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1 Objectives

In order to better understand veganism in the UK from an anthropological perspective, this study aims to:

- Explore the experiences of Oxford based vegan groups and their attitudes towards activism.
- Evaluate the role of trans-biopolitics in constructing vegan ideologies.

What is Veganism?

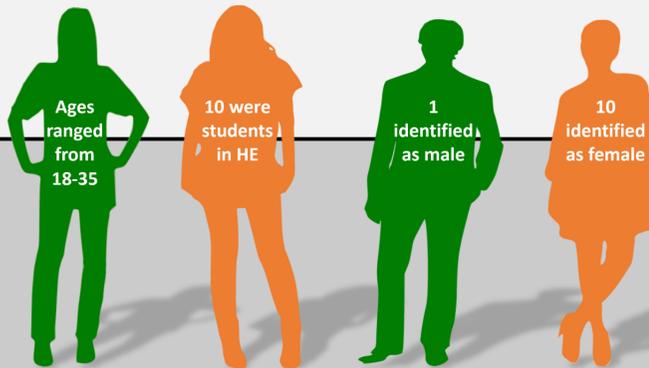
"Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose." - The Vegan Society

Trans-biopolitics?

Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics describes how the state governs the lives of human populations through institutions such as healthcare; trans-biopolitics extends this theory to include other animals (Blue & Rock, 2010).

2 Methods

Details of this study were posted online in Oxford based vegan social media groups to gather volunteers.



Notes from the interviews were analysed to identify key themes and ideas. An extended case method was used to link trans-biopolitics to the participants' responses.



Eleven Participants from a variety of backgrounds were interviewed across a period of four weeks. Scholars such as Kruse (1999) suggested women are more likely to support animal rights and support of animal rights rises with education levels, this was reflected in my participant group (details above). Interviews were designed to allow participants to discuss experiences following a series of topical questions.

3 Findings

The most prominent reasons for going vegan were to support animal rights and transitioning from vegetarianism (see Table 1). Vegans can be sorted into subgroups based on their motivations, the most common are ethical vegans. Ethical vegans support animal rights and criticise the hierarchy (Knight et al., 2009) in which animals are dominated and controlled by humans.

Reason for Going Vegan	Number of Participants
Animal Rights	6
Previously Vegetarian	6
Environment	4
Health	3

Table 1: Participants' reasons for going vegan. Several individuals identified multiple reasons.

Most participants explained that after going vegan they took part in more activism addressing a range of issues including homelessness and mental health. This could be a result of links between positive attitudes to animals and increased empathy (Paul, 2000). A key reason that vegans fight for animal rights is that they feel animals deserve to be equal to humans and shouldn't be treated as property.



Trans-biopolitics recognises that humans classify and evaluate life, often in order to justify their actions. These classifications differ between individuals and cultures, for example Westerners become outraged at the dog meat trade in Korea, yet think nothing of the slaughter of pigs. Serpell (2009) calls this process 'compartmentalisation'. Vegans criticise these systems of classification and challenge normative omnivorous behaviour. I believe 'trans-biopower' is a more appropriate term to describe the control over individual animal lives and bodies, such as choosing which lives to prolong and which to cut short. Vegans actively engage with these ideas by condemning the control that humans have taken.

4 Conclusions

- Vegans may be divided into subgroups based on their motivations, the most common being ethical veganism.
- Vegans may have an increased empathic capacity and subsequently consider animal lives equal to humans.
- They are also likely to engage in various forms of activism addressing a range of issues including animal and human rights.
- Trans-biopolitics and trans-biopower are useful ways to describe how vegans construct their ideologies.

What Comes Next?

The sample group for this study had its limitations; there was only one male and all but one were students at university. Future research could make use of a more varied sample group. There is also potential to compare these results to other locations, or to see how groups of non-vegans relate to the theories of trans-biopolitics and trans-biopower.

