The beef with vegans: Managing stigma in Britain's hegemonic meat culture

Hannah Howard, Edge Hill University

Email: howard.hannahruth@gmail.com

Author Profile

Hannah Howard graduated with a first-class honour's degree in BA Human Geography from Edge Hill University in 2020. This research was conducted between May and September 2019 as part of the final year dissertation and was supervised by Dr Simon Dickinson.

Abstract

As one of the fastest growing lifestyle choices, veganism is a diet, lifestyle and social movement motivated by animal rights, environmental protection and human health. Veganism is considered socially deviant from the hegemonic meat culture of the UK and so vegans often receive stigma when expressing this element of their identity. This study aimed to critically examine how vegans manage stigma dependent on the social and spatial context. Semi-structured interviews with 20 vegans in north-west England revealed that vegans employ four main strategies to manage stigma: acceptance, avoidance, reduction and denial. The chosen management technique was determined by a stigmatised individual's acceptance or rejection of public understandings of the stigma and the applicability of the stigma to the self. Social and spatial context were often emphasised by participants, with many vegans communicating a need to adapt their management techniques in accordance with the situation– often employing elements of different strategies simultaneously. The study thus highlights the idea of stigma as a social construct that is shifting and wide-ranging.

Keywords

Veganism, social deviance, stigma, stigma management

<u>Introduction</u>

Veganism is one of the world's fastest growing lifestyle choices, with 25% of the global population expected to follow a vegan diet by 2040 (Gerhardt *et al.*, 2019). In the United Kingdom (UK), there was a 300% increase in the number of vegans between 2014 and 2019, with an estimated total of 600,000 vegans by the end of 2019 (The Vegan Society, n.d.). Veganism is often defined as following a '… plant-based diet avoiding all animal foods such as meat, dairy, eggs and honey' (The Vegan Society, n.d.). Following this diet has many proven health benefits including lowered blood pressure and reduced risk of heart disease (Craig, 2009). Furthermore, the vegan diet is argued to have environmental benefits, generated through a weakening of the demand for livestock– the farming of which is considered a significant contributor to climate change (Steinfeld *et al.,* 2006; Goodland and Anhang, 2009). For most vegans, animal rights are the main motivation for following a vegan diet (Greenebaum, 2012a) and so their lifestyle is based upon non-contribution to forms of animal exploitation.

Despite the argued benefits a vegan diet has on personal health, the environment and animal welfare, the lifestyle is regularly framed negatively. Cole and Morgan (2011) conducted a review of vegan discourse in UK national newspapers in 2007 and concluded that of the 392 articles analysed, 74.3% were categorised as negative. Sensationalist advertisements and television programmes can also be found to mock veganism. For example, in their advertisement for the American Super Bowl, Hyundai (2019) equates a vegan dinner party to the unpleasantness of root canal surgery and sitting in the middle seat on a plane during a six-hour flight.

Additionally, research finds evidence of stigma towards vegans from omnivores. For example, Adams (2003: 76) recognised the six stereotypes of vegans– 'freaks', 'psychologically affected', 'emotionally immature', 'ascetic', 'superior' and 'puritans'. In a study by Cole and Morgan (2011), these stereotypes were still present. They noted several negative terms used to describe vegans, including 'faddists', 'sentimentalists' and 'hostile extremists' (Cole and Morgan, 2011: 149). Moreover, when assessing public perceptions of commonly stereotyped groups, MacInnis and Hodson (2015) found that vegans were viewed more negatively than drug addicts and homosexuals. These stigmatising comments can extend much further, into a form of direct

discrimination considered illegal under some laws. For example, a job vacancy advertised by the National Health Service (NHS) explicitly stated that applicants with a vegan diet would not be considered for the role (The Vegan Society, 2017). Under the Equality Act (Great Britain Parliament, 2010), this is considered direct discrimination.

Considering the exponential growth of veganism in the UK in the past six years (Vegan Society, n.d.), there is a pressing demand for relevant research into the issue of vegan stigma. This study aims to critically evaluate experiences of practising veganism in Britain's hegemonic meat culture. This will be achieved by exploring how vegans manage stigma both physically and discursively and examining how their management technique is adapted dependent on the social and spatial context.

Literature Review

Conceptualising vegan stigma

In his seminal work, Goffman (1963: 13) defined stigma as an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting'. When a stranger first comes into an individual's presence, initial appearances and interactions enable them to anticipate the stranger's attributes. However, when a 'deeply discrediting' attribute arises, it causes a discrepancy to form between a person's virtual social identity (how an individual is expected to be) and their actual social identity (the attributes an individual really possesses) (Goffman, 1963). This identity disagreement causes the individual to be reduced 'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, 1963: 13). A discredited attribute may be conspicuous, such as race, or could be considered an invisible identity that cannot be readily discerned (for example, homosexuality or religion) but is nonetheless discreditable if revealed (Goffman, 1963).

The discussion of stigma as a social construct emerged in the late 1980s. Key scholars such as Jones *et al.* (1984), Stafford and Scott (1986) and Crocker *et al.* (1998) concurred with Goffman's (1963) idea that stigma consists of a discreditable attribute that leads to devaluation but notably recognised that the social environment will fundamentally influence whether an attribute will become stigmatised. For example, Stafford and Scott (1986: 90) define stigma as 'a characteristic of persons that is

contrary to a norm of a social unit' where a norm is 'a shared belief that persons ought to behave in a certain way in certain circumstances' (Blake and Davis, 1964: 81).

When considering vegans as a stigmatised group in British society, it is important to adopt a social constructionist view because veganism can be considered socially deviant from the dominant food culture of the UK. According to the latest figures, approximately 3% of the British population follow a vegan diet (Finder, 2020). Many foods typically associated with British cuisine, including a full English breakfast, afternoon tea, fish and chips and roast dinner (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015) are not suitable for the vegan diet. Thus, veganism opposes the 'norm of a social unit' (Stafford and Scott, 1986: 90) that is the hegemonic meat and dairy food culture of the UK. Moreover, food is considered a highly sociable activity (Telfer, 1996; Delormier *et al.*, 2009) and it is typical for social gatherings to involve food (Marshall and Bell, 2003). As vegans may choose to reject these foods, they are seemingly more socially deviant by disrupting convention (Boyle, 2011) and preventing bonding through the sharing of food (Hamburg *et al.,* 2014).

Managing a stigmatised identity

Numerous studies conclude that stigma can have a harmful effect on individuals, including lowered self-esteem and quality of life (LeBel, 2008). The associated negative consequences provide motivation for individuals to manage stigma.

Meisenbach's (2010) approach presents over twenty separate stigma management techniques that may be employed by a stigmatised individual. These strategies are determined by an individual's acceptance or rejection of public understandings of stigma as well as their understanding of whether the stigma applies to themselves- a unique concept to this framework. It allows for a range of stigma management strategies to be studied simultaneously and can be applied to a variety of stigma typologies, including invisible stigmas like veganism.

	Applicability of stigma to self	
	Accept	**Challenge**
Accept	**I. Acceptance** Passive acceptance Apologising Humour Bonding	**II. Avoidance** Hiding Avoiding Making favourable comparisons
Challenge	**III. Reduction** Refocusing Transcending Minimising	**IV. Denial** Discrediting discrediters Providing evidence Highlighting logical fallacies

Public understanding of stigma (left vertical axis label)

Table 1: Simplified stigma management communication framework
(Adapted from: Meisenbach, 2010)

Managing vegan stigma

Existing studies on vegan stigma management are problematic. Research often misrepresents veganism as a subset to vegetarianism, merging the two in research situations despite huge differences in diet and lifestyle (for example, Jabs *et al.,* 2000; Iacobbo and Iacobbo, 2006; Edwards, 2013; Yeh, 2014). Also, most existing studies tend to be superficial in their analysis, lacking recognition of the diverse approaches for managing stigma. For example, Jabs *et al.* (2000) provide limited options for vegetarians and vegans to manage stigma, suggesting that hiding or disregarding their stigmatised identity is their only choice. The study gives no consideration to active responses to stigma which more contemporary stigma management studies recognise as equally important (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007; Meisenbach, 2010). Similarly, Edwards (2013) summarised the participants in her study as 'not want[ing] to ruffle any feathers… just want[ing] to go about their daily lives' and their tactics as 'the path of least resistance'. In this view, the passive strategies used by vegetarians and vegans were employed to protect the feelings of non-vegetarians rather than as a direct reaction to stigma. Furthermore, Greenebaum's (2012b) research explores, four different impression management tactics vegetarians and vegans employ to avoid

stigmatisation– avoiding confrontation, appropriate timing, focusing on health benefits and leading by example. The study focuses entirely on the discursive practices of vegetarians and vegans with no consideration of how stigma might be managed discursively across different social and spatial contexts.

While these studies have made an important introduction into research on vegan stigma management, all were conducted in the United States of America (USA). The scarcity of similar studies based in the UK makes it difficult to generalise the results of previous studies to vegans living in Britain. Additionally, the research issues highlighted through the critical examination of extant literature above provides further motivation for this study and the importance of examining veganism in the context of stigma in the UK.

Methodology

Data and procedure

A significant element of this study emerges from semi-structured interviews with 20 self-identified vegans. Interviews were conducted between June and September 2019 across north-west England. Interviews were semi structured in that they were guided by a bank of pre-set, open-ended questions and prompts (Appendix 1). This flexibility allowed for discussion that expanded beyond the scope of the question, enabling the researcher to probe emergent themes (Dialsingh, 2008). Interviews were conducted either face-to-face (18) or via telephone (2) and lasted between 25 and 65 minutes, with an average of 40 minutes. Full ethical approval was secured from the university and all names have been changed. Complete interview recordings were transcribed and inductively coded before being applied to the simplified stigma management communication framework (Table 1).

Participants and recruitment

Participants were initially recruited via convenience sampling. An advertisement was placed in a vegan group on the social media networking site, Facebook, called ScouseVeg (2019). ScouseVeg (2019) is a virtual group for vegans living in north-west England that provides a platform for sharing recipes, products and ideas. From the advertisement, 12 of the participants were recruited while snowball sampling was used

to obtain the remaining 8. In snowball sampling, current participants are asked to contribute names of others who may be interested in joining the study. Demographic details are shown in Table 2.

Name	Gender	Age (years)	Length of time being vegan (years)
Andrea	F	25-34	6
Brenda	F	18-24	2
Carol	F	35-44	15
Christine	F	18-24	4
Coleen	F	18-24	0.5
Denise	F	18-24	3
Eamonn	M	35-44	1
Frank	M	65+	21
Jack	M	25-34	4
Jane	F	55-64	38
Janet	F	18-24	2
Joe	M	25-34	4
Kaye	F	25-34	4
Maddie	F	18-24	1
Nadia	F	18-24	0.5
Patricia	F	25-34	5
Ruth	F	18-24	3
Saira	F	18-24	1
Stacey	F	25-34	5
Zach	M	25-34	9

F- Female   **M- Male**

Table 2: Profile of interview respondents (Source: Howard, 2020)

Results

All 20 participants in this study have experienced stigma at some time since being vegan. Four overarching strategies were utilised to manage stigma– acceptance, avoidance, reduction and denial. Acceptance strategies were utilised by participants that accepted public perceptions of vegan stigma and accepted that the stigma applied to themselves (Meisenbach, 2010). Avoidance was the most frequently adopted stigma management strategy. Like acceptance, avoidance was performed in situations where the existence of the stigma was accepted. However, avoiders challenge the applicability of the stigma to themselves (Meisenbach, 2010). The reduction strategy actively works to change public perceptions of the stigma despite accepting that the stigma applies to the individual (Meisenbach, 2010). Using denial, stigmatised individuals challenge both public opinions of stigma and the fact that the stigma applies to themselves (Meisenbach, 2010). Denial was the least used strategy of all in this study.

Each strategy comprises of 3 or 4 sub-strategies which are the specific actions exercised by participants to manage stigma (Table 1). For example, humour is a sub-strategy of acceptance whereas an example of a denial sub-strategy is engaging in logical fallacies. Table 3 shows the number of participants that used each strategy. Participants were recorded as using a sub-strategy if they ever expressed using this behaviour specifically to manage stigma. They were then marked on how many of the 4 overall strategies they used. For example, the same participant may be recorded as using three sub-strategies of acceptance but will only be recorded once in the overall acceptance strategy.

Strategy/ sub-strategy	Number of participants using sub-strategy
Acceptance	
Passive acceptance	8
Apologising	3
Humour	4
Bonding	3
Avoidance	
Hiding	7
Avoiding	9
Making favourable comparisons	4
Reduction	
Refocusing	4
Transcending	5
Minimising	3
Denial	
Discrediting the discrediter	3
Providing evidence	3
Engaging in logical fallacies	2

Table 3: Table showing general strategy and sub-strategy usage

(Source: Howard, 2020)

When presenting the stigma management communication framework, Meisenbach (2010) suggests that strategy choice is static with a stigmatised individual usually only adopting one of the four options. The results of this study challenge this idea as 18 of the 20 participants used a mixed strategy approach, with many vegans communicating a need to adapt their management technique in accordance with the situation. Therefore, this study expands on Meisenbach's (2010) explanation that strategy choice is based upon a stigmatised individual's acceptance or rejection of (a) public understandings of the stigma and (b) the applicability of the stigma to the self. This is done by critically examining the situational factors (both social and spatial) that influence a stigmatised individual's acceptance or rejection of elements of this dual axis at any one moment and how this in turn influences strategy choice for managing stigma.

Discussion

Using the narratives of participants, this section explores the strategy choices of participants when managing stigma with a focus on how strategy choice shifts dependent on the social and spatial context, thus emphasising the social nature of stigma. Each of the four main stigma management strategies are examined in turn– acceptance, avoidance, reduction and finally denial. In each section, the sub-strategies of each of these strategies are identified and evaluated using the narratives of participants in this study. To highlight the multi-strategy approach adopted by the majority of participants and emphasise how social and spatial context influence strategy choice, three participants will be tracked throughout all strategies. Carol, Ruth and Stacey were recognised as the three participants that used the most diverse range of strategies to manage stigma (Figure 6) and so will be studied consistently throughout the discussion section meanwhile other participants' narrative will be used to provide supplementary evidence.

Acceptance

Choosing not to address stigmatising comments by ignoring or agreeing with them sees vegans *passively accepting* stigma. One respondent, Ruth, suggested that vegans choose to passively accept stigma 'to retain [their] sanity'. Expanding on this, Ruth clarified that she only passively accepts stigma from individuals she is

unacquainted with or those she deems as unconversant with the vegan lifestyle. Like Ruth, Andrea admitted that when she does not have 'the emotional energy' she finds herself agreeing with stigmatising comments. As explained by Ashforth *et al.* (2007), despite disagreeing with the stigma, Ruth and Andrea recognise that the stigma applies to themselves and accept public understandings of the stigma, therefore tolerating the stigma stoically by passively accepting it. Some non-vegans' retorts towards vegans are particularly vicious and represent the extreme form that stigma can take. In these situations, vegans are likely to passively accept the stigma to avoid confrontation. For example, Stacey stated that she would not challenge someone if she felt it was 'a dangerous situation'. Similarly, Denise confirmed that the only time she does not retaliate is when someone is 'angrily talking about vegans' or 'showing real hatred'.

While Carol did not mention using passive acceptance to manage stigma, she did employ a different acceptance strategy – *apologising*. Carol, shared her experience of apologising to manage stigma amongst friends,

> 'I always say sorry… cos I can only go to certain restaurants or takeaways or if I go theirs [friends] for tea I have to remind them I'm vegan and then I feel a bit like I'm pressuring them to cook food they wouldn't normally have to make… I know it's annoying for people to have to think about'

By apologising, Carol suggests that her veganism puts her in the wrong. In an attempt to restore image, Carol transforms herself into the scapegoat and uses this as leverage to ask for forgiveness to eat in a vegan friendly restaurant. Burke (1970: 200) describes this dual process of apologising and forgiveness as 'mortification'. Like Carol, other vegans in this study used mortification as a way of anticipating stigma and trying to prevent it from occurring. For example, Janet described her experiences of ordering food in restaurants and how she uses apologising to pre-empt prejudiced comments, 'I always start my order with *I hate to be a pain but…*'. Interestingly, Carol clarified that she does not use apologising in social situations with her family or strangers. She explained that her family's ignorance toward her vegan lifestyle and a stranger's unfamiliarity with her means she does not 'apologise for being vegan around them'. Although with her friends, its different as she explained,

'… my friends know me, are interested and ask questions about it [veganism] so I have more sympathy with them and do find myself apologising, but not because I'm vegan, just because I know it's a bit of an inconvenience to them'.

A stigmatised individual might also use *humour* to signify that they accept a stigma. One respondent, Stacey, described her use of humour when eating out, 'I'll usually make a joke 'cos then everyone can… get on with the meal and stop worrying about offending me'. By using humour, Stacey acknowledges the stigma, so others do not have to, helping to reduce tension and allow for easier interactions (Goffman, 1963; Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). Like Stacey, Ruth admitted that she 'join[s] in on the banter' and often 'make[s] jokes'. Like with her employment of passive acceptance, Ruth explained that she only uses humour in certain situations. In the presence of hostile individuals, Ruth asserted that she does not like to passively accept stigmatising comments as 'they can't get away with those kinds of comments'. Equally, she does not retaliate to these comments by challenging them as she 'won't give them the satisfaction' and 'think[s] it's not worth trying to explain it [veganism] to them'. By using sarcastic humour, a balance is struck between ignoring and responding to the stigma. From these excerpts, we see two participants using the same strategy but in very different ways and in different situations. While Stacey used humour to put friends at ease as she recognises that veganism is socially deviant to the norm, Ruth used humour to acknowledge stigma from hostile individuals.

Meisenbach (2010) suggests that individuals that accept a stigma are likely to isolate themselves from society as a management strategy. This strategy is minimally discursive in its nature since it involves significantly limiting communication with others. In this study, no vegans isolated themselves from society completely although some did express an ideal to only socialise with other vegans, a strategy known as *bonding.* For example, Patricia specified that she will 'not be friends with people unless they're vegan'. Another participant, Saira, noted 'only one person at work knows I'm vegan, and that's the other vegan'. By isolating their identity from work colleagues, Saira and her vegan colleague, have created a bond based on in-group membership. They use this bond to minimise the risk of stigma by creating a social buffer (Ashforth *et al.,* 2007) that focuses on in-group membership to provide a defence against identity threats, rather than attempting to be part of a larger society.

Avoidance

A stigmatised individual may attempt to *hide* the stigma attribute by restricting the display of the attribute or keeping it secret altogether (Meisenbach, 2010; Link *et al.,* 2002). For individuals wanting to hide their vegan diet and/or lifestyle, the invisible nature of the stigma aids this. However, the highly social nature of food (Delormier *et al.*, 2009) makes hiding veganism difficult to maintain in social situations. In these situations, vegans who want to hide their identity engage in renaming or lying to avoid stigmatisation (Meisenbach, 2010). Many participants claimed that they preferred to ask for 'plant-based' or 'dairy-free' foods rather than admitting they were vegan. Kaye explained she did this because of the 'unfortunate public perception of vegans as fussy'. Stacey mentioned that she states she has a 'dairy allergy' so food retailers 'take… [her] more seriously', suggesting that she fears discrimination as a result of the negative stereotypes associated with veganism (Link and Phelan, 2001). Carol notes her use of the strategy,

> 'I know it's bad but at work I just tell people I'm lactose intolerant… 'cos I work for a milk brand. I don't want them thinking I'm a hypocrite… and dread to think of all the comments I'd get if people knew I was vegan.'

Alternatively, individuals who accept public understandings of stigma may choose to *avoid* situations that might involve public attribution of the stigma to them (Meisenbach, 2010). For example, Ruth stated, 'I avoid mealtimes with my in-laws as much as possible because they find it hilarious to offer me steak.' Instead of playing into the stereotype that vegans cannot take a joke, Ruth avoids the situation altogether. Jack suggested that he used the avoidance strategy too, stating, 'I consciously try and steer clear of conversations about it [veganism] as it often ends up being highly political conversations that I don't want to be having.' Another participant, Frank, explains how discursive avoidance led him to physical avoidance,

> 'I would always try and change the topic of conversation if it [veganism] came up or do anything I could to stop it being mentioned at all but that just seemed to make it worse, so I just stopped going [to the cycling club].'

By avoiding situations and conversations in which they are likely to be stigmatised, vegans adopt a prevention focus that involves efforts to minimise prejudicial encounters and their negative effects.

Another avoidance strategy involves stigmatised individuals denying that a stigma applies to them by *making favourable comparisons* between themselves and others (Meisenbach, 2010; Shih, 2004). In using this strategy, individuals select a stigmatised *other* and demote this *other* to a lower status than themselves, for example 'a full vegan' or an 'animal preacher'. Vegans are motivated by one or a combination of reasons associated with the environment, ethics and health, although ethical vegans tend to receive more discord compared to environment and health vegans (Greenebaum, 2012a). Interestingly, instead of comparing herself to ethical vegans, another participant, Nadia made a comparison to her past when using the comparison tactic, stating, 'I like to remind them [non-vegans] that I used to be like them too.' By comparing themselves to others perceived as worse, or to their own past, these individuals are drawing self-enhancing inferences that focus on avoiding the stigma's applicability to themselves.

Reduction

Refocusing involves shifting the focus from the stigmatised part of an individual's identity to a non-stigmatised part (Meisenbach, 2010). Both Joe and Jane explained that they use refocusing strategies whilst in the presence of people they admire or are trying to impress. By using identity switching (Shih, 2004), Joe and Jane protect themselves from stigma by refocusing non-vegans' attention away from their veganism towards other identities they hold, such as being a rock climber or charity worker. Although they accept the stigma applies to themselves, they develop non-stigmatised aspects of the self to make sympathetic connections with others that they hope will override and challenge the stigmatising attribute.

Transcendence acknowledges that the stigma attribute applies to the individual but attempts to challenge public understandings by identifying it with a higher purpose (Meisenbach, 2010). The most popular way for vegans in this study to transcend stigma was to highlight the benefits veganism has on animal welfare, the environment and health. For example, Ruth clarified that she would use the transcendence strategy with anyone and in any situation, using animal welfare and environmental facts to

support her. Thus, transcendence infuses the stigma with a positive value to transform it into a 'badge of honour' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 427).

The *minimisation* sub-strategy works to reduce the stigma's offensiveness by highlighting how it does not harm others (Meisenbach 2010; Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). Respondents who used the minimisation strategy, for example, Carol, clarified that being vegan is 'an individual choice' that vegans 'don't want to force on other people'. Nadia likens the choice to be vegan to 'choosing what to watch on the telly… or… who you vote for', highlighting that everyone will not make the same choices simply because of human nature. In doing so, Carol and Nadia are minimising the stereotypical idea that vegans are pushy and defensive. Similarly, Coleen explained, 'I don't make a fuss when I'm eating because there is no need to'. Using minimisation, Coleen is showing that vegans are not an inconvenience and is thus minimising the negative feelings associated with vegans and disproving the fussy vegan stereotype.

Denial

Individuals may work to deny the stigma by questioning the credibility of those promoting the stigma. This *discrediting of the discrediter* challenges a stigmatising individual's ethos in order to deny a stigma. Most vegans claimed that omnivores are ignorant in an attempt to discredit the omnivores. For example, one participant in this study, Carol stated,

> 'Most people are just ignorant! They don't really have a clue… when they start on me, I'll make sure they realise how little they know about it [veganism]'.

Carol explained that whilst she uses acceptance strategies around her friends, she uses this more active strategy in the presence of individuals that are ignorant to the vegan lifestyle. Like Carol, Kaye tries to deny the stigma by criticising the knowledge of non-vegans, '… they end up looking stupid if they get into an argument with me because, obviously, I know all the ins and outs [about veganism] and really they don't have a clue'.

Participants in this study also denied the stigma by *providing evidence* that refutes the stigma. This evidence might take the form of displaying behaviours that contradict assumptions associated with a stigma or may take a more discursive format. This strategy refutes the logic of stigmatising stereotypes and focuses on the (re)education

of the non-stigmatised. One respondent, Christine stated her refuting evidence to the stereotype that a vegan diet is low in protein,

> 'All protein starts with plants anyway. You're eating a cow to get protein from it when the cow eats grass to get its protein, it literally makes no sense!'.

Some participants used logical denials to disprove the stereotype that vegan food is tasteless. For example, in her workplace Carol explained her strategy to manage potential stigma is based on 'making awesome food and sharing recipes.' Carol works for a non-vegan milk brand and combines the strategies of hiding and providing evidence to avoid stigma from work colleagues. Similarly, Jane stated,

> 'I always offer people at work vegan snacks, cakes, etc… if I show people how tasty and varied vegan food can be, they may feel more inclined to try it out and less likely to hate on me and my food!'.

By educating others using refuting evidence, Christine, Carol and Jane attempt to both disprove the stigma applies to them as well as changing public perceptions of veganism.

The final strategy that can be used to deny a stigma involves stigmatised individuals showing how some stigma communicators are *engaging in logical fallacies* (Meisenbach, 2010). One participant, Zach discussed a time he was socialising with friends but was not hungry himself. After stating he was not hungry, Zach joked, '… it's okay, I've got some lettuce in the fridge for when I get home'. In a similar experience, when out with her friend who was visiting a butcher's shop, Stacey explained that she would 'wait outside and come back and preach at them later'. The illogical aspects of these stereotypes are that a vegan diet consists of more than lettuce and that vegans do not preach to everyone they meet. Using pre-emptive and self-deprecating humour, Zach and Stacey highlight the logical issues with the stereotypical views held by non-vegans in an effort to challenge both the applicability of the stigma to the self and public understandings of the stigma (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). Another respondent, Joe, explained how he makes them those that stigmatise him feel inadequate by proving that their logic for disliking vegans is unrealistic, he stated:

'if someone starts with me, I will usually ask them why they hate vegans so much? They can never give me a logical answer and so I rest my case… they end up looking like the stupid one.'

Joe only adopts active reduction and denial approaches for managing stigma. He explained that he engages in logical fallacies around 'anyone whose got anything to say about vegans'.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify and examine management techniques adopted by vegans when experiencing stigma and the factors that influence this choice. To conclude, vegans employ four main management strategies– acceptance, avoidance, reduction and denial. Some participants appeared to prefer a single strategy approach, for example Patricia who only used acceptance strategies, or Jack whose only management technique was to avoid stigmatising situations. For the remaining vegan respondents, a combination approach was adopted. As the salience of being vegan shifted depending on the social and spatial context, these vegans were able to adapt their management technique in accordance with the situation. For example, Carol adopts denial strategies, such as discrediting the discrediter, when dealing with stigma from her family, who she deems as ignorant to veganism. In a different situation, her workplace, Carol employs a combination of avoidance and denial strategies. Finally, Ruth explained that she adopts the reduction strategy of transcendence in any situation as she recognises that most people care about themselves and their own personal health. She uses this to her advantage and takes the discussion as an opportunity to promote veganism and challenge public understandings of the lifestyle by identifying it with a higher purpose.

The social and spatial aspects that seemingly controlled stigma management were intertwined throughout all narratives, although social context appeared more dominant over spatial factors. For most participants, it was the people they were with rather than the physical spaces they were in that influenced their strategy choice most. With food being considered a highly sociable activity (Telfer, 1996: Delormier et al., 2009) this finding seems likely, nonetheless it undoubtedly supports the discussion of stigma as a social construct.

Overall, the narratives of Carol, Ruth and Stacey, as well as those of the other 17 participants highlight the idea of stigma as a social construct that is shifting and wide-ranging and emphasises how stigma management is influenced by social and spatial context.

Future research could consider the process of de-stigmatisation, in which stigmatised groups become less devalued in society (Ryan, 2018). Sagarin (1979) suggests that norm violations, depending on their salience, are impermanent and should be treated as contingent. In this view, veganism, a diet and lifestyle choice that is currently viewed as deviant to the hegemonic meat and dairy culture of the UK, is an ineffaceable lifestyle choice and the stigma linked to it may be considered ephemeral (Grant, 2019). Thus, investigation into veganism becoming de-stigmatised in British society and the possibility for meat eating to become a stigmatised identity should be at the forefront of future stigma research surrounding diet and lifestyle.

References

Adams, C. J. 2003: Living among meat eaters: the vegetarian's survival handbook, Three Rivers Press, New York.

Anspach, R. 1979: From stigma to identity politics: political activism among the physically disabled and former mental patients. *Social Science and Medicine* 13 (1), 765-773.

Ashforth, B.E. Clark, M.A. Kreiner, G.E. and Fugate, M. 2007: Normalizing Dirty Work: Managerial Tactics for Countering Occupational Taint. *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (1), 149-174.

Ashforth, B.E. and Kreiner, G.E. 1999: How can you do it?: Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Journal* 24 (3), 413-434.

Atkinson, W. and Deeming, C. 2015: Class and cuisine in contemporary Britain: the social space, the space of food and their homology. *The Sociological Review* 63 (4), 876-896.

Boyle, J.E. 2011: Becoming Vegetarian: The Eating Patterns and Accounts of Newly Practising Vegetarians. *Food and Foodways* 19 (4), 314-333.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) n.d: Map of United Kingdom, highlighting the north-west region [online]
(http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/nationsregions.shtml) Accessed 26/01/20

Burke, K., 1970: The rhetoric of religion: Studies in logology, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Cambridge Dictionary n.d. *Omnivore* [online]
(https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/omnivore) Accessed 28/10/19

Cole, M., and Morgan, K. 2011: Vegaphobia: Derogatory discourses of veganism and the reproduction of speciesism in UK national newspapers. *British Journal of Sociology* 62 (1), 134-153.

Craig, W.J. 2009: Health effects of vegan diets. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 89 (5), 1627-1633.

Crocker, J., Major, B. and Steele, C. 1998: Social stigma. In Gilbert, D.T. and Fiske, S.T (eds): *The Handbook of Social Psychology,* McGraw-Hill.

Crosby, F. 1976: A model of egotistical relative deprivation. *Psychological Review* 83 (1), 85-113.

Delormier, T., Frohlich, K. L., and Potvin, L. 2009: Food and eating as social practice-understanding eating patterns as social phenomena and implications for public health. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 31 (2), 215-228.

Dialsingh, I. 2008: Face-to-Face Interviewing. In Lavrakas, P.J (ed): *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, Sage Publications.

Edwards, S. 2013: Living in a Minority Food Culture: A Phenomenological Investigation of Being Vegetarian/Vegan. *Phenomenology & Practice* 7 (1), 111-125.

Falk, G. 2001: Stigma: How We Treat Outsiders, Prometheus Books: New York.

Finder, 2020. UK diet trends 2021 [online]. Available from:
https://www.finder.com/uk/uk-diet-trends [Accessed 10 January 2021].

Gerhardt, C. Suhlmann, G. Ziemβen, F. Donnan, D. Warschun, M. and Kühnle, H.J.
2019: How Will Cultured Meat and Meat Alternatives Disrupt The Agricultural and
Food Industry?, ATKearny, Chicago.

Goffman, E. 1963: Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, Penguin,
Group, London.

Goodland, R. and Anhang, J. 2009: Livestock and climate change: What if the key
actors in climate change are... cows, pigs, and chickens?, Worldwatch Institute,
Washington.

Grant, K 2019: Why do people hate vegans? A behavioural scientist and food author
explain. *The Independent* [online] (https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/food-and-
drink/why-people-hate-vegans-greggs-sausage-roll-179871) Accessed 04/02/20

Great Britain Parliament, 2010. Equality Act 2010. HMSO, London.

Greenebaum, J.B. 2012a: Veganism, Identity and the Quest for Authenticity. *Food,
Culture & Society* 15 (1), 129-144.

Greenebaum, J.B. 2012b: Managing impressions: 'Face-saving' strategies of
vegetarians and vegans. *Humanity and Society* 36 (4), 309-325.

Hamburg, M.E. Finkenauer, C. and Schuengel, C. 2014: Food for love: the role of
food offering in empathetic emotion regulation. *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (32), 1-9.

Hughes, G. and Degher, D. 1993: Coping with a deviant identity. *Deviant Behavior:
An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14 (1), 297-315.

Hyundai, 2019. The Elevator. CBS. 03 February. 2330 hrs.

Iacobbo, K. and Iacobbo, M. 2006: Vegetarians and vegans in America today,
Praeger, Westport.

Jabs, J. Sobal, J. and Devine, C. M. 2000: Managing vegetarianism: Identities, norms
and interactions. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 39 (5), 375- 394.

Jones, E. Farina, A. Hastorf, A. Markus, H. Miller, D.T. and Scott, R. 1984: Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships, Freeman, New York.

Kessler, T. Mummendey, A. and Leisse, U. 2000 The personal-group discrepancy: Is there a common information basis for personal and group judgment? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (1), 95-109.

Lebel, T.P. 2008: Perceptions of and Responses to Stigma. *Sociology Compass* 2 (2), 409-432.

Link, B.G. and Phelan, J.C. 2001: Conceptualizing Stigma. *Annual Review Sociology* 27 (1), 363-385.

MacInnis, C. and Hodson, G. 2015: It ain't easy eating greens: Evidence of bias toward vegetarians and vegans from both source and target. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 20 (6), 721-744.

Major, B. and O'Brien, L.T. 2005: The social psychology of stigma. In Fiske, S.T. (ed): *Annual Review of Psychology,* Annual Reviews.

Marshall, D. and Bell, R. 2003: Meal construction: exploring the relationship between eating occasion and location. *Food Quality and Preference* 14 (1), 53- 64.

Meisenbach, R.J. 2010: Stigma Management Communication: A theory and agenda for applied research on how individuals manage moments of stigmatized identity. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 38 (3), 268- 292.

Miller, C.T. and Major, B 2000: Coping with stigma and prejudice. In Heatherton, T.F, Kleck, R.E, Hebl, M.R and Hull, J.G (eds): *The Social Psychology of Stigma,* Guildford.

Oyserman, D. and Swim, J.K. 2001: Stigma: An Insider's View. *Journal of Social Issues* 57 (1), 1-14.

Povey, R. Wellens, B. and Conner, M. 2001: Attitudes towards following meat, vegetarian and vegan diets: An examination of the role of ambivalence. *Appetite* 37 (1), 15- 26.

Sagarin, E. 1979: Deviance without deviants: The temporal quality of patterned behavior. *Deviant Behavior* 1 (1), 1- 13.

ScouseVeg 2019: ScouseVeg [online]. (https://www.facebook.com/groups/48796317406/) Accessed 03/05/19

Shih, M. 2004: Positive Stigma: Examining resilience and empowerment in overcoming stigma. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591 (1), 175- 185.

Siegel, K. Lune, H. and Meyer, I.H. 1998: Stigma management among gay/bisexual men with HIV/AIDS. *Qualitative Sociology* 21 (1), 3-24.

Stafford, M.C. and Scott, R.R 1986: Stigma deviance and social control: some conceptual issues. In: Ainlay, S.C, Becker, G and Coleman, L.M (eds): *The Dilemma of Difference,* Plenum.

Steinfeld, H. Gerber, P. Wassenaar, T. Caste, V. Rosales, M. and De Haan, C. 2006: Livestock's long shadow: Environmental issues and options, United Nations, Rome.

Telfer, E. 1996: Food for thought: Philosophy and food, Routledge, London.

The Vegan Society 2017: Vegan's welcome to apply- it's the law [online]. (https://www.vegansociety.com/whats-new/news/vegans-welcome-apply-–-it's-law) Accessed 23/04/19

The Vegan Society n.d: Key Facts [online]. (https://www.vegansociety.com/about-us/further-information/key-facts) Accessed 23/04/19

Yeh, H.Y. 2014: Voice with Every Bite. *Food, Culture and Society* 17 (4), 591- 613.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Interview Question Guide

1. How long have you been vegan?
2. What was your motivation?
3. Has your motivation changed over time?
4. How do you define veganism?
5. Would you describe yourself as a *typical* vegan? Why/ why not?
6. Describe the reactions of family and friends when you went vegan.
7. How supportive of your veganism are your family and friends?
8. How do you tend to engage people in conversations about veganism?
9. Have you ever encountered difficulties in talking to people about veganism? What perceptions seem to shape those conversations?
10. What reaction do you usually get from strangers or do not often disclose your veganism to strangers?
11. How do you think the general public sees your diet/ lifestyle? Why do you think they see you this way?
12. Have you encountered any stereotypes about vegans, directed at you personally or that you have observed?
13. How do you deal with these stereotypes?
14. What kind of advice would you give a new vegan?
15. Have you ever tried to downplay or hide the fact that you are vegan? What were the circumstances?
16. Have you ever been denied anything because you are a vegan?
17. Who do you socialise with most? Friends, family, work colleagues? Does your veganism influence who you socialise with? How?
18. What are the most rewarding aspects of being vegan?
19. And what are the most challenging aspects?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add?