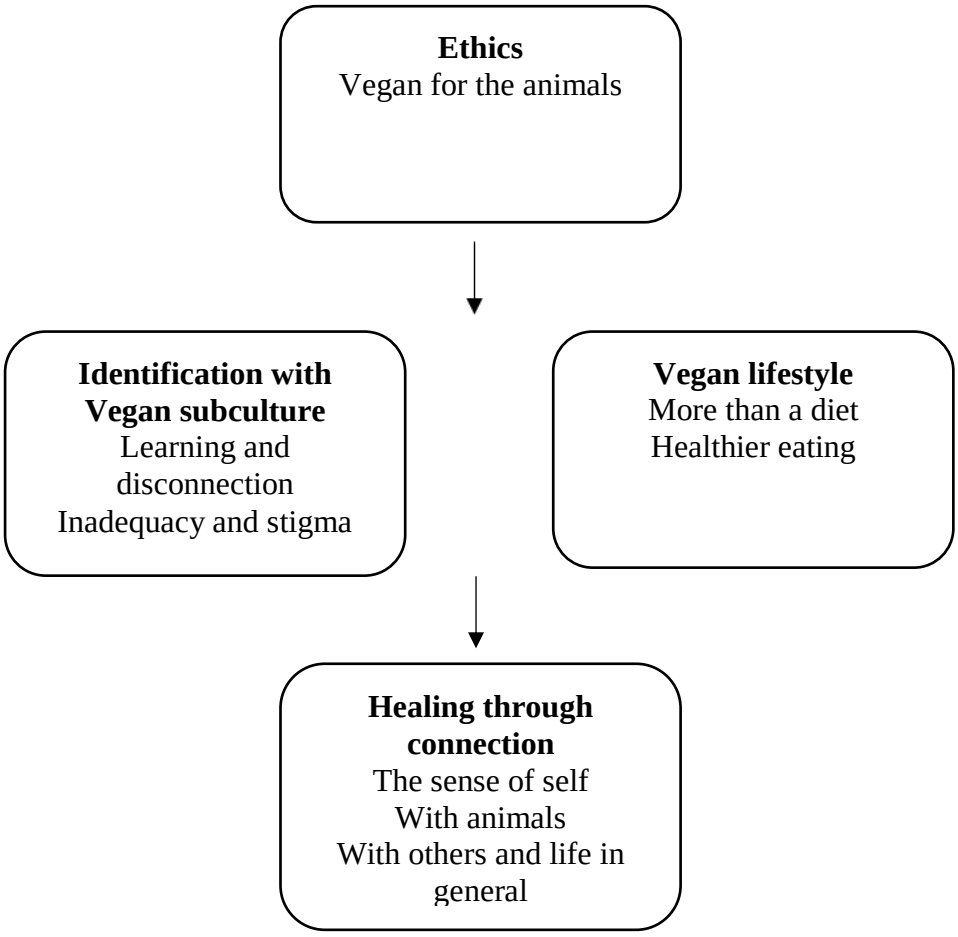

Figure 1. *Young Vegan Women's process of change*

There is currently little information on the healing potential of veganism. As such, the following findings focus on the healing through connection superordinate theme. These healing experiences are explored through the three themes of 1, Healing sense of self, 2, Healing relationship with animals and the environment 3, Healing relationships with others and life in general. A detailed explanation of each theme will be presented below along with

illustrative texts in support of these themes. In line with Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009), table two includes the prevalence of themes according to each participant.

Table 2. *Table of prevalence: Number of Quotes per Theme and Participant*

Themes Participants	Relationship with self	Relationship with animals	Relationship with others/ environment
Ana	4	0	0
Billy	7	7	5
Nadia	4	5	4
Carrie	5	2	4
Grace	5	6	4
Jess	3	4	4
Julia	7	0	4
Mel	5	12	4
Miranda	3	4	4
Rebecca	5	3	3

Healing the Self: "I'm more aware"

For some participants, veganism is a lifestyle that has positively changed who they are. It appeared that this healing processes involves letting go of old habits that entailed a lack of connection, control and care. Instead, the women embraced conscious/active decision making, and gaining a sense of control over their diet and eating practices. The women explained that this has helped them improve the way they take care of themselves and therefore healed the relationship with their own bodies and minds. Billie explains:

> So before I was vegan and vegetarian like I didn't care about my health at all. I just ate whatever I wanted to eat. I ate McDonalds four times a week and I never thought that was a bad diet because I've always been skinny so like 'oh I'm healthy'. Now like I look at food differently, and probably more like…I'm like 'oh yeah that's junk food, that's healthy food, that's **good for your soul**, that's gonna make me **feel better** than eating a massive pile of junk food.

Billie highlights how embracing veganism has improved her relationship to food by making her more health conscious. This seems to reveal that for Billie, food has become a conduit of

the self. As a result, she now cares about herself, and uses food to nourish the self. Previously, there was a lack of reflection on health, where being skinny was enough, which has been transformed into eating for wellbeing. For Miranda, going vegan helped her with eating disturbances and improved her mental wellbeing:

> Before going vegan, I sort of was a bit of a binge-eater. I had like a slight binge eating disorder and sometimes would be like on the verge of being bulimic. **I'd just eat and not think** about what I was eating usually. That's when the weight sorted of started gaining so from there I would try starve myself with small amount of meals, not a healthy approach to it. […] I just ate if food was there like if I was sad or bored I'd keep eating. I was just never…I never really enjoyed food for what it was. I would just eat to be full or sick […] Now being vegan **I'm more aware** of what I am actually putting into my body […] I'm thinking about what I'm making. I'm **choosing** what to cook for each meal like I actually go shopping and enjoy buying food. It's like it [veganism] made me look at food healthier. I'm just more aware of what I'm buying and what I'm eating so that's been really positive. […] I haven't done any binge eating sort of stuff because I haven't felt like I need to, so I just feel like my **body just feels better** in general.

There is consistency in many of the women's testimony where prior to veganism their focus was on weight but not health. This led Miranda to harmful cycles of binging, purging and starving. However, embracing this vegan lifestyle helped Miranda heal this harmful way of eating. There is now a strong sense of agency in the way Miranda talks about food. She is **aware** of how food makes her feel, and **chooses** accordingly. Similarly, Ana explained how a vegan diet has helped her transition from food restriction to healthy eating, and has increased her self-love:

> I went through a **massive life change** in January, which **messed up my mental**

> **health** and my way of copying was to **not eat and to limit my food and being vegan sort of aided that**… I didn't have to eat certain food and I could hide it by saying "oh I'm vegan I can't eat that". Up until recently, I was hardly eating but now that I am **better I see food a lot differently and I see it as nourishing and healthy**…with the animals as well. I'm helping them yeah like **I** definitely see it as what I put in my body **I am doing a good thing**. When I eat vegan it makes me happy now because I'm like I feel good about what I'm eating yeah

Rebecca explains that she also related food to weight, but now relates food to health:

> Prior to going vegan, I was pretty **obsessed with food and my weight** and my image. I would definitely weigh myself every single day. I'd think about food way too much and what to eat and uhm…with way too sort of restriction on myself, and then sort of binge…it's taken maybe a year into it [veganism] and then I'll just…I'd see food like fuel but also **just whatever.** Like I don't really think about it that much as long as it's vegan. I have a way healthier relationship with my body and **I never weigh myself**.

This perceived improvement in their relationship to food appears to be the result of the sense of control and empowerment, along with increased knowledge of the food, body, and mind relationships. It seems that veganism is offering women ways to resist habits of disconnection, and instead make a deliberate investment of self in an ethically guided lifestyle. In this way, veganism can be seen as having deep symbolic meaning for participants (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Rozin, 2005), adding an important dimension to their identities (Dyett, et al., 2013). The healing reported by the women seems to involve growth in terms of knowledge, investment of self, and identity characteristics. Healing also appeared to involve moving on from past experiences. This healing process reflects current holistic perspectives on psychosocial growth and wellbeing (e.g., Joseph, Linley& Harris, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2007), where positive change follows adversity. For these women, it appeared that veganism

was the catalyst for positive personal development, and the healing of fractured relationships with food and in some cases disordered eating (Patton et al., 1997).

It seems that the women's relationship to food is not just gendered (Cheney, 2011) and informed by socio-cultural norms on beauty, but is also underpinned by global capitalism (Watson & Caldwell, 2005). Eating patterns have shifted greatly in the last few decades whereby food, particularly processed food, is easily accessible, inexpensive, and convenient (Cheney, 2016). The women appear to have made a conscious choice to resist these trends.

Healing One's Relationship to Animals: "I need to do something"

The participants revealed that by being exposed to veganism, they were able to act on their ethics and make profound connections between animal products and the cruelty behind them.

> I went vegan basically for the animals […] I was always a big animal lover but never really quite make the connection and then once I did, I realised I couldn't fund that anymore. [I made the connection] through Freelee the banana girl on YouTube. She kinda opened me up to the idea of veganism. At first, I was very resistant to what she was saying but it kinda sparked me to do my own research from what she was saying […] and then Earthlings, that cemented it for me. […] The thought of eating meat again is **sickening** […] even the thought of eggs now really **grosses me out** […]. It's not even food anymore […] like I can't help but think about animals' meat as if it was my own like it's **just disgusting.**

Mel explains that learning about animal cruelty in meat production has strengthened her animal empathy and connected this empathy to animal products such that meat and eggs elicit an automatic and powerful adverse response (McDonald, 2000). Extending past research, this broadened knowledge not only leads to change in lifestyle (Miller, 1985), but also affords vegans with a sense of activism and synthesis between their actions and beliefs. This

activism can provide women a sense of purpose and even redemption. On this account, Grace says:

> I started kinda going off meat cause I didn't like it and I looked into the ethical stuff and I am very passionate about animals and I just thought this isn't cool and then I went vegetarian and then vegan […] I learnt what veganism was and what vegetarianism was and I kinda just wanted to get onto it and I remember before I was vegetarian my sister brought home a few pamphlets from animal Australia and **I read them and cried** and I was like **'I need to do something'**.

Similar to Mel, for Grace, veganism helped develop a passionate emotional connection to animals and a disgust for animal cruelty. It was clear for most of the women that this emotional connection had become part of their self and identity. Nadia further explains that she feels empowered to act on her change of thinking towards animal products:

> In the past five or so years, I've always kinda knew what I was doing was wrong when I was eating animal products but it was so easy to pretend it was not going on, and then once I started opening myself up to veganism it was just okay I can't stop you know. I just gotta…you know all of this information is out there and all this knowledge…**I cannot be wilfully ignorant.** It does frustrate me. Now I'm like veganism is one of my core values, **it's a huge part of me**. **I cannot imagine living in any other way** than I am right now, only improving on what I am doing.

The process of healing for these women is multifaceted. The knowledge gained regarding animal cruelty connects with existing animal empathy, amplifying it and connecting it to food. There is also a sense of a strong connection being made between empathic emotion and cognitive awareness of a social problem. In undertaking a vegan lifestyle, the women are enacting these thoughts and feelings in a powerful, personal form of agency that strengthens the self. The self is enhanced through knowing that one is living according to deeply felt

principals, and that one's actions are contributing to animal welfare. In addition, the vegan lifestyle entails emotional, cognitive and behavioural investment in one's social world. As such, a vegan lifestyle appears to promote a mindful connection with the social world, which in many of the participants' lives, replaced a disconnection with the social world, a preoccupation with body image, and disordered eating. These findings highlight the potential of a vegan lifestyle for improving the psychosocial wellbeing of young women with complex and sometimes problematic relationships to food. These women demonstrate that veganism can influence multiple levels of the self (identity, cognition, emotion, behaviour), making it potentially a powerful driver of healing and growth. This might be contrasted to current psychosocial interventions that focus on only cognitive and behavioural aspects of young women's relationships with food (Eddy & Kim, 2016).

Even though these connections and investments presented at an individual level, it could also be read as a form of resistance to the commodification of animals by a capitalist global system (Turner, 1988). This system is premised on invisibility, exploitation, and disconnection to animal life, enabling the abusive treatment of animals. Participants challenge binaries between human and non-human by empathising with animals, and including them within their moral scope of justice (Bastian & Loughnan, 2017).

Healing One's Relationship to People: Forging connections between self, others and beyond

Participants reported that adopting veganism as a core part of their identity has helped them achieve a new sense of belonging. This sense of belonging encompassed two main features: a deeper connection to the world, and an increase in their sense of altruism and pro-social behaviour. Several participants clearly expressed that becoming vegan had changed the way they thought about animals and the people around them. As a result, participants reported developing a deeper connection to the people and life in general. For example, Rebecca

reported:

> Veganism made me a lot more **other-centred rather than ego-centric** uhm…I have a lot **more compassion** to any animals that I interact with, people as well. It's because of that sort of connection that starts, you know…everyone feels, everyone thinks and everyone…every life is worth it. I **see the world differently** now. I see the world and the environment and the creatures in it differently. Uhm…you know… I try to avoid harm wherever possible in my life.

Similarly, Carrie explains:

> I think it [veganism] definitely **changed the way I think**… like when I do things I definitely think about the **consequences** and how they are going to **affect others**, not necessarily in relation to animals but like I see more…I know like that when you make a **choice**…the **ripple effect**....it affects others and I think that I have changed the way I think about **my action**. I'm a little **more aware** now.

Carrie demonstrates here that applying her knowledge and feelings to a vegan lifestyle reinforces her agency and her willingness and ability to affect others. This allows Carrie to be more thoughtful and considerate of her actions towards people as well as animals. Jasmine describes not only an improved outlook on life but a willingness to lead others towards a better life:

> I think I have a **more positive** outlook on life. I feel like I've grown a **passion** for something I wasn't **passionate** about before, and I really want to make it uhm…I guess my mission to **help others** improve their health and uhm…**help others** realise they can do so much more with their life and **be more compassionate**.

And Julia:

> I've become a bit **kinder** in everything I do. Veganism is about being **compassionate** in **every aspect of your life**, like you say that you love animals or you're an

> environmentalist or you're trying to like… leave a minimal footprint like it's part of being a vegan I guess.

Similarly, Carrie explains:

> I generally just became a **more positive** person. I am not sure what that had to do with it but I don't know I just felt like I was **waking up** to do…to make a change…I don't know, it [veganism] sort of **changed me as a person entirely**. Before this [going vegan] I wanted to be a police officer and I wanted to help people but now I'm more so wanting to uhm…like work to make the environment more sustainable and aid wild life and stuff like that.

There is also a paradox here in that the participants revealed feeling a disconnection from non-vegan individuals based on knowledge of animal welfare. This frustration appeared to relate to non-vegans' disinterest in learning the reasons behind their transition to veganism resulting in frustration and at times anger. For example, Mel explains:

> It was my first Christmas as a vegan and my family in the morning all had poached eggs and I....I had to leave the dinner table…like I was uncomfortable. It can be really **frustrating** sitting at dinner with them while they are eating meat…and I can kinda…and they are eating dairy or eggs…kinda thinking 'you would not be eating that if you would read something that I said to you or whatever'. So I can find it frustrating like the **ignorance**… **they do not want to learn**. The information [on the ethical reasons behind veganism] is there and they do not want it and same for my family, I can feel really **frustrated** with them, I guess **angry** sometimes.

It appeared that what participants found frustrating was that the perceived ignorance of non-vegans could also result in anger towards vegans. For example, Rebecca explains:

> I think people who have these negative opinions about veganism…they do it to **cover up their own guilt** and their cognitive-dissonance…it [consuming and purchasing

> animal products] is not the right thing to do and they cannot really cope with it so instead they make fun [of veganism] and try to poke holes in the arguments of vegans.

Commonly, the women spoke about veganism improving their diets by increasing the range of foods they ate, and were frustrated that non-vegans perceived their lifestyle as restrictive. Julia explained:

> When I first like told my friends and stuff that I was going vegan, they thought I was going to **turn into this cruel stick** and like not be able to eat anything but grass and lettuce.
>
> People often think **we get sick** a lot and that we're not getting enough protein or iron, which I can back that up by saying it's not true with my own personal experience. Prior to going vegan, I used to get sick quite often and at the age of 15, I had a blood test and I was anaemic and at that time I was a meat eater. I had a blood test three months ago and my blood count was perfect, I wasn't low in iron or b12 and I know for a fact that I get enough protein. Also, **people think we are all skinny** and I'm the living example of this stereotype [laughs] but I was all stick and bones prior to going vegan so this is purely within my genetics to be like this.

The presence of this stereotype means that vegans must defend their position. The women were also aware of other vegans who were less healthy in their vegan diets.

> Often people say that they felt really bad because of the vegan diet because they **weren't doing it properly** and didn't know much about it…I think that more people would benefit from like **more information** about it being put out there.

The notion of connecting to humans and the environment is related to trying to make life meaningful in an individualistic culture where disconnection from the environment is a dominant tenant (Turner, 1988). It seems veganism is offering these women ways of making meaning in life beyond individualistic culture by making passionate connections between

themselves and social causes. They have also learned and acknowledged the power of their agency, and the "rippling effect" between self, others and the environment. In this way veganism can be seen as almost a religion in a modern capitalist world. Another way to understand this is that veganism has become a 'political diet' through which the women can engage in activism (Chuck, Fernandes & Hyers, 2016; Paxman, 2016). This strongly supports the concept that foods and food choice can acquire a symbolic function and can be adopted to express one's ideals and beliefs (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Rozin, 2005). By changing their lifestyle as well as their diet, the women made a profound identification as vegan, which appeared to improve their relationship to food as well as their sense of wellbeing. This improvement may function partly through an increased focus on internal sources of self-esteem (pride in living ethically and morally), and a decreased focus on external sources (appearance, body image) (Liu & Huang, 2018).

Participants revealed making what they referred to as an "ethical connection" between animal cruelty and the consumption and purchase of animal products. This supports the idea that catalytic experiences can motivate the individual to change their lifestyle and embrace veganism by revising their consciousness and making them, for the first time, aware of the cruelty behind the consumption and purchase of animal products (McDonald, 2000; Ferree & Miller, 1985). This lifestyle was the catalyst for healing relationships and a stronger engagement with and connection to society.

Conclusions

The aim of this qualitative research was to investigate young vegan women's relationship to food and psychosocial wellbeing. Participants reported that what initially began as a dietary restriction based on ethical principles transformed into a lifestyle. The adoption of a vegan lifestyle led to profound healing of self and social/animal connectedness in a number of

women. The healing effects of a vegan lifestyle may have significant implications for improving young women's sense of self, psychosocial wellbeing, and connections to their social and environmental worlds. Participants were no longer concerned with the way food may impact their bodies, but rather more focused on how, through their food choices, they could contribute to make a positive change for the animals and the environment. In these cases, food and diet is no longer experienced as a source of fear, anxiety, and guilt, but became an aspect of identity with a deeper symbolic meaning through which participants were able to express their strong morals and ethical stance and heal fractured connections (Rozin, 2005).

This study also makes some tentative conclusions on the process of healing and improved psychosocial wellbeing through veganism. We suggest that the new knowledge of animal cruelty connects with existing animal empathy, amplifying it and connecting it to food. A strong connection is made between empathic emotion and increased awareness of a social problem. These thoughts and feelings in ways that afford the young women with a strong sense of agency and sense of self and stronger emotional (empathic), cognitive (knowledge of animal cruelty and healthy eating), and behavioural (diet and consumption choices, actions towards other) investment in their social worlds. We suggest that these investments enable the women to redefine ways of being and relating to others in a modern, capitalist world.

The processes of healing through a vegan lifestyle presented here may be particular to this group of women, who are young, caucasion, middle class, with a self-reported history of concerns around diet and weight, and who have recently embraced veganism. As such findings may not representative of other vegans, and research needs to examine processes of change and healing in other cohorts of women and men. Given the complexities of the young women's experiences, future research could engage a case study approach, drawing on

multiple interviews, and other data collection methods such as diaries. In addition, narrative methodologies may be suited to this topic, as the women in this study tended to express their experiences as a story of personal transformation. In conclusion, a vegan lifestyle may have the potential to give meaning in life to disengaged young women, and may help transform disordered eating and heal fractured connections with their social and environmental worlds.

References

Alewaeters, K., Clarys, P., Hebbelinck, M., Deriemaeker, P., & Clarys, J. P. (2005). Cross-sectional analysis of BMI and some lifestyle variables in Flemish vegetarians compared with non-vegetarians. *Ergonomics, 48* (11-14), 1433-1444. doi:10.1080/00140130500101031

Alloway, R., Reynolds, E. H., Spargo, E., & Russel, G. F. M. (1985). Neuropathy and myopathy in two patients with anorexia and bulimia nervosa. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry, 48*(10), 1015-1020. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1028541/

Anonymous. (2015, October 21). Re: Recovering from an eating disorder doesn't mean working out and following a plant base diet and doing morning yoga and drinking kale detox smoothies [Web log comment]. Retrieved from http://www.lifewithoutanorexia.com/2015/10/recovering-from-eating-disorder-doesn.html

Bardone-Cone, A. M., Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E., Harney, M. B., Maldonado, C. R., Lawson, M. A., Smith, R., & Robinson, P. (2012). The Inter-Relationships between Vegetarianism and Eating Disorders among Females. *Journal of the academy of nutrition and dietetics, 112*(8), 1247-1252. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2012.05.007.

Bastian, B., & Loughnan, S. (2017). Resolving the Meat-Paradox: A Motivational Account of Morally Troublesome Behavior and Its Maintenance. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *21*(3), 278–299. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868316647562

Briones, J. (2015, February 28). My Story: How I Used Veganism to Mask My Eating Disorder AND How Veganism Helped Me Heal It [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://sweetsimplevegan.com/2015/02/mystory/

Cheney, A. M. (2011). Most Girls Want to be Skinny: Body (Dis)Satisfaction Among Ethnically Diverse Women, *Qualitative Health Research, 21*(10), 1347-1359.

Cheney, T. (2016). Historical Materialism And Alternative Food: Alienation, Division Of Labour, And The Production Of Consumption. *The Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies, 11*(1), 105-126

Cherry, E. (2015). I Was a Teenage Vegan: Motivation and Maintenance of Lifestyle Movements. *Sociological Inquiry*, *85*(1), 55-74. doi:10.1111/soin.12061

Chuck, C., Fernandes, S. A., & Hyers, L. I. (2016). Awakening to the politics of food: Politicized diet as social identity. *Appetite, 107*, 425-436. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2016.08.106

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: meaning & perspective in research process*. Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Dyett, P. A., Sabaté, J., Haddad, E., Rajaram, S., & Shavlik, D. (2013). Vegan lifestyle behaviours. An exploration of congruence with health-related beliefs and assessed health indices. *Appetite, 67*, 119-124. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2013.03.015

Eatough, V., & Smith, J.A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In Willg, C., & Stainton-Rogers, W. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 193-211). Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE Inc

Eddy, K. T., & Kim, Y. (2016). Dieting to Disordered Restricting. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 59*(4), 369-370. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.07.015

Ferree, M. M., & Miller, F. D. (1985). Mobilization and Meaning: Toward an Integration of Social Psychological and Resource Perspectives on Social Movements. *Sociological Inquiry, 55*(1), 38-61. doi:10.1111/j.1475-682X.1985.tb00850.x

Forestell, C. A., Spaeth, A. M., & Kane, S. A. (2012). To eat or not to eat red meat. A closer look at the relationship between restrained eating and vegetarianism in college females. *Appetite, 58*(1), 319-325. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2011.10.015

Fox, N., & Ward, K. J. (2008). You are what you eat: vegetarianism, health and identity. *Social Science & Medicine, 66*(12), 2585-2595. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.02.011

Gilbody, S. M., Kirk, S. F. L., & Hill, A. J. (1998). Vegetarianism in young women. Another mean of weight control. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 26*(1), 87-90. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-108X(199907)26:1<87::AID-EAT11>3.0.CO;2-M

Grabe, S., Ward, L. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2008). The role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of experimental and correlational studies, *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(3), 460-476

Greenebaum, J., & Dexter, B. (2018). Vegan men and hybrid masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies, 27*(6), 637-648.

Gough, B., & Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological science: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods, 17*(3), 374-384. doi:10.1037/a0029313

Greenebaum, J. (2012). Veganism, Identity and the Quest for Authenticity. *Food Culture & Society, 15*(1), 129-144. doi:10.2752/175174412X13190510222101

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity and ethically important moments in research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10*(2), 261-280. doi:10.1177/1077800403262360

Hancox, D. (2018, April 1). The unstoppable rise of veganism: how a fringe movement went

mainstream. The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/01/vegans-are-coming-millennials-health-climate-change-animal-welfare

Hirschler, C. A. (2011). What pushed me over the edge was a deer hunter: being vegan in north America". *Society & Animals,* 19(2), 156-174.

Hoffman, S. R., Stallings, S. F., Bessinger, R. C., & Brooks, G. T. (2013). Differences between health and ethical vegetarians. *Appetite, 65,* 139-144. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2013.02.009

Holland, E. (2016, February 23). Veganism and eating disorder recovery (part 1) [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://www.vegansociety.com/whats-new/blog/veganism-and-eating-disorder-recovery-part-1

Joseph, S., Linley, P.A., & Harris, G. (2005). Understanding positive changes following trauma and adversity: Structural clarifications. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*:*International Perspectives on Stress and Coping,10,* 83-96.doi: 10.1080/15325020490890741

Kadambari, R., Gowers, S., & Crisp, A. (1986). Some correlates of vegetarianism in anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 5*(3), 539-544. doi:10.1080/10640260008251222

Lake, A. J., Staiger, P. K., & Glowinski, H. (2000). Effect of Western Culture on Women's Attitudes to Eating and perceptions of body shape, *International Journal of Eating Disorders,* 27, 83-89.

Lindeman, M., & Sirelius, M. (2001). Food choice ideologies: the modern manifestation of normative and humanist views of the world. *Appetite, 37*(3), 175-184. doi:10.1006/appe.2001.0437

Liu, C. H., & Huang, P. S. (2018). Contingencies of Self-Worth on Positive and Negative Events and Their Relationships to Depression. *Frontiers in psychology*, *9*, 2372. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02372

Lucey, H., Melody, J., & Walkerdine, V. (2003). Uneasy hybrids: psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women. *Gender and Education*, *15*(3), 285-299. Doi:10.1080/0954025032000103204

McDonald, B. (2000). Once You Know Something, You Can't Not Know It: An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan. *Society & Animals, 8*(1), 1-23. Retrieved from: http://www.animalsandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/mcdonald.pdf

Medico, D., & Santiago-Delefosse, M. (2014). From Reflexivity to Resonances: Accounting for Interpretation Phenomena in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 11*(4), 350-364. doi:10.1080/14780887.2014.915367

Neumark-Sztainer, D., Rock, C. L., Thornquist, M. D., Cheskin, L. L., Neuhouser, M. L., & Barnett, M. J. (2000). Weight-control behaviors among adults and adolescents: associations with dietary intake. *Preventive Medicine*, *30*(5), 381-391.

Papadopoulos, R.K. (2007). Refugees, trauma and adversity-activated development. *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, *9*, 301-312. doi:10.1080/13642530701496930

Patton, G. C., Carlin, J. B., Shao, Q., Hibbert, M. E., Rosier, M., Selzer, R., & Bowes, G. (1997). Adolescent dieting: healthy weight control or borderline eating disorder? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *38*(3), 299-306. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1997.tb01514.x

Paxman, C. G. (2016). Vegan voices: communicatively negotiating a food-based identity.

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2012). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal, 18*(2), 361-369. doi:10.14691/CPPJ.20.1.7

Radnitz, C., Beezhold, B., & DiMatteo, J. (2015). Investigation of lifestyle choices of individuals following a vegan diet for health and ethical reasons. *Appetite, 90*, 31-36. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.026

Rajaram, S., & Sabaté, J. (2000). Health benefits of a vegetarian diet. *Nutrition, 16*(7/8), 531-533. doi:10.1016/S0899-9007(00)00305-1

Ribar, E. (2016, May 3). IT HAPPENED TO ME: Going Vegan Cured My Binge Eating Disorder [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://www.xojane.com/it-happened-to-me/veganism-cured-my-binge-eating-disorder

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78. doi:10.1037110003-066X.55.1.68

Ryan, Y. M. (1997). Meat avoidance and body weight concerns: nutritional implications for teenage girls. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 56*, 519-524. Retrieved from: https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0029665197001249

Rosenfeld, D. L., & Burrow, A. L. (2017). The unified model of vegetarian identity: a conceptual framework for understanding plant-based food choices. *Appetite, 112*, 78-95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.01.017

Rozin, P. (2005). The Meaning of Food in Our Lives: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Eating and Well-Being. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour, 37*(2), 107-112. doi:10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60209-1

Rozin, P., Bauer, R., & Catanese, D. (2003). Food and Life, Pleasure and Worry, Among American College Students: Gender Differences and Regional Similarities. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85*(1),* 132-141.

Rozin, P., Fischler, C., Imada, S., Sarubin, A., & Wrezesniewski, A. (1999). Attitudes to Food and the Role of Food in Life. *Appetite, 33*(2), 163-180. doi:10.1006/appe.1999.0244

Shisslak, C. M., Crago, M., & Estes, L. S. (1994). The Spectrum of Eating Disturbances. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 18*(3), 209-219. doi:10.1002/1098-108X(199511)18:3<209::AID-EAT2260180303>3.0.CO;2-E

Smith, B. (2018). Generalizability in qualitative research: misunderstandings, opportunities and recommendations for the sport and exercise sciences. *Qualitative Research In Sport, Exercise And Health*, *10*(1), 137-149. doi:10.1080/2159676X.2017.1393221

Smith, J. A., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods* (218-241). London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(3), 224-237. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2695870?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Szmukler, G. I. (1985). The Epidemiology of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 19*(2/3), 143-153. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0022-3956(85)90010-X

Timko, C. A., Hormes, J. M. M & Chubski, J. (2012). Will the real vegetarian please stand up? An investigation of dietary restraint and eating disorder symptoms in vegetarians versus non-vegetarians. *Appetite, 58*(3), 982-990. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2012.02.005.

Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(10), 837-851. doi:10.1177/1077800410383121

Walters, K. L, & Simoni, J. M. (1993). Lesbian and Gay Male Group Identity Attitudes and Self-Esteem: Implications for counselling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *40*(1), 94-99. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.40.1.94

Watson, J. L. & Caldwell, M. L. (2006). The Cultural politics of food and eating: a reader. Oxford: Blackwell

Webb, C. M., Thuras, P., Peterson, C. B., Lampert, J., Miller, D., & Crow, S. J. (2011). Eating-related anxiety in individuals with eating disorders. *Eating and weight disorders: EWD*, *16*(4), e236–e241. doi:10.1007/bf03327466

Willig, C. (2013). Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology (3rd ed). Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Wilkinson, S. (1988). The role of reflexivity in feminist psychology. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *11*(5), 493-502. https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(88)90024-6

Wilson, A. V. (2019). A critical analysis of the discourse around food, identity and responsibility from vegan Instagram influencers. *Social Sciences*