Utrecht University

Blending In or Standing Out?

A Qualitative Diary Study of Vegan Employees

David Schut

Research Master 'Public Administration and Organisational Science'

Words: 9182 (incl. Abstract & Footnotes)

Supervisor: Dr. Ozan Alakavuklar

Second reader: Dr. Noortje van Amsterdam

Table of content

Abstract

This study examines how vegan employees navigate their identity work in the Dutch workplace. Using a qualitative diary method over a two-month period, 15 vegan employees documented their experiences, feelings, and behaviours. Thematic analysis of the data revealed the following triggers for identity work: (non-vegan) food, conversations or interactions about veganism, bullying behaviour and unpleasant comments and the vegan discourse. The identity work strategies identified were: avoidance, conformity, anticipation, self-censorship, discussion, humour, and selective disclosure. The socio-institutional context significantly influences the initiation of identity work and the selection of strategies by vegan employees. Grounded in a critical post-structuralist perspective and social identity theory, this study shows the complex interplay between individual agency and organisational power structures in the context of vegan identity work. The results suggest a need for discussions on diversity and inclusion within organisations.

***Keywords*: diary study, identity work, veganism, workplace, vegan discourse, vegaphobia**

1. Introduction

This study expands the literature on identity work within organisation and management studies by analysing vegan employees' feelings, cognitions and behaviour in response to particular triggers within socio-institutional contexts in Dutch organisations. Existing studies have examined identity work across various social categories, such as gender (e.g. LaPointe, 2013), fatness (e.g. Van Amsterdam & Van Eck, 2019) and religious affiliation (e.g. Harvey, 2018). However, no research has yet been done on how vegans navigate identity work in the workplace. Caza, Vough and Puranik (2018) mention this gap, stating that "there is less research on identity work concerning other social categories at work" (p. 895). Identity work involves the ongoing process through which individuals form, maintain, repair, and revise their identities within social contexts (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This process is particularly relevant for individuals with stigmatized or minority identities, such as vegans, who often face unique challenges in maintaining their self-concept in environments that may be indifferent or even hostile to their lifestyle choices. Understanding these processes is crucial for fostering inclusivity and addressing organisational indifference towards veganism, which is increasingly relevant in a society that values diversity and inclusion.

Hence, this study aims to address the following primary research question: How do vegan employees navigate identity work in the Dutch workplace? Given the centrality of identity work to this study, it is essential to understand the triggers that prompt engagement in identity work. Identity work is initiated, for example, when individuals experience discomfort, feel attacked or when differences become apparent (Caza et al., 2018). Following such triggers, individuals engage in various strategies to, for example, maintain or strengthen their identity. Consequently, a pertinent sub-question arises: What *strategies* do vegan employees employ in response to specific triggers? Moreover, during and after engaging in identity work, individuals may face certain implications, such as anxiety about interactions with specific colleagues. Therefore, this study also considers the implications of identity work for vegan employees. Finally, this study focuses on the socio-institutional context in which vegan employees undertake identity work. Such contexts inherently influence the initiation of identity work and the selection of strategies by vegan employees.

Specifically, social identity theory (SIT) suggests that individuals position themselves in relation to ingroups and outgroups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This study applies SIT to understand how vegan employees might position themselves in opposition to non-vegan colleagues, leading to various identity work strategies. Previous research has identified strategies such as "adapting, negotiating, avoiding, rejecting and resisting (Berger, Essers, &

Himi, 2017), teflonic maneuvering (Alvesson & Robertson, 2016), nostalgia, reproduction, validation, and combination (Bardon, Josserand, & Villesèche, 2015), legitimacy affirming and legitimacy contesting (Brown & Toyoki, 2013) and experimentation, reflection, and recognition (Beech, 2011)" (Caza et al., 2018, p. 895). However, again, the specific strategies used by vegan employees remain unexplored.

Building on this, the critical management and organisation studies (CMO) perspective further elucidates how vegan employees negotiate their identities amidst organisational discourses that challenge their ethical beliefs and practices. The CMO lens suggests that identity work involves engaging with and resisting dominant organisational narratives (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009). For example, vegan employees may challenge these narratives through discussions. Organisations often create and reinforce hegemonic discourses to shape individual identities (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). However, individuals can question, selectively adopt, or reject these dominant discourses through identity work (Doolin, 2002). This later rejection of a certain discourse in relation to identity is termed *dis-identification* and can be understood through a critical post-structuralist view (Bardon, Clegg, & Josserand, 2012). This post-structuralist framework helps to understand the strategies vegan employees use to maintain their identities, balancing organisational pressures with their desire for autonomy and self-expression. By applying the CMO perspective, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between individual agency and organisational power structures in the process of identity work.

To explore the research question, this study employs a qualitative diary method. Respondents were asked to repeatedly document their feelings, cognitions, and behaviours over a two-month period. This method is well-suited for capturing the dynamic and contextual nature of identity work (Janssens et al., 2018). A total of 15 respondents participated in this study, providing rich data on their identity work processes.

Based on the diary entries, vegan employees employ a variety of identity work strategies to navigate their identities in the workplace. One prominent strategy observed is *self-censorship*, where individuals refrain from discussing their veganism openly to avoid conflict and maintain social harmony. Additionally, participants utilize strategies such as *selective disclosure*, choosing when and to whom they reveal their vegan identity based on perceived acceptance or potential repercussions. Another strategy identified is *avoidance*, where vegans actively avoid situations that may challenge their ethical beliefs, such as declining invitations to non-vegan events or bringing their own food to social gatherings. However, these are but a

handful of strategies that emerged from the diaries. See table 2 in the results section for an overview of the triggers, strategies and socio-institutional contexts.

My research makes the following contributions. First, understanding how vegans navigate identity work can contribute to broader discussions on diversity and inclusion within organisations. This knowledge can inform organisational policies and practices, fostering a more inclusive work environment that respects and supports diverse dietary choices and ethical beliefs. By addressing this gap, the study enriches the literature on identity work which promotes social change by highlighting the importance of accommodating all forms of diversity within the workplace. Second, on a micro-level, this research has the potential to empower participants through *consciousness raising*, which implies an awareness of one's own situation and the influences affecting it (Tengland, 2007). Increased awareness can lead to greater control over one's own situation. Recognizing subtle anti-vegan behaviours, such as nasty jokes from colleagues, is the first step towards wanting and being able to change these aspects of the workplace. Third, no previous research has examined the strategies adopted by the targeted group of vegans at work in the face of certain triggers in a specific socio-institutional context. Theoretically, it is important to investigate this gap because it provides insights into how a specific group adapts to social and institutional triggers, which can contribute to broader knowledge about behaviour and adaptation within diverse professional environments. This research can thus yield new theoretical insights that are applicable in similar contexts.

2. Exploring vegan identities through the lens of identity work

The concept of identity work was first articulated by Snow and Anderson (1987), who define it as “the generic process by which we refer to the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). This early definition highlights key elements such as activities and outcomes, emphasizing the creation, presentation and maintenance of personal identities.

Building on this foundational work, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) offer a refined definition, stating that identity work “refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). This refinement acknowledges the complexity and iterative nature of identity work, suggesting that identity work is not merely about creating, presenting and sustaining an identity, but also about repairing

and revising it to maintain coherence and distinctiveness. This nuanced understanding is crucial as it provides a more comprehensive framework to analyse the multifaceted aspects of identity work. While Snow and Anderson's definition focuses on the basic activities involved in identity construction, Sveningsson and Alvesson's perspective allows for a deeper exploration of how individuals continuously engage in identity work to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain a coherent self-concept.

Further research widened the scope to consider other aspects of identity work, such as *multiple identities*. According to Lucas, identity work is a "negotiation of simultaneously held identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, social class) and individualized meaning-making in interaction with people and systems" (Lucas, 2011, p. 357). Other definitions focus on the *ongoingness* of identity work (e.g., Davies & Thomas, 2008; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Fachin & Davel, 2015), on the presence of *tensions and conflicts* (e.g., Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; Alvesson & Robertson, 2016), on the intersection between *self and social world* (e.g, Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Davies & Thomas, 2008) and on the different *activities* that may be involved in identity work (e.g., Beech, 2008; Lucas, 2011).

Despite the proliferation of definitions, I argue that Caza, Vough, and Puranik's (2018) definition is the most useful for analysing and understanding vegan identity work, because of its focus on specific and mostly materialistic forms of activities. They define identity work in occupations and organisations as "the cognitive, discursive, physical and behavioural activities that individuals undertake with the goal of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, revising or rejecting collective, role, and personal self-meanings within the boundaries of their social contexts" (Caza et al., 2018, p. 895). The first group of activities consists of *cognitive* activities. Cognitive identity work involves mental effort to subjectively construct, interpret, understand and evaluate an identity. For example, a vegan might regularly try to cognitively neutralize unkind comments about their vegan identity to protect their sense of coherence and self-worth. The second group of activities involves *discursive* activities. Since identity work is intertwined with discourse (Carroll & Levy, 2010), individuals often use narratives, dialogues, stories and conversations for identity work. For instance, a vegan might frequently engage in discussions about veganism at work. Through these conversations, they aim to enhance understanding among colleagues and align the organisation's values more closely with their own. The third group of activities consists of *physical* activities. Individuals use their bodies or objects in their physical environment to shape others' perceptions in accordance with their desired self-meaning. At work, a vegan might always dress professionally and maintain a neat

appearance to avoid being stereotyped as a 'vegan hippie'. The last group of activities falls under *behavioural* activities. Behavioural identity work involves the actions individuals take in the context of identity work. For instance, a vegan might bring their own food and drinks to work to ensure they have vegan options available, as many office coffee machines do not offer plant-based milk.

To further elucidate the dynamics of vegan identity work, it is essential to consider the lens of social identity theory (SIT). SIT provides a theoretical framework for understanding how vegans navigate their identity within the social contexts of their workplace. According to SIT, individuals position themselves in relation to ingroups and outgroups, which can either strengthen or weaken their identification with a particular group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This theory is relevant as it helps to explain the cognitive, discursive, physical and behavioural activities vegans engage in to manage their identity. For example, a vegan might engage discursively in identity work by emphasising their distinctiveness from non-vegan colleagues, highlighting the ethical and environmental benefits of veganism to strengthen their identification with the vegan ingroup. Conversely, they might downplay these differences in social settings to enhance their sense of belonging with non-vegan colleagues, thereby navigating their identity between the vegan community and the broader workplace environment. According to SIT, identity work becomes particularly significant when the meanings of the ingroup's collective identity are threatened or changed, or when differences between ingroups and outgroups become significant (Caza et al., 2018). This dynamic is often evident during events involving food, where the distinct dietary choices of vegans and non-vegans underscore the boundaries between the ingroup and outgroup. In these situations, vegans engage in identity work to navigate these differences and maintain a balance between belonging to a group and maintaining their authentic self, motivated by the need for belongingness, distinctiveness, and self-enhancement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer, 1991).

To better position the narratives of the vegan organisational members within the broader power relations in the organisations, I draw upon arguments from critical management and organisation studies (CMO). Accordingly, from this CMO perspective, identity work takes place through engagement with dominant discourses, often in the form of resistance to these dominant discourses (e.g., Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009). Vegan workers, for example, can engage in discussions to challenge dominant discourses. Organisations create and reproduce dominant narratives to influence individuals how they perceive themselves (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). Yet the presence of hegemonic discourses does not necessarily determine

individuals, through identity work, individuals can question these discourses, partially adopt them, but also reject them (Doolin, 2002). Consequently, identity work takes place when individuals are compelled to navigate between efforts of organisational identity regulation and their desire for autonomy and agency (Caza et al., 2018).

However, there is a dominance of the *interpretive* post-structuralist view over the *critical* post-structuralist view, which has reduced the analysis of identity to one of discourse understood as a merely textual matter (Bardon et al., 2012). By maintaining such a narrow definition of *discourse* when addressing the social construction of identity, certain post-structuralist scholars view *critique* merely as the deconstruction of a language game, rather than an analysis of the *material* and concrete forms of domination exerted by certain individuals over others and their potential response strategies (Bardon et al., 2012). In this study, I therefore fulfil the plea of Bardon, Clegg and Josserand by 'putting the material back into the equation' by adopting a wider definition of discourse. Foucault's ideas about discourse are broader in that it also addresses the constructive properties of discourse. In other words, discourse can contribute to the regulation and discipline of individuals within a socio-institutional context[1].

While motives for identity work are not the central focus of research conducted by critical theorists, I argue that individuals might instinctively engage themselves in identity work to uphold their *individuality*, *self-expression*, and maintain a *sense of continuity* (Caza et al., 2018). Organisational attempts to regulate employees' identities (i.e., subjectification) can lead to the disruption of their identity work, causing feelings of insecurities and anxiety (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009).

Lastly, veganism can be considered an *identity* because it allows individuals to reflexively attach meaning to themselves through conscious choices that reflect ethical values (Caza et al., 2018; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). Being vegan involves continuously answering fundamental existential questions such as 'who am I?' and 'how should I act?' (Brown, 2014). I argue that most vegans live according to the following definition[2], which provides an answer to the previous existential questions: “Veganism is a […] way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the

[1] For example, read p. 346 of Seale (2004).
[2] This idea comes from my own experiences within the animal rights movement and vegan organisations in which I have been closely involved since 2017.

environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals." (The Vegan Society, 2024).

3. Power through exclusionary practices, identity work and food in organisations

Food is perhaps the most pervasive aspect of the vegan identity. Vegans do not consume animal products, which disrupts social conventions and often lead to negative perceptions (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Potts & Parry, 2010; Wright, 2015). This stigma, characterized by negative perceptions and discriminatory treatment (Goffman, 2009; Link & Phelan, 2001), can manifest in workplace environments, affecting how vegan employees are treated regarding food. For example, employers and colleagues might not accommodate vegans' dietary needs, leading to situations where vegans are excluded from social or professional events. Such exclusionary practices, whether overt (e.g., not inviting someone to a lunch meeting) or subtle (e.g., ignoring vegan options in meal planning), can prompt vegans to engage in conscious identity work to navigate their workplace dynamics.

According to Fleming and Spicer's (2014) typology of power, these exclusionary practices can be understood through two faces of power[3]: domination and subjectification. *Domination* refers to the *systemic* power that shapes preferences, attitudes, and political outlooks. It is reflected in the way organisational cultures and norms perpetuate non-vegan diets as the default, making alternative dietary preferences seem less valid, unnecessary or even unnatural (Kunda, 1992; Mumby, 1987; Simons & Ingram, 1997). This creates an environment where veganism is marginalized and non-vegan norms are hegemonic. *Subjectification* involves the deeper process of shaping individuals' identities and self-perceptions. Vegan employees might internalize feelings of being 'difficult' or 'different', leading them to downplay their dietary choices to fit in and avoid conflict. This aligns with the concept of *identity management*, where individuals adjust their behaviour and self-presentation to fit their social environment (Caza et al., 2018). Subjectification processes in organisations can lead to self-regulation, where vegans modify their behaviour to align with perceived organisational norms (Foucault, 1977; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

[3] I am aware of the fact that Fleming and Spicer name four faces of power: coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification. For the analysis of the diaries, domination and subjectification seem especially valuable because these forms of power are more subtle and elusive. From the analysis of the diaries, the subtle nature of power also appeared to recur frequently.

Since stigmatization is inherently negative and people naturally avoid it (Greenebaum, 2012; Hirschler, 2011; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Wrenn, 2017), vegans are expected to adjust their behaviour around non-vegans to minimize conflict and maintain social harmony. This behavioural change may involve only discussing veganism when prompted or distancing oneself from stereotypical vegan characteristics. In fact, food represents a deep social activity (Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009). Sharing meals is associated with multiple social functions, including defining boundaries around the peer group, as well as maintaining and strengthening relationships between colleagues. Cultural beliefs and traditions are also reinforced (Ochs & Shohet, 2006).

Consequently, it is expected that vegan workers may experience some degree of social isolation, as they may withdraw from events involving food. This disengagement may be because vegans are regularly questioned because of their choices around their diet (McDonald, 2000). For example, Twine (2014) shows that antagonistic questioning often goes hand-in-hand with open mockery and attempts to dismiss vegan identities as invalid or just a passing fad. Non-vegans may be unwilling to accommodate vegan options, leading to social friction. This tension can result in lost friendships, decreased interaction, and even avoidance of social events, indicating significant social costs associated with veganism (Greenebaum, 2012; Hirschler, 2011; Twine, 2014).

Exclusionary practices in the workplace not only affect social interactions but also have significant psychological and professional repercussions. The psychological effects of workplace exclusionary practices can be profound. It threatens feelings of security and belonging, leading to emotional distress and decreased job satisfaction (O'Reilly & Banki, 2016). Behaviourally, exclusionary practices can lead individuals to either withdraw further or attempt to conform with the organisational norms in order to avoid further exclusion. Vegans may downplay their veganism or avoid mentioning it entirely during social gatherings to prevent awkwardness or negative comments. The human desire for belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) makes such practices detrimental to employee well-being (O'Reilly & Banki, 2016).

4. Research design

4.1 Method

This study uses a qualitative diary method to delve into how vegans shape their identities within organisational settings. The decision to use a diary study is rooted in a critical post-structuralist perspective on how identities are formed and evolve. Post-structuralism challenges the idea of fixed identities, emphasizing instead their dynamic nature shaped by social interactions and discursive practices (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The diary method is ideal because it allows participants to express their personal experiences and the ongoing process of identity construction over time. By documenting their interactions and reflections, participants reveal how they navigate, negotiate, and reinterpret their identities within the complexities of their workplace (Caza et al., 2018). This approach aligns with post-structuralist views that emphasize the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of identities amidst organisational dynamics and structures of power.

My motivation for conducting this diary study stems from my personal experiences as a vegan employee. I repeatedly encountered challenges that compelled me to explain my veganism, often reluctantly. I navigated numerous social situations delicately to avoid conflict with colleagues who made insensitive remarks disguised as jokes. One notable incident involved a discussion with a colleague where common stigmas surrounding veganism surfaced. These included perceptions that vegans impose their beliefs on others and that veganism is extreme. Concerns about nutritional adequacy, such as the need for vitamin B12 and iron, were also raised. Despite clarifying my health status with supportive evidence, the conversation persisted, culminating in assertions about the appeal of meat and a declaration of personal aversion to veganism. This unsolicited exchange, initiated upon noticing my choice of vegan cheese, exemplifies the recurring challenges that fuelled my determination to explore vegan identity dynamics in organisational contexts.

4.2 Data Collection

All participants work and live in the Netherlands. The population of participants included slightly more women (i.e., 9) than men (i.e., 6). Although the sample was not selected based on certain characteristics other than identifying as a vegan, it appears diverse in education level and job function. Most participants responded to a LinkedIn post inviting them to participate in this study, while a smaller proportion responded to the same invitation on Facebook. Both invitations were shared on my personal accounts, leveraging my network, which includes many vegans. Participants also shared the invitation, further recruiting additional participants. The vegans who participated are outspoken about veganism and likely more comfortable articulating their thoughts and feelings.

Once participants responded to the invitation, I scheduled an initial online introductory meeting with nearly all of them. During this introductory meeting, I explained the study's rationale. For participants who were unable to join the video call, I provided them with a document containing information about the study (see Appendix B). All participants received this file, either during the meeting or afterward. Subsequently, participants could choose whether they wanted to participate or not by contacting me via e-mail, LinkedIn or Facebook.

Participants were asked to keep a diary for two months (8 April 2024 - 8 May 2024), recording their cognitions, feelings, and behaviours related to their vegan identity at work. Given the infrequent nature of identity work, this extended timeframe was necessary to capture sufficient data. The diaries were monitored regularly, and participants were contacted via e-mail if there was doubt about their commitment. Follow-up questions were sent by e-mail or posed in the interactive document to clarify or deepen the entries. Diaries were stored securely in a OneDrive environment hosted by Utrecht University, ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

In the end, 15 participants agreed to take part in the study. A 16th person started, but after repeated contact, this person no longer responded. One diary contained such a small amount of text that it was excluded from the final analysis; therefore, 14 diary studies were included for analysis.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is well-suited for understanding experiences, thoughts, and behaviours, making it ideal for this study's epistemological and ontological underpinnings. During and after the collection of the diary entries, the data were organized into codes using ATLAS.TI software. The coding process was guided by questions such as: 'What identity work do the participants talk about?', 'What do the participants do to deal with the vegan discourse?', and 'What are the triggers for engaging in identity work?'. These questions provided a framework for systematically analysing the data. When the codes, fragments, and (sub-)themes emerged from the thematic analysis, I fully drafted the results section. After completing the results section and feedback from and feedback from two fellow scientists, I gained new insights, leading to slight changes in the names and categorization of triggers and (sub-)themes. This clearly illustrates the iterative nature of qualitative research. The iterative steps taken during the data analysis phase were recorded in an audit trail (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), ensuring transparency and rigor. See table 1 for a sample of the analysis.

Table 1

Sample of the data analysis

Fragment	Code	Theme	Strategy
- There was a big meeting at work, and then I do know in advance that the chances are slim that there will be some for me; - The restaurant had been shared before, but I hadn't looked at the menu. This week I did anyway, just to be sure.	Wondering whether the food will be plant-based	Food at the workplace	Anticipation
- I walked up to the support worker and explained that it is very inconvenient for me when there are no separately packaged sandwiches and I don't know what the sandwiches are topped with.; - "We definitely have to eat vegan now, right, because as [...] we focus on sustainability." I was able to respond to this immediately by indicating that that is indeed the idea and that you should actually always do that.	Engaging in discussions	Challenges of blending in	Discussion
- I've received comments from several former colleagues like "oh, you're that annoying vegan that your friends have to accommodate". I don't think I even responded to this, because how do you respond to that?"; - I received a lot of accusations and threats. That shocked me. But because I didn't want to engage in a discussion with these narrow-minded individuals, I chose not to respond.	Not responding to nasty comments	Challenges of blending in	Avoidance

4.4 Ethics, Positionality and Reflexivity

In this study, several ethical considerations had to be taken into account. To safeguard anonymity, pseudonyms were uniformly used throughout the research process. Given that all participants are adults, parental consent was not required for their involvement. However, each respondent was informed about the goal and the course of action of the study. Data, including the diary entries, were securely stored in a OneDrive environment hosted by Utrecht University, ensuring confidentiality against unauthorized access. Similarly, all participants had been informed several times that they could quit the study at any time without giving any reason.

My positionality as a researcher is shaped by various dimensions. I am a white Dutch and European male, using he/ him pronouns, currently pursuing a research master's degree at a prestigious Dutch university. Having been vegan since 2017, with a history of vegetarianism, and coming from a low socio-economic background, my personal experiences deeply inform my approach to this study. During this research, I confronted the potential bias of selectively publishing findings that could negatively portray vegans. To avoid this bias, I made sure to also include 'negative' findings, e.g., where participants temporarily set aside their vegan principles. This finding could have a negative impact on the vegan community.

Navigating my influence on participants was challenging. As a fellow vegan, I aimed to foster openness and trust, possibly encouraging more detailed disclosures. Conversely, my shared identity might have presumed mutual understanding, potentially leading to less explicit descriptions from participants. Balancing closeness with detachment, I meticulously monitored diary entries and engaged in follow-up queries to capture comprehensive insights into participants' experiences.

The self-identification and convenience sampling method used in this study means that the sample was not actively diversified. No selection was made based on sexuality, class, race, political affiliation, or occupation. The aim, however, was not to generalize to the entire vegan community, but to provide insights into the experiences of a few vegan workers. The narratives of the participants, despite not being generalizable, possess *metaphorical* generalizability (Stein, 2004), offering valuable perspectives on often disregarded or unknown experiences.

5. Results

In this section, I discuss what vegans encounter at work as a trigger for identity work. First of all, food is an important trigger for vegans in the workplace. Food is consumed during a variety of events in the context of work. Furthermore, the following three triggers emerge from the diary entries, which are all related to the overarching theme of *challenges of blending in*: conversations or interactions about veganism, bullying behaviour and the vegan discourse. Subsequently, several identity work strategies for dealing with these triggers emerge from the participants' diaries. When it comes to the trigger food, these strategies are avoidance, conformity and anticipation. For the trigger conversations or interactions about veganism, these are: self-censorship and discussion. Furthermore, respondents apply the following strategies to deal with the trigger bullying behaviour: avoidance, humour. Finally, participants apply selective disclosure to deal with the vegan discourse. The above are all happening in a specific socio-institutional context with a rationale (see table 2).

Table 2

Summary of the results

Theme	Trigger	Strategy	Definition strategy	Context
Food	Food at the workplace	Avoidance	Consciously avoiding the places where non-plant-based food is consumed.	- Utilised as resistance against the power that determines the normative climate of the organisation; - Resistance against societal assumptions and norms.
Food	Food at the workplace	Conformity	Reproducing the existing norms by behaviourally or cognitively partaking in the hegemonic values.	- The social norms within the organisation, established through manipulation by higher management, determine what is considered acceptable.
Food	Food at the workplace	Anticipation	Making behavioural and cognitive adjustments in advance in situations where non-vegan food is expected, so that the principles of the vegan identity can still be adhered to.	- Participants internalize the lack of organizational support for their dietary needs, leading them to adopt anticipation behaviours to mitigate potential discomfort.
Challenges of blending in	Conversations/ interactions about veganism	Self-censorship	Refraining from talking about vegan-related topics.	- The organisations' ideological values shape what is perceive as permissible to talk about and the process of internalisation of these norms prevent people from challenging them.
Challenges of blending in	Conversations/ interactions about veganism	Discussion	Engaging in discursive acts.	- Engaging in discussions has the potential to challenge the organisational culture and participants try to change it by validating their own vegan identity.
Challenges of blending in	Bullying behaviour and unpleasant comments	Avoidance	Avoiding situations where bullying behaviour is more common and/ or ignoring unpleasant comments.	- Utilised in an unsafe work environment; - The organisations have power imbalances where the vegan minority is marginalised; - Organizational elites shape the organizational culture according to their preference(s).
Challenges of blending in	Bullying behaviour and unpleasant comments	Humour	Making jokes and/ or laughing along with anti-vegan jokes.	- All organisational members are ‘guilty’ of defining discourses, positioning subjects and delineating ‘correct behaviour’ through discursive processes.
Challenges of blending in	Vegan discourse	Selective disclosure	Strategically determining when it is wise (or not) to mention being vegan.	- The fear for ‘coming out as a vegan’ has to do with the organisations’ power to disrupt potential career paths.

5.1 Food at the workplace

5.1.1 Trigger

It is not entirely unexpected that every participant mentions *food* in the workplace as a trigger for identity work. Food is a very important part of the vegan identity because vegans live by the prescriptive principle of causing as little suffering to animals as is practically possible by paying attention to, among other things, food consumption (The Vegan Society, 2024). Ove points to food as a trigger for identity work in the following excerpt: ‘I do mentally prepare myself for a dinner where meat and dairy are eaten around me.’ Food is present at a variety of occasions, including informal BBQs with colleagues. Likewise, a BBQ is a trigger for instance for Mo: 'I'm probably not going to join, because it goes against my principles.' Similarly, for others, (in)formal lunches, (in)formal dinners, breaks at work, excursions and work appointments are also triggers to engage in identity work, as these almost always involve non-plant-based food.

5.1.2 Strategies and context

From the diary entries of the participants, three identity work strategies to deal with the 'food trigger' emerged: *avoidance*, *conformity* and *anticipation*. *Avoidance* in this context means consciously avoiding the places where non-plant-based food is consumed. Marco describes this situation of avoidance as follows: 'very often I just go home earlier these days. I rarely eat with colleagues.' And Mathilda: ' I think I have an appointment in [...] around 7.30pm that Tuesday night, so I can avoid dinner.' . In an organisational context, this strategy is mainly utilised as resistance against the power that determines the normative climate of the organisation (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). The following excerpt from Fatima makes this clear:

> A few months ago, I was sitting in the staff room during lunch. On the bar, I had seen a bowl of processed meats but had not responded to it. Then, while we were eating, the concierge came with the bowl of meat, put it in the middle of the table and said, 'eat it because otherwise we will have to throw it away'. To which I reacted with shock by saying: “bloody hell, I am eating and don't need any corpses near me.” Eventually I sat down at another table to continue eating there.

This shows that the norm within the organisation is to consume animals, as the concierge insisted to Fatima, saying 'eat, because otherwise...'. She eventually avoided the situation where she was confronted with meat by sitting at another table. Nevertheless, it does happen that close

colleagues and people higher up in the hierarchy, such as managers, support the participants' food choices. Marlou describes this, for example:

> My manager also always brings her own food from home, due to a diet. Also because she eats vegetarian and because she regularly says (also in the group) that she respects my eating style, I usually feel safe in our own team on this subject.

In this case, when avoidance still occurs, it is not directed at resisting the manager or immediate colleagues, but rather at less visible forms of power and influence. Possibly, it is against the norms of those higher in the organisational hierarchy or even against society-wide assumptions regarding the value of veganism and animals (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

However, some participants choose to engage in events typically considered 'non-vegan' by employing a *conformity* strategy. *Conformity* means something like reproducing the existing norms by behaviourally or cognitively partaking in the hegemonic values. While some resist the organisational norms (of those higher in the hierarchy), others fall prey to the pressure of the power and influence of the organisational ideology (Fleming & Spicer, 2014)[4]. This is evident from Mathilda's entry:

> Colleague A., the general director, informs us that next Tuesday we will have a meeting in Belgium with the Belgian management. [...] The Belgians are never much into timing, they may decide halfway through the day that it would be nice to go out to dinner together and if the management board offers you that honour, it is not done to refuse.

Mathilda's entry illustrates the subtle yet powerful *manipulation* described by Fleming and Spicer (2014), where the expectation set by higher management (i.e., superordinate minority) implicitly dictates the behaviour of employees, making it 'not done' to refuse the dinner invitation. This aligns with Salznick's (1949) observation that rules and norms can prevent issues from arising by adhering to apparently objective criteria. In Mathilda's case, the social norm within the organisation equates compliance with attending the dinner, thus suppressing any objections she might have due to her vegan principles.

However, the degree of conformity to the dominant organisational norms occurs on a continuum. On the left side of the spectrum, there is little conformity. This could include, for example, attending a non-vegan work-related BBQ. As described earlier in the '5.1.1 trigger

[4] In this context, ideology refers to the creation of shared assumptions and ideals that shape and constrain individual preferences and desires (Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980).

section', Mo hesitated to go to the work BBQ. In the end, he went anyway: 'I like doing an excursion with colleagues, for fun and the social aspect.' This conformity stemmed from a form of need for social bonding (Kemmer, Anderson, & Marshall, 1998).

Another example of moderate conformity is described by Jacqueline:

> An external visitor arrived a little early for the poster presentation and I offered to get coffee for him. In the building we were in, plant-based milk was not available as an option for coffee. Fortunately, he wanted black coffee, so without cow's milk or sugar. If I have to get coffee with cow's milk for someone, I really don't like doing that for someone. After all, it goes against my principles. But if someone at work asks for it, I do it, because I think it's important to participate normally and do social merit for others so that I am liked.

Jacqueline's experience of offering coffee is an example of how subjectification affects her behaviour (Foucault, 1977). Even though she prefers not to use cow's milk, she would still conform to the expectation of hospitality within the organisation if necessary: 'if someone at work asks for it, I do it, because I think it's important to participate normally and do social merit for others so that I am liked.' This shows how organisational norms can transcend her personal principles because of the desire to function well within the social framework of the organisation. This illustrates the concept of subjectification where individuals' self-image and behaviour are shaped by prevailing organisational expectations and norms (Foucault, 1997; Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

On the other hand, conformity and subjectification can go so far that two participants temporarily disregard their vegan identity. In other words, the participants *dis-identified* with the vegan identity when they realized that a particular way of be(hav)ing does not contribute to their satisfaction and well-being at work (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). For example, when Mathilda thinks about the lunch with the director, she indicates that:

> [...] I don't want to claim the space to make my food preference someone else's problem. Of course, I can also say that there is nothing for me to eat and see how people will solve that, but then I fear rejection, ridicule.

Subjectification is clearly expressed again. Mathilda has internalised what is considered socially acceptable within her work environment, which influences her decisions. Her sense of identity and self has been conditioned by the power structures within the organisation,

suppressing her vegan identity to avoid rejection or ridicule. This internalisation of social norms is a profound form of power that shapes her sense of self and behaviour (Foucault, 1997; Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Manipulation probably precedes internalisation, as certain topics and preferences (i.e. veganism) seem to be implicitly excluded from the agenda of acceptable topics during work-related social gatherings. Social norms within the organisation determine what is considered acceptable, which limits Mathilda's perception of what she can say and do (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

Finally, many participants respond to non-vegan food in the context of the workplace by using the *anticipation* strategy. *Anticipation* means something like making behavioural and cognitive adjustments in advance in situations where non-vegan food is expected, so that the principles of the vegan identity can still be adhered to. One example revolves around proactively seeking out information about available plant-based options before an informal diner for work. Gabriëlle illustrates this behaviour:

> I don't feel like indicating special preferences again, especially since dietary preferences were not actively asked. I plan to indicate it once again anyway just to be sure because it is annoying if on the day itself it turns out that there are no vegan options. Ideally, I would just like to be automatically taken into account and that they don't mind doing so.

This anticipation behaviour reflects a desire for control and certainty in unfamiliar environments. Participants often go to great lengths to ensure they are accommodated, which indicates a gap in organisational inclusivity. Participants internalize the lack of organisational support for their dietary needs, leading them to adopt anticipation behaviours to mitigate potential discomfort. This aligns with the concept of *self-regulation*, where employees manage themselves to conform to organisational norms (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Additionally, narratives reveal a hybrid social situation where participants attend non-vegan events but bring their own food. This allows them to maintain relationships with peers while adhering to their dietary preferences (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). However, this self-sufficiency can be burdensome. Monica's frustration with the canteen's lack of options illustrates this:

> Being unable to buy anything at all in the canteen. Not even a cup of hummus, so that means I always have to bring food from home. This is annoying and irritating.

5.2 Challenges of blending in

5.2.1 Triggers

The next set of triggers all highlight the difficulties that the respondents face when trying to work in harmony with colleagues: the challenges of blending in. Three *triggers* for identity work related to blending in clearly emerge as a recurring pattern in the diary entries: conversations/ interactions about veganism, bullying behaviour and the vegan discourse.

First, *conversations* about veganism regularly arise at the participants' workplace. Monica provides insight into such a situation:

> Every time I am quietly eating my vegan sandwich people see that it is completely plant-based. Out of interest, they ask questions because I am often the first vegan they encounter. Questions asked are "oh why are you vegan?", "where do you get your protein from?", "and your B-12?", "but what do you eat?".

Bullying behaviour as a second trigger is often closely associated with discussions about veganism. Conversations about veganism can eventually take the form of nasty and bullying comments. For example, Marco is sometimes told that others are 'compensating for him' by consuming extra meat, thereby neutralizing the impact of Marco's vegan consumption pattern. Exemplars of harassment could be even worse, as Mo had to experience:

> It's around noon and colleague M. looks down from the window (we're on the 4th floor). “Hey Marco, it's time for lunch, look, the buffet is already ready.” I look outside and see that they are mowing the lawn. I immediately understand the link, because ‘vegans eat grass’.

The comments can also be more subtle. Oscar experienced such a situation:

> I walked into the workplace of a colleague, and I asked if he was coming for lunch, it would be cozy. “Are you sure?” he asks with a sickening grin on his face.

The third trigger plays out a priori of any actual material conditions in the vegan participants' cognitive states and reflections. Almost all participants acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, the existence of a *vegan discourse* in which there are many negative ideas about them. The participants' narratives illustrate the large amount of identity work they do to avoid being identified as an *annoying* vegan. Mathilda explains this point clearly when she writes about a situation where she is afraid to start talking about lunch. She did not want to bring up lunchtime

because she was ‘slightly afraid that people will then think “oh, she needs to let people know she is vegan”’. In response to my follow-up question: ‘what ideas do you think are associated with the vegan identity?’, Mathilda responds with:

> Especially that people think that vegans consider themselves morally superior or special/ interesting. And often just want to make a statement or claim an exceptional position.

Furthermore, Marco does not want to be seen as a *preachy* person or a *whining-vegan*; Rosalie does not want to be known as a *grumpy* and *pedantic* person; Gabrielle does not want to be seen as *pushy*.

These narratives indicate the internalisation of the vegan discourse. In this context, vegans internalise societal and discursive pressures that frame their identities in negative terms, such as being *preachy*, *grumpy*, or *morally superior*. This process of internalisation shows how power can work in subtle ways. Furthermore, this dynamic shows the unequal power relations inherent in the vegan discourse, where the dominant group (i.e., non-vegans) possess the authority to define and impose normative identities and marginalising vegans since they deviate from these norms (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

5.2.2 Strategies and context

First, two strategies for dealing with the first trigger (i.e., conversations/ interactions about veganism) emerge in participants' diaries: *self-censorship* and *discussion*. *Self-censorship* in this context means refraining from talking about vegan-related topics. For example, Rosalie, a primary school teacher, describes how she refrains from reading an arguably ‘vegan book’ to her students out of fear of certain repercussions:

> I have a book called ‘Squeaky mouse visiting Anna the cow’. But I have decided not to read the book aloud. That would definitely get me in trouble. I talked about it with my colleague who is a teacher in the group where I am the teaching assistant. She also advised me not to do it.

This excerpt clearly illustrates the organisational norms and expectations that exist of teachers. The school's ideological values likely shape what Rosalie perceive as permissible, and Rosalie's internalisation of these norms prevents her from challenging them. This process shows how organisational norms can become hegemonic. This goes so far that subordinates accept their subordination (Kunda, 1992; Simons & Ingram, 1997).

Nevertheless, there are participants who regularly engage in *discussions* on vegan-related topics at the workplace. *Discussion* means engaging in discursive acts. For example, Marlou describes that she walked up to a support worker in the canteen to express that it is very difficult for her to determine which sandwiches are vegan when it is not indicated what is vegan or not. By discussing this issue, she makes a part of her vegan identity visible and asks for recognition. This can be a subtle form of power where Marlou challenges the organisational culture and tries to change it by validating her own identity and in-group (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999; Gabriel, 1999; Sturdy, 1997).

More direct or provocative discussions that blur the line between a discussion and a response to bullying behaviour are also evident. For example, after repeatedly hearing annoying remarks about animal slaughter, Mo makes a somewhat desperate attempt to engage in a discussion with a colleague by asking the following direct question: 'does it affect you at all?' Mo thus tried to initiate an ethical discussion on a topic of value to him, but he encountered resistance from the outgroup. His peers have internalised the prevailing norm around the use of animals (for consumption), which is why Mo's attempts to initiate an ethical discussion on this topic are seen as annoying.

Second, two identity work strategies clearly emerge in the participants' diaries following the trigger of bullying behaviour and obnoxious comments, namely *avoidance* and *humour*. *Avoidance* in this context means something like avoiding situations where bullying behaviour is more common or ignoring unpleasant comments. As highlighted in the explanation of the trigger, Marco's colleagues told him that they will compensate for his non-existent meat consumption. These comments are often made during informal lunch breaks. Hence, Marco writes: 'so, I find myself avoiding those situations, preferring to have lunch with my only vegan colleague.... apart from the rest.' First of all, Marco's choice to spend lunch breaks with his sole vegan colleague stands out. It reflects his effort to reinforce his identification with the vegan ingroup while avoiding situations where his vegan identity may be challenged by the unkind remarks he has previously been subjected to. Furthermore, Marco's choice to have lunch alone with his vegan colleague makes clear how systematic aspects of power work and, perhaps more importantly, how internalising these ideas about vegans can limit the practice of Marco's vegan identity both in the individual and in social interactions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Foucault, 1977).

Another example of avoidance in the wake of nasty comments, whether intentional or unintentional, is evident in Oscar's diary entry in which he describes what happens when the topic of veganism comes up:

> The times it is brought up, the conversation is like "oh I could never do that", "oh, I really can't live without meat..." and I find a lot of that, but I just smile silly. I feel very unsafe to really express my opinion, as everyone else does it to me without me asking.

Again, this diary excerpt clearly illustrates how subjectification works. Oscar feels unsafe at work to truly express his opinion on veganism. So he adjusts his behaviour by simply smiling and avoiding entering into a discussion after somewhat annoying remarks. He thus feels the need to stay within the existing dominant and accepted social and moral organisational frameworks. This also demonstrates the marginalised nature of the vegan identity at the workplace and arguably in society at large (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Another example of the *avoidance* strategy is present in the following fragment from Fatima's diary:

> About a year and a half ago, I was supposed to arrange fries with something on the side for the toddlers during carnival. I bought plant-based meatballs from Ikea and the fries came from the snack bar. Somewhere in the corridors I had heard that there would be pork sausages as a snack but I had told the person fetching this that I would bring the meatballs. On my day off, I received an angry email from my coordinator and the headmistress. "How I took it into my head to bring *plant-based* meatballs." I received a lot of accusations and threats. That really shocked me. But as I did not want to get into a discussion with these narrow-minded spirits, I did not respond.

This fragment shows how organisational elites (i.e. coordinator) assert influence over norms and practices. By telling that plant-based meatballs are not acceptable, the coordinator shapes the organisational culture according to his/ her/ them preference(s) (Spicer & Böhm, 2007).

Next, the identity work strategy *humour* in this context involves using humour after having been subjected to nasty comments or bullying behaviour regarding the participants' vegan identity. In this context, the strategy involves making jokes and/ or laughing along with anti-vegan jokes. Mathilda, for example, tells about her 'cognitive gymnastics' while being confronted with the following situation:

> People often ask me quasi-interested what I am eating today. It was a Mexican salad with beans and vegetables through which I crumbled tortilla chips. Easy, high-fibre and still a little snack. That's how it feels thanks to the chips. In no time, the conversation turns to the fact that some people are big meat lovers and that they really can't live without it. Especially the colleague with an Argentinian background. "Her father would disown her if she went vegan." This time, it is me making the joke. There are days when I just don't want to allow it to enter my mind and shut myself off from it with superficiality. The alternative is to keep my mouth shut.

This strategy clearly demonstrates how each individual in the workplace can (re)produce norms. All organisational members are 'guilty' of defining discourses, positioning subjects and delineating 'correct behaviour' through discursive processes, including through the use of humour . Using the discursive perspective, therefore, we can see that discursive efforts produce social reality. For example, Mo makes the following joke when a colleague makes a silly remark about his veganism: 'not really, and I'm still full from yesterday, when I was trimming the hedge at home.' However, this response may reinforce the negative vegan discourse. That is, vegans are those who supposedly solely eat 'grass' (Huber & Brown, 2017).

Ove also humorously describes what he regularly does when discussing veganism at work:

> Usually I try to get ahead of this and make jokes about it myself. Not because I find it so funny, but I want to 'cut the grass away from their feet' (pun intended), so that it is not discussed any further. Then I'm quickly rid of it too and we can get on with the day.

Besides power dynamics between the ingroup and outgroup, it can also be argued that Ove engages in strategic identity management. He is aware of the group dynamics, so he tries to neutralise attention on his vegan identity through humour.

Third, the idea of the existence of a *vegan discourse* among respondents triggers one strategy: selective disclosure. *Selective disclosure* in this context involves strategically determining when it is wise (or not) to mention being vegan. Participants seem to have developed a kind of tacit knowledge and intuitive antennae by sensing at what moments it is wise to explicitly tell people that he/ she/ they are vegan or not. In the context of identity work research, this strategy has been mentioned more often (e.g. Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004). To put it in an organisational

context, a part of the fear for 'coming out as a vegan' has to do with the organisations' power to disrupt potential career paths. For example, Fatima mentions that she has to be careful about the things she says about veganism and the timing of it, because she loves her job. This indicates that Fatima expects vegans to be evaluated as negative and thus that veganism is a stigmatised identity. Furthermore, we can again observe that organisational culture determines which identities are accepted and which are marginalised (Flemming & Spicer, 2007).

6. Discussion

This research illustrates how the vegan employees who participated in this study manage their vegan identity in the workplace in response to various triggers and within different socio-institutional contexts. Different identity work strategies were used to navigate food within the organisation: avoidance, conformity, and anticipation. These three strategies are essentially responses to the limited diversity within the organisations. Based on the participants' experiences, the organisations seem to pay little attention to the prescriptive and performative moral principles associated with a vegan identity. One person no longer wants to attend non-vegan events at all (i.e., avoidance), the other person conforms to the prevailing food norms within the organisation in certain exceptional situations (i.e., conformity), and yet the other person brings their own food due to the lack of vegan options (i.e., anticipation). The implementation of these strategies also depends on the participants' energy levels. When feeling tired, they may be more likely to choose avoidance. Food, therefore, appears to have the potential to both pose challenges to diversity and inclusion and it could serve as a strength for diversity and inclusion. Organisations could choose to make their catering 100% plant-based as a standard practice. Additionally, during work-related (in)formal events, initiated by the organisation, consideration could be given to the genuine ethical concerns that vegan employees may have.

Secondly, the analysis of the narratives reveal that vegans face challenges in the workplace and feel compelled to excessively engage in identity work. While identities are generally not fixed and thus require continuous effort (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), the participants often find themselves *excessively* engaging in identity work. This is partly because food appears to be one of the key aspects of the vegan identity, and food is omnipresent. Additionally, participants must exert extra effort to manage the negative stereotypes surrounding vegans, such as being perceived as extremists, pushy and morally superior. In the results section, a connection has already been made with *stigma identity work*, which focuses on repairing image cleavages

and avoiding negative judgments (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Participants do this, among other ways, by exerting mental efforts to maintain their vegan identity.

Interestingly, despite all the identified triggers, strategies, and socio-institutional contexts, I argue that the main finding is that participants' identity work revolves around identity negotiation. Whether it concerns food or interactions with colleagues, all vegans constantly balance between advancing their vegan identity with its associated performative principles and conforming to the hegemonic organisational and societal power structures. Vegans sense that the vegan identity is not the norm in their organisation and they find it challenging. They constantly manoeuvre within the existing frameworks of what is considered 'normal and natural'. Among the eight strategies identified from the diaries, only two can be considered forms of resistance against organisational norms. Firstly, *avoidance* as a response to non-vegan events can be seen as resistance, albeit in a limited form. Absence signals to the organisation: (re)assess the fundamental ethical framework of the organisation or I will continue to abstain from so-called 'social events'. Furthermore, engaging in *discussions* is a powerful way to express dissatisfaction. It can change organisational norms and provide a counterpoint to the supposedly natural order of the organisation.

The flip side of the coin is the fact that organisations exert influence on the identities of vegan employees in various ways making it important to engage in identity work. Subjectification is arguably the most fundamental form of control, as it permeates deep into the human psyche. Subjectification constitutes what a person is. "Domination may 'naturalize' an extant social order whereas subjectification normalizes a particular way of being in that social order" (Fleming & Spicer, 2014, p. 244). The participants have already internalized the vegan discourse to some extent, thereby not offering resistance to their subjectification. The following strategies clearly reflect this observation: conformity, self-censorship, humour, and selective disclosure. An aim of this research was therefore to empower vegan participants in their vegan identity. With these insights, I hope they become (even more) aware of their subjectification.

Furthermore, this research contributes to an existing body of theory and empirical research, namely the examination of various forms of discrimination in the workplace. This academic literature encompasses studies on gender inequalities (e.g., Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Dick, 2013), sexism (e.g., Jones & Clifton, 2017), homophobia (e.g., Rostosky & Riggle, 2002), and racism (e.g., Trenerry & Paradies, 2012) in the workplace. Similar dynamics are discernible in the narratives of vegans, such as being treated differently in certain situations

without valid justification and experiencing harassment[5]. More specifically, this research contributes to strengthening the theoretical framework surrounding the potentially contentious concept of *vegaphobia*, i.e., the discrimination against vegans. I argue that this concept warrants further theorization, as it appears to be relevant in workplace context.

[5] I do not want to draw similarities between the forms of discrimination, but in the *underlying* dynamics within organisational power structures that makes discrimination possible in the first place.

Literature

Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization, 15*(1), 5–28.

Alvesson, M., & Robertson, M. (2016). Money matters: Teflonic identity manoeuvring in the investment banking sector. *Organization Studies, 37*(1), 7–34.

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies, 39*(5), 619–644.

Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20–39.

Bardon, T., Clegg, S. & Josserand, E. (2012). Exploring identity construction from a critical management perspective: a research agenda. *M@n@gement, 15*, 351-366.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497–529.

Beech, N. (2008). On the nature of dialogic identity work. *Organization, 15*(1), 51–74.

Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1998). Covered by equality: The gender subtext of organization. *Organization Studies, 19*(5), 787–805.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*(5), 475–482.

Brown, A. D. (2014). Identities and identity work in organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *17*(1), 20–40.

Carroll, B., & Levy, L. (2010). Leadership development as identity construction. *Management Communication Quarterly, 24*(2), 211–231.

Caza, B. B., Vough, H. C., & Puranik, H. G. (2018). Identity work in organizations and

occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *39*(7), 889–910.

Clarke, C. A., Brown, A. D., & Hailey, V. H. (2009). Working identities? Antagonistic discursive resources and managerial identity. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 323–352.

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

Costas, J., & Kärreman, D. (2016). The bored self in knowledge work. *Human Relations, 69*(1), 61–83.

Creed, W. E. D., DeJordy, R., & Lok, J. (2010). Being the change: Resolving institutional contradiction through identity work. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*(6), 1336 -1364.

Davies, A., & Thomas, R. (2008). Dixon of Dock Green got shot! Policing identity work and organizational change. *Public Administration, 86*(3), 627–642.

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

Dick, P. (2013). The politics of experience: A discursive psychology approach to understanding different accounts of sexism in the workplace. *Human Relations, 66*(5), 645-669.

Doolin, B. (2002). Enterprise discourse, professional identity and the organizational control of hospital clinicians. *Organization Studies, 23*(3), 369–390.

Fachin, F. F., & Davel, E. (2015). Reconciling contradictory paths: Identity play and work in a career transition. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 28*(3), 369–392.

Fineman, S., & Sturdy, A. (1999). The emotions of control: A qualitative exploration of environmental regulation. *Human Relations, 52*(5), 631–663.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2014). Power in management and organization science. *the Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1), 237–298.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline & punish*. Toronto: Random House.

Gabriel, Y. (1999). Beyond happy families: A critical reevaluation of the control-resistance -identity triangle. *Human Relations, 52*(2), 179–203.

Goffman, E. (2009). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon and schuster.

Greenebaum, J. B. (2012). Managing Impressions: "Face-Saving" Strategies of Vegetarians and Vegans. *Humanity & society, 36*(4), 309-325.

Harvey, P. F. (2018). It's a Total Way of Life? Catholic Priests, Women's Ordination, and Identity Work. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, *57*(3), 547–566.

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.

Huber, G., & Brown, A. D. (2017). Identity Work, Humour and Disciplinary Power. *Organization Studies, 38*(8), 1107-1126.

Janssens, K. a. M., Bos, E. H., Rosmalen, J. G. M., Wichers, M. C., & Riese, H. (2018). A qualitative approach to guide choices for designing a diary study. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *18*(1).

Jones, K., & Clifton, J. (2017). Rendering sexism invisible in workplace narratives. A narrative analysis of female entrepreneurs' stories of not being talked to by men. *Gender, Work & Organization, 25*(5), 557–574.

Kärreman, D., & Alvesson, M. (2004). Cages in tandem: Management control, social identity, and identification in a knowledge-intensive firm. *Organization, 11*(1), 149 -175.

Kemmer, D., Anderson, A. s., Marshall, D. w. (1998). 'Living Together and Eating Together: Changes in Food Choice and Eating Habits during the Transition from Single to Married/Cohabiting'. *The Sociological Review*, *46*(1), 48-72.

Kunda, G. (1992). *Engineering culture: Control and commitment in a high-tech corporation*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

LaPointe, K. (2013), Heroic Career Changers? Gendered Identity Work in Career Transitions. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 20: 133-146.

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual review of Sociology, 27*(1), 363-385.

Lucas, K. (2011). Blue-collar discourses of workplace dignity: Using outgroup comparisons to construct positive identities. *Management Communication Quarterly, 25*(2), 353 -374.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2008). Intensive Remedial Identity Work: Responses to Workplace Bullying Trauma and Stigmatization. *Organization, 15*(1), 97-119.

MacInnis, C. C., & Hodson, G. (2017). It ain't easy eating greens: Evidence of bias toward vegetarians and vegans from both source and target. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 20*(6), 721-744.

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.

Michelle E. Kiger & Lara Varpio (2020) Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131, Medical Teacher, 42:8, 846-854.

Mumby, D. K. (1987). The political function of narratives in organizations. *Communication Monographs, 54*, 113–127.

Ochs, E., & Shohet, M. (2006). The cultural structuring of mealtime socialization. *New directions for child and adolescent development, 2006*(111), 35-49.

O'Reilly, J., Banki, S. (2016). *Research in Work and Organizational Psychology: Social Exclusion in the Workplace*. In: Riva, P., Eck, J. (eds) Social Exclusion. Springer, Cham.

Potts, A., & Parry, J. (2010). Vegan sexuality: Challenging heteronormative masculinity through

meat-free sex. *Feminism & Psychology, 20*(1), 53-72.

Ranson, S. Hinings, C. R., & Greenwood, R. (1980). The structuring of organizational structures. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 25*(1), 1–17.

Roschelle, Anne R. and Kaufman, Peter (2004) 'Fitting in and Fighting Back: Stigma Management Strategies Among Homeless Kids', *Symbolic Interaction 27*(1): 23–46.

Rostosky, S. S., & Riggle, E. D. B. (2002). "Out" at work: The relation of actor and partner workplace policy and internalized homophobia to disclosure status. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 49*(4), 411–419.

Salznick, P. (1949). *TVA and the grassroots*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Schwalbe, M. L., & Mason-Schrock, D. (1996). Identity Work as Group Process pp. 113-147 Advances in Group Process, vol. 13, edited by Barry Markovsky, Michael J. lovaglia, & Robin Sion.

Seale, C. (2004). *Social research methods: A Reader*. Psychology Press.

Simons, T., & Ingram, P. (1997). Organization and ideology: Kibbutzim and hired labor: 1951–1965. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 42*(4), 784–813.

Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology, 92*(6), 1336–1371.

Spicer, A., & Böhm, S. (2007). Moving management: Theorizing struggles against the hegemony of management. *Organization Studies, 28*(11), 1667–1698.

Stamarski CS and Son Hing LS (2015) Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Front. Psychol*. 6:1400.

Stein, H. F. (2004). A window to the interior of experience. *Families, Systems, & Health, 22*(2),

178–179.

Sturdy, A. (1997). The consultancy process—an insecure business? *Journal of Management Studies, 34*(3), 389–413.

Sveningsson, S. and Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, *56*, pp. 1163–1193.

Tengland, P. (2007). Empowerment: a Conceptual discussion. *Health Care Analysis*, *16*(2), 77–96.

The Vegan Society. (2024). *Definition of veganism*. www.vegansociety.com.

Thornborrow, T., & Brown, A. D. (2009). "Being regimented": Aspiration, discipline and identity work in the British parachute regiment. *Organization Studies, 30*(4), 355 -376.

Trenerry, B., & Paradies, Y. (2012). Organizational Assessment: An Overlooked Approach To Managing Diversity And Addressing Racism In The Workplace. *Journal of Diversity Management (JDM), 7*(1), 11–26.

Twine, R. (2014). Vegan killjoys at the table—Contesting happiness and negotiating relationships with food practices. *Societies, 4*(4), 623-639.

Van Amsterdam, N., & Van Eck, D. (2019). "I have to go the extra mile". How fat female employees manage their stigmatized identity at work. *Scandinavian Journal Of Management*, *35*(1), 46–55.

Wrenn, C. L. (2017). Trump veganism: A political survey of American vegans in the era of identity politics. *Societies, 7*(4), 32.

Wright, L. (2015). *The vegan studies project: Food, animals, and gender in the age of terror*. University of Georgia Press.

Appendix

A) Format diary entry

Format Hoofdstuk Uit Dagboek

Universiteit Utrecht

Hieronder leest u hoe een hoofdstuk in uw dagboek eruit zou *kunnen* zien. Door het beantwoorden van deze vragen zijn de meest belangrijke zaken besproken.

Let op! Dit is een format. Meer relevante vragen kunnen van toepassing zijn!

Format 'hier en nu':

Gebeurde er vandaag iets op het werk dat u als veganist heeft geraakt?

- Wat gebeurde er?
- Hoe raakte dit u?
- Hoe ga/ ging u hiermee om?
- In welke context gebeurde dit?
- Wat deden anderen?

(Gebruik zo veel mogelijk woorden als nodig om een goede beschrijving te geven; schrijf in zo veel mogelijk detail)

Format 'verleden':

Gebeurde er in het verleden iets op het werk dat u als veganist heeft geraakt? Zo ja,

- Wat gebeurde er?
- Hoe raakte dit u?
- Hoe ga/ ging u hiermee om?
- In welke context gebeurde dit?
- Wat deden anderen?

(Gebruik zo veel mogelijk woorden als nodig om een goede beschrijving te geven; schrijf in zo veel mogelijk detail)

B) Instruction diary study

Universiteit Utrecht

Beste potentiële deelnemer,

Allereerst wil ik u enige context bieden van het onderzoek waarin u bent geïnteresseerd. U staat op het punt om deel te nemen aan het 'dagboek'-onderzoek 'Navigating the workplace as a vegan'. Dit onderzoek is onderdeel van mijn (David Schut) afstuderen voor de onderzoeksmaster 'Public Administration and Organisational Science' aan de Utrecht Universiteit. De vorm van mijn afstudeerproject neemt echter niet de vorm aan van een klassieke scriptie: een onderzoek bestaande uit ruim 50 pagina's. Dit project neemt de vorm aan van een daadwerkelijk wetenschappelijk artikel, zoals u ze tegenkomt in internationale wetenschappelijke tijdschriften. Het doel is dan ook om dit onderzoek te publiceren in een wetenschappelijk tijdschrift. Dr. Ozan Alakavuklar en dr. Noortje van Amsterdam zullen dit project vanuit de Utrecht Universiteit begeleiden.

In het vervolg van deze brief wil ik u informeren over de details van dit onderzoek.

Waarom ik?

U kunt meedoen aan dit onderzoek als u zich identificeert als **veganist**. Ook moet u **werkzaam** zijn in een organisatie of **zeer recentelijk zijn gestopt** met werken. Verder is het van belang dat u binnen de komende 2 maanden verwacht 'geraakt te worden in uw vegan identiteit' en/ of over evenementen en gebeurtenissen kunt schrijven die in het verleden zijn gebeurd op de werkplek. Mocht u op basis van deze criteria twijfelen aan uw deelname, neem contact op met de onderzoeker. Let op! Als u zich als vegetariër identificeert valt u buiten de doelgroep van dit onderzoek.

Wat betekent 'geraakt zijn in de vegan identiteit'?

Dit is moeilijk om te definiëren, omdat dit deel is van het onderzoek. De vraag aan de deelnemers is dan ook om gebeurtenissen te beschrijven die van invloed op uw vegan identiteit zijn. Dit kunnen voor de buitenwereld ogenschijnlijk minuscule gebeurtenissen zijn, maar voor u als individu impact hebben. Ook kan het zijn dat er helemaal niks negatiefs op het werk gebeurt, maar je toch denkt aan jouw vegan zijnde. Denk bijvoorbeeld aan uw eventuele wens om een 'hogere' positie te vervullen, maar je waagt deze gok niet, omdat je denkt dat ze veganisten niet als leiders zien. Al deze gedachten, acties en activiteiten die in relatie staan tot uw vegan identiteit zijn interessant om in detail op te schrijven.

Om wat voor studie gaat het?

Het gaat om een zogeheten dagboekstudie. Meer specifiek gaat het om een '**directed diary study**'. Normaliter schrijft men over zeer uiteenlopende dingen in een dagboek, maar deze studie gaat over een specifiek onderwerp. Om relevante inzichten te verzamelen kan de onderzoeker enigszins sturende open vragen stellen, op basis van de dingen die u heeft opgeschreven. Vandaar kan deze studie *overkomen* als een langlopende vragenlijst.

Hoelang duurt het onderzoek?

Aan iedere deelnemer wordt gevraagd om gedurende een periode van **2 maanden (8/04/2024 – 8/06/2024**

Waar moet ik over schrijven?

Zoals hierboven aangegeven ben ik geïnteresseerd in alle dingen die u in uw vegan identiteit raken. Hier kunnen gebeurtenissen aan ten grondslag liggen, zoals een vervelende grap of een bedrijfsuitje of een wandeling met een collega. Maar dit hoeft niet. U kunt ook vatbaar zijn voor het zogeheten 'anti-vegan' discourse. De idee dat veganisten als extreem, geiten-wollen sokken, hippies, zweverig, vervelend, onhandelbaar, moeilijk, niet gezellig, etc worden gezien. Door de aanwezigheid van dit discourse kun je ook ander gedrag vertonen, andere woorden gebruiken, andere kleding dragen, etc. Schrijf al deze gedachten en daadwerkelijke gebeurtenissen op. Schrijf ook op hoe u hierop reageerde en wat eventuele implicaties hiervan waren. Probeer ook na te denken over de omgeving/ context die iets mogelijk heeft gemaakt. In al het voorgaande ben ik geïnteresseerd.

Maar ik wil over dingen die in het verleden zijn gebeurd schrijven. Mag dat?

Ja, zeker! U kunt schrijven over gebeurtenissen uit het verleden. Toch vragen we aan iedere deelnemer om ook te reflecteren op de dingen die de aankomende 2 maanden voorvallen. Bent u net gestopt met werken, dan is dit niet mogelijk. Als u op dit moment werkzaam bent, is de verwachting dat u ook kunt reflecteren op gebeurtenissen uit het hier en nu.

Ik heb een eerste document geschreven, wat nu?

De onderzoeker zal ingeleverde documenten/ hoofdstukken van alle deelnemers zo spoedig mogelijk lezen en analyseren. Op basis van een ingeleverd document kan het zijn dat de onderzoeker vervolgvragen heeft. In dat geval neemt de onderzoeker contact met u op met het verzoek om op deze vervolgvragen te reflecteren.

Hoe weet ik of en wanneer ik iets moet doen?

De onderzoeker zal u gedurende de komende 2 maanden begeleiden. U kunt van de onderzoeker verwachten dat hij de ingeleverde documenten zo snel mogelijk leest en bij eventuele vervolgvragen contact met u opneemt. De onderzoeker verwacht dat u op eigen initiatief begint met schrijven over een gebeurtenis die in het hier en nu is gebeurd. Aangezien gebeurtenissen vaak over meerdere dagen plaatsvinden, is het dan ook te verwachten dat u op meerdere dagen over één gebeurtenis schrijft. Toch is het voor de onderzoekers fijn als u, zoals bij een normaal dagboek, per dag een hoofdstuk schrijft en deze inlevert. Mocht bijvoorbeeld de spanning nog niet uit de lucht zijn en de gebeurtenis 'raakt u de volgende dag(en) nog in uw vegan identiteit', schrijf hier dan over.

Documenten? Hoofdstukken? Waar lever ik die in?

De onderzoeker werkt met de beveiligde 'OneDrive' van de Utrecht Universiteit. Iedere deelnemer krijgt een eigen map op een beveiligde locatie. Als u deelneemt aan het onderzoek, krijgt u van de onderzoeker een link naar deze map. De map is enkel voor u en de onderzoeker zichtbaar. In uw map kunt u documenten uploaden. U kunt er bijvoorbeeld voor kiezen om in een Word-document over een gebeurtenis te schrijven. Dit document kunt u vervolgens in uw map uploaden. Mocht u er niet uitkomen, neem dan contact op met de onderzoeker. De onderzoeker kunt met u meedenken en u eventueel helpen in dit proces.

Hoe communiceer ik met de onderzoeker en hoe communiceert de onderzoeker met mij?

Van iedere deelnemer wordt het e-mailadres verzameld. Iedere deelnemer zal ook het e-mailadres van de onderzoeker krijgen. Voor eventuele vervolgvragen zal de onderzoeker contact met u opnemen via de mail (of platform naar keuze). Mocht een ander platform uw voorkeur hebben, laat het gerust weten.

Hoelang heb ik om de formulieren in te vullen?

Dit onderzoek omvat 2 abstracte opties: schrijven over dingen uit het *verleden* en schrijven over dingen die in het *hier en nu* gebeuren. Aangezien dit onderzoek 2 maanden duurt, heeft u genoeg tijd om over dingen die in het verleden zijn gebeurd te schrijven. Het zou fijn zijn als u vóór 8 mei 2024 deze verhalen kunt schrijven en inleveren. Dit mag in één bulk, maar hoeft niet. Dit maakt het voor de onderzoeker mogelijk om op tijd eventuele vervolgvragen te stellen. Verder is het voor de dingen die u over het hier en nu schrijft fijn om dit zo snel mogelijk te doen. Aangezien u een drukke agenda kunt hebben, moe kunt zijn na een lange dag werken, etc, is het niet realistisch om consistent in de avond energie in dit onderzoek te stoppen. Toch vragen we u binnen 48 uur na een gebeurtenis een hoofdstuk in te leveren in uw map.

Dus… Hoe vaak moet ik nu iets opschrijven? Hoeveel ben ik met dit onderzoek bezig?

Dat hangt van iedere individuele situatie af. De een maakt veel mee op het werk, de ander veel minder. De een heeft vooral veel over situaties uit het verleden te vertellen, de ander over situaties in het hier en nu. Kortom, u kunt de studie zo groot maken als u zelf wilt.

Wat als er de hele tijd niks op het werk gebeurt?

Het kan zijn dat u een aantal dagen, weken of zelfs maanden niet in uw veganisme wordt ‘geraakt’. Vandaar staat dit onderzoek voor 2 maanden op actief. Wees dan niet van slag als u denkt niks aan dit onderzoek bij te kunnen dragen. Als u een aantal weken over niks kunt schrijven, dan is dat zo. Toch is de verwachting dat veganisten zeer frequent tegen dingen aanlopen op het werk.

Ik twijfel of ik wel goed genoeg kan schrijven. Wat nu?

Het belangrijkste is dat u uw belevenissen op papier kunt zetten. Op spelling, grammatica, zinsopbouw, etc wordt niet gelet. De waarde zit hem in de mate van detail. De onderzoeker kunt u eventueel helpen bij het aanbrengen van meer diepgang in uw verhalen.

Wat gebeurt er met mijn verhalen?

Uw verhalen/ data wordt opgeslagen in OneDrive. Vervolgens analyseert de onderzoeker de gegevens in ATLAS.TI. Beide programma’s voldoen aan de veiligheidsstandaarden van de Utrecht Universiteit.

Hoelang blijven de gegevens voor de onderzoekers beschikbaar?

Volgens de Utrecht Universiteit mogen gegevens niet langer dan 1 jaar na afronding van het onderzoek worden opgeslagen. Uw gegevens zullen uiterlijk na 6 maanden na afronding van dit onderzoek worden verwijderd.

Blijf ik anoniem?

Veel mensen zijn financieel afhankelijk van hun werk. Aangezien dit onderwerp gevoelig kan zijn, zullen de onderzoekers er alles aan doen om uw identiteit te beschermen. Zowel in de transcripten als in de resultatensectie van het wetenschappelijke artikel zult u een pseudoniem krijgen. Ook zal de onderzoeker gevoelige informatie nooit openbaar maken, denk hierbij bijvoorbeeld aan uw functie, uw werkgever en de namen van uw collega's. Ook uw verhalen zullen niet met derden worden gedeeld. Alleen dr. Ozan Alakavuklar en dr. Noortje van Amsterdam zullen wellicht toegang willen tot de ingeleverde verhalen. Maar ook zij zullen een anoniem transcript te lezen krijgen. Wat als ik niet meer mee wil doen?

Uiteraard bent u altijd vrij om te stoppen met het onderzoek. Hier zijn geen redenen voor nodig.

Ik heb dit gelezen, wat nu?

Na het lezen van deze informatie in het voor de administratie fijn als u de onderzoeker een mail kunt sturen (d.m.a.schut@uu.nl) als u officieel wilt deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. De onderzoeker stuurt u vervolgens een 'informed consent' formulier die u dient te tekenen. Door het ondertekenen van het formulier geeft u formeel aan dat u op de hoogte bent van dit onderzoek. In dezelfde mail ontvangt u uw link naar uw map in 'OneDrive'. Vanaf dat moment is het onderzoek voor u officieel begonnen.

Bedankt voor het lezen van deze informatie.

David Schut

d.m.a.schut@uu.nl