

Negotiating Knowledge and Care: Exploring the Practice of Vegan Parenting

MSc thesis
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Abstract

There is a growing consensus that in order to address climate change and its negative impact on health and environment, our society needs to shift towards plant-based food practices. This shift is reflected by increasing number of families who opt for vegan parenting. However, healthcare professionals and official dietary guidelines often discourage this practice due to concerns about potential nutritional deficiencies. Despite these warnings, parents continue to engage in vegan parenting, indicating a reliance on alternative sources of knowledge and a complex negotiation of objects of care extending beyond their children. In order to investigate how different objects of care and sources of knowledge are integrated in the practice of vegan parenting, 15 semi-structured interviews with 17 parents engaging in vegan parenting were conducted. To analyse the interviews, reflexive thematic analysis was employed together with the theoretical lenses of ethics of care, critical perspectives on ethics of care and constructivist theorizations on knowledge. The analysis demonstrates that parents employ diverse strategies to integrate various objects of care, including: animals, environment, (vegan) identity, children's health and children's social welfare, leading to the construction of three levels of parental strictness. These differences in strictness were mainly attributed to differences between parental ways of care for their identity, children's social welfare and health. Also children's age influenced the level of strictness. Furthermore, the analysis shows that objects of care significantly influence parents' perceptions on knowledge legitimacy, emphasizing the active role parents play in seeking, evaluating and integrating information from various sources of knowledge in their parenting practices. Additionally, the analysis generates a typical trajectory of knowledge formation in vegan parenting, again, highlighting the influence of objects of care in knowledge formation. Overall, the paper contributes to understanding vegan parenting, ethics of care, and the interplay between care and knowledge acquisition.

Keywords: plant-based diet, veganism, vegan parenting, objects of care, sources of knowledge, knowledge acquisition, negotiation

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1 Introduction

There is broad agreement across many academic fields that our society must adjust its food production and consumption practices in order to prevent catastrophic health effects and environmental damage brought on by climate change (Willett et al., 2019). If our society continues with current ways of animal-based products production and consumption, we risk not achieving the climate goals of the Paris Agreement as well as the UN's Targets for a Healthy, Equitable and Sustainable Development (Willett et al., 2019). To illustrate, Xu et al. (2021) demonstrated in their study that food production of animal-based products causes 57% of global greenhouse emissions from food production. It is startling as these products make up only 18% of human calorie intake, which illustrates their disproportional role in driving climate change (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Furthermore, the current overconsumption of animal-based products increases the risks of obesity and the development of various non-communicable diseases like diabetes or cancer (Moreno et al., 2022). Additionally, climate change consequences such as increased temperatures, resulting from, among other things, the overconsumption of animal-based products, pose direct health hazards to people, particularly the vulnerable populations like children and the elderly (Baharom et al., 2021; Faurie et al., 2022).

In light of these challenges, securing a sustainable and healthy future for our children necessitates a substantial shift towards more plant-based consumption patterns (Willett et al., 2019). A testament to this shift is the growing preference for plant-based diets, with approximately 1% to 5% of the Western population embracing a vegan lifestyle (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Sutter & Bender, 2021). "A vegan diet seeks to exclude products originating from animals, including meat, fish, dairy, eggs and honey" (Sutter & Bender, 2021, p. 14). Notably, the adoption of a vegan lifestyle has extended beyond individual choices and into the realm of parenting, as an increasing number of families are adopting a vegan lifestyle for both themselves and their children (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Kiely, 2021; Sutter & Bender, 2021; Weder et al., 2022). In this thesis, this practice is referred to as "vegan parenting".

It is crucial to acknowledge that healthcare professionals and official dietary guidelines, such as "Voedingscentrum Dietary Guidelines for the Netherlands" (Brink et al., 2019), often discourage vegan parenting due to the potential nutritional deficiencies, such as vitamin B12, iron and calcium deficiency, and the associated health complaints (Moreno et al., 2022; Sutter & Bender, 2021; Weder et al., 2022). Conventional nutritional knowledge, highlighting the risks of veganism for children and children's higher nutritional needs compared to adults, raises concerns about the health risks related to vegan parenting (Kiely, 2021). However, despite these warnings, parents continue to engage in vegan parenting, indicating a reliance on alternative sources of knowledge and a complex negotiation of objects of care extending beyond their children. The deficit model of communication assumes that parents lack correct knowledge when they do not change their behaviour after receiving communication attempts. Nonetheless, research suggests that caregivers often possess accurate knowledge about healthy eating for their children but do not always implement this knowledge into practice (Hebestreit et al., 2010; Lovell, 2016). Given the conflicting messages surrounding vegan parenting, with some sources emphasizing the urgency of adopting vegan diets (e.g. Poore & Nemecek, 2018; Willett et al., 2019) and others highlighting potential risks (e.g. Kiely, 2021; Sutter & Bender, 2021), it is essential to explore how parents navigate these competing messages and develop their knowledge to mitigate health risks in their children.

1.1 Empirical Background: Knowledge Acquisition and Objects of Care in Vegan Parenting

In order to identify the research gap that led to conduction of this study, in this section I aim to provide an overview of existing empirical research on vegan parenting, specifically focusing on the acquisition of (nutritional) knowledge among parents and the objects of care related to veganism and vegan parenting. Despite official dietary guidelines and conventional healthcare professionals not advocating

for vegan diets for children, parents consciously choose to raise their children on a vegan diet (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Kiely, 2021). This discrepancy between expert recommendations and parental practices may stem from the fact that the knowledge provided by official dietary guidelines and healthcare professionals does not align with parents' daily routines and the significance they attribute to those practices (Halkier, 2018). Knowledge is not a detached entity but must be integrated into parents' daily practices (Halkier, 2018). Therefore, when certain sources do not align with their practices, individuals seek alternative sources of knowledge that better correspond to their everyday realities, such as their commitment to veganism (Gvion, 2022).

For instance, individuals may draw inspiration from science-based knowledge about climate change or animal welfare when opting for a vegan diet (Laakso et al., 2021). Notably, a quantitative study on vegan parenting conducted by Bivi et al. (2021) revealed that parents extensively research the nutritional adequacy of vegan diets for children, with scientific websites and healthcare professionals, such as nutritionists and dietitians, serving as their primary sources of knowledge. Other sources on nutrition considered by parents found in other studies are: social network (Bivi et al., 2021; Lovell, 2016), media like books, TV and social media (Hebestreit et al., 2010). This multitude of sources indicates that parents actively seek and evaluate knowledge sources, in contrary to the deficit model of knowledge communication, which suggests that people are simply passive recipients of information (Lovell, 2016).

The integration of diverse knowledge sources can result in contrasting messages regarding the suitability of a diet for children (Halkier, 2018; Lovell, 2016). It is important to recognize that knowledge from one source does not exist on an island but is weighed up against knowledge acquired from other sources (Lovell, 2016). Additionally, the existence of numerous conflicting dietary recommendations may lead to increased questioning of certain types of dietary advice (Halkier, 2018). Consequently, this critical evaluation of information could potentially diminish trust in science-based nutritional knowledge as it is compared to other commonly relied upon sources such as advice from social network or information obtained through social media (Hebestreit et al., 2010). Notably, Farella et al. (2020) and Gvion (2022) observed that individuals following a vegan lifestyle tend to be critical of conventional medical and nutritional practices. In fact, Farella et al. (2020) suggest that this critical stance could pose threats for the health of vegan children, highlighting the importance of further investigation in this area.

Regarding objects of care, Bivi et al. (2021) found that parents who raise their children on a vegan diet do it with the health benefits of the child and animal welfare as the most important motives, with environmental reasons being the least popular. These motives align with other studies researching the motivations behind the adoption of a vegan diet (e.g. Fresán et al., 2020; Ghaffari et al., 2022). In the literature, the entities or individuals that are focus of care or attention and are considered valuable or in need of support within a given context, are referred to as “objects of care” (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993). Therefore, drawing from the literature, objects of care that motivate parents to engage in vegan parenting extend beyond their children to other objects of care, namely: animals and environment (Bivi et al., 2021).

1.2 Research Gaps: Navigating and Reconciling Objects of Care and Sources of Knowledge

While vegan parenting can be seen as parental expression of care for the children's health, animals, and environment (Bivi et al., 2021), it is important to critically analyse the potential implications within this caregiving practice. For instance, one could pose questions about meeting the child's nutritional needs (Moreno et al., 2022; Sutter & Bender, 2021). There is a lack of research on how parents specifically address their objects of care in the practice of vegan parenting. Additionally, the practice of vegan parenting likely involves additional objects of care, but it is unknown which ones parents find important and how they navigate and reconcile all their objects of care in their daily practices.

It is evident that parents who engage in vegan parenting value knowledge about the negative environmental and/or animal welfare impacts of conventional animal-based consumption (Laakso et al., 2021). This reflects their concern for these objects of care and indicates that the importance parents attribute to particular knowledge is influenced by their objects of care. This perspective challenges the deficit model of communication, which assumes that individuals lack correct knowledge if they do not change their behaviour in response to communication attempts (Halkier, 2018). In addition to knowledge of climate change and animal rights (Laakso et al., 2021), parents need specific nutritional knowledge in order to be able to properly engage in the practice of vegan parenting. Otherwise, their children could suffer from nutritional deficiencies (Moreno et al., 2022; Sutter & Bender, 2021; Weder et al., 2022). Although prior studies suggest that parents undertake extensive research on the suitability of vegan diets for children, pulling from various sources of knowledge (Bivi et al., 2021), a noticeable gap remains in comprehending how parents navigate through and reconcile the multitude of knowledge sources in their vegan parenting practice.

Overall, while there is extensive literature on the practice of adults and adolescents adopting a vegan diet (e.g. Fresán et al., 2020; Gendel-Guterman & Derqui, 2021; Ghaffari et al., 2022; North et al., 2021), and nutritional aspects of a vegan diet for children (e.g. Baldassarre et al., 2020; Kayode et al., 2022; Kiely, 2021; Nuzzi et al., 2022; Světnička et al., 2022; Weder et al., 2022), there are little studies, and no qualitative studies at all, investigating the practice of vegan parenting. Existing research provides insights into the motivations behind vegan parenting and the potential nutritional deficiencies associated with it, however, little is known about the integration of objects of care and sources of knowledge in this practice. Thus, further research is needed to explore the perspectives of parents themselves and examine how they integrate their objects of care and sources of knowledge in the practice of vegan parenting.

1.3 Aims and Research Questions: Investigating Integration of Objects of Care and Sources of Knowledge in Vegan Parenting

This thesis aims to investigate how different objects of care and sources of knowledge are integrated in the practice of vegan parenting. Therefore, the research objectives informing this study are:

- To investigate which objects of care are significant for parents practicing vegan parenting.
- To investigate how parents practicing vegan parenting negotiate these various objects of care in their daily practices.
- To investigate which sources of knowledge parents practicing vegan parenting consider relevant to their context.
- To investigate how parents practicing vegan parenting perceive the legitimacy of sources of knowledge.
- To investigate how parents practicing vegan parenting gather, navigate and integrate these different sources of knowledge.

Based on these objectives, the research question this paper seeks to answer is “How are different objects of care and sources of knowledge integrated in the practice of vegan parenting?” with the following sub-questions:

- SQ1: How do parents negotiate different objects of care in the practice of vegan parenting?
- SQ2: How do parents negotiate different sources of knowledge in order to be able to engage in the practice of vegan parenting?

1.4 Social and Scientific Relevance of Studying Vegan Parenting

Filling in the identified knowledge gaps is both socially and scientifically relevant. The transition to vegan diets is one of the significant ways in which individuals could reduce their environmental footprint on the earth (Willett et al., 2019). Investigating the experiences and decision-making processes of parents engaging in vegan parenting could illuminate ways to encourage larger-scale shift towards plant-based diets. The more people transition to a vegan diet, the less environmental impact they have which contributes to the mitigation of climate change (Moreno et al., 2022) and to achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the Paris Agreement (Willett et al., 2019). This could, in turn, improve the health of the entire population (Baharom et al., 2021; Willett et al., 2019). Additionally, understanding how parents negotiate and integrate different objects of care and sources of knowledge could inform and improve public health messaging and recommendations around nutrition, which could further improve the health outcomes of the population. This is important, because some experts suggest that the practice of vegan parenting could pose health risks to the children when not incorporated correctly (Moreno et al., 2022; Sutter & Bender, 2021; Weder et al., 2022). Moreover, exploring the objects of care behind vegan parenting could foster understanding of this minority practice within society. This is important, as vegan parenting is a growing practice (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Kiely, 2021).

Furthermore, this research is scientifically relevant as it could contribute to our understanding of the interplay between objects of care and knowledge. By employing critical perspectives on ethics of care and constructivist theorizations on knowledge as guiding frameworks, this study challenges and expands existing models of communication and knowledge acquisition, particularly the deficit model. It introduces important elements such as legitimacy and objects of care into the analysis, shedding light on how individuals navigate and reconcile multiple sources of knowledge and objects of care in the context of vegan parenting. Moreover, examining vegan practices through the critical lens of ethics of care is scientifically relevant, as it could provide an useful example of how multiple objects of care are reconciled with each other in the practices of care and how inherent power dynamics unfold within these practices. Hence, vegan parenting serves as a compelling case study to enhance our understanding of ethics of care.

In the subsequent sections, the Theoretical Framework on constructivist theorizations on knowledge, ethics of care and the critical approach to ethics of care will be outlined. Thereafter, the Methodology and Methods employed for data collection and analysis will be described. The Results and Discussion section will present the constructed findings contextualized in relation to the established framework. Finally, in the Discussion and Conclusion section, all findings will be synthesized to answer the research question, followed by recommendations for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

In the Theoretical Framework provided in this section I outline the theories, perspectives and theoretical concepts that I believe to be suitable to understand how parents integrate different objects of care and sources of knowledge in the context of vegan parenting. The first part of the Theoretical Framework will focus on constructivist perspectives on knowledge. The second part of the Theoretical Framework will incorporate feminist care ethics and, subsequently, the critical lens on the care ethics.

2.1 Knowledge

In the first part of the Theoretical Framework I aim to outline the constructivist perspective on knowledge utilized in this thesis. This perspective is chosen because it provides a suitable framework for examining how knowledge is formed and acquired by vegan parents. By recognizing the active role of parents in constructing their own knowledge and the social, interactive and context-dependent aspects of knowledge acquisition, the constructivist approach offers valuable insights into the perspectives of vegan parents. Additionally, the adoption of a constructivist approach to knowledge highlights the limitations of the deficit model of communication in understanding knowledge acquisition and utilization of sources of knowledge among parents. Instead, the concept of legitimacy of knowledge sources is proposed as a more effective lens through which to explore the acquisition of knowledge and utilization of sources of knowledge by parents.

2.1.1 Understanding knowledge

In this section I delve into the complex nature of knowledge and its implications for understanding the perspectives of individuals. I aim to explore the limitations of the traditional definition of knowledge as "justified true belief" and instead adopt a constructivist approach that recognizes the subjective interpretations, social context, and active role of individuals in knowledge construction.

Many attempts have been made to come up with a universally accepted definition of knowledge, however, explaining what it is remains difficult (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Neta & Pritchard, 2009). The most used definition of knowledge is that of "justified true belief" (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Neta & Pritchard, 2009). Nevertheless, this definition is also far from satisfactory. For example, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) claim the justification of "true belief" to be culturally and contextually dependent, and therefore not universally reliable. According to them, the justification of a condition has to be placed against the social context where knowledge is created and shared, and should not be seen as static and absolute. This suggests that knowledge and its justification are often a matter of interpretation and this definition does not include this aspect (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Likewise, Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) argue that this famous definition, trying to objectively define knowledge, focuses only on conscious, rational knowledge while ignoring its subjective parts, like the social context.

This way of thinking about knowledge is also stressed by Harris (2007) who argues that knowledge is bound to the environment of an individual and that one cannot leave this environment when acquiring knowledge. He stresses that in the study of other people's knowledge one's context should be taken into account with the notion that knowledge is acquired through time, work and experience. In that sense, knowing could be seen as ongoing, always changing and situated in a particular place and moment. This suggests that knowledge could be seen as a continuous process where it is reworked by human practice from one context to another (Harris, 2007).

Viewing knowledge in this way aligns with the constructivist approach to knowledge, wherein an individual is seen as an active agent in constructing their own knowledge and understanding of the world. In the constructivist view, knowledge is not considered an objective and absolute entity that exists independently of human perception and interpretation. Instead, the constructivist approach stresses that

people integrate new information with prior knowledge in the process of social construction. Therefore, different individuals may construct different meanings and interpretations based on their unique perspectives and experiences (Grant & Phene, 2022).

One contrasting perspective on knowledge is the positivist perspective in which the objective nature of knowledge is emphasized. In the positivist view, universal laws and objective reality can be observed and measured using quantitative methods and verification of hypotheses. This positivist paradigm diminishes the impact of subjectivity in the interpretation of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, this paradigm is not a suitable perspective to study the perspectives of vegan parents, as it overlooks the subjective interpretations, social context and active role of individuals in knowledge construction.

Thus, by adopting a constructivist approach, the subjective interpretations, social context and active role of individuals in knowledge constructions are acknowledged and embraced (Grant & Phene, 2022; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Understanding how vegan parents integrate different objects of care and sources of knowledge requires exploring their subjective perspectives and the ways in which they construct meaning and understanding within their unique contexts. Therefore, the constructivist approach is believed to be a suitable framework to study the perspectives of vegan parents.

2.1.2 The Limitations of the Deficit Model of Communication

Having established the constructivist approach to knowledge in the previous section, I further explore its implications for understanding the process of knowledge acquisition. Specifically, in the context of studying the perspectives of vegan parents, the deficit model of communication may not be a suitable fit due to its limited consideration of subjective interpretations and social context.

The deficit model of communication is a theory which assumes that individuals behave the way they do due to lack of knowledge about a certain topic. The assumption of this model is that when people possess correct knowledge, they will change their behaviour in accordance to this knowledge. So, within the frames of this model, if individuals do not behave in certain ways, it means that they do not have the accurate knowledge. Consequently, providing individuals with information should be enough to change their behaviour in the desired direction (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009).

The constructivist perspective on knowledge highlights that individuals actively construct new knowledge and understanding through their experiences and social discourse (Grant & Phene, 2022). Rather than passively receiving information, individuals integrate new knowledge, for instance nutritional information, within the context of their daily practices and personal meanings (Halkier, 2018). Therefore, within the constructivist perspective, providing individuals with information does not equal behaviour change. In other words, information needs to fit within individuals' daily routines in order to be used (Halkier, 2018). As a result, information is not universally interpreted in the same way by everyone (Grant & Phene, 2022).

Thus, the constructivist paradigm directly challenges the deficit model of communication, as it acknowledges that individuals construct their knowledge by integrating new information with their prior knowledge (Grant & Phene, 2022). When studying vegan parenting perspectives, it is important to consider the constructivist approach to knowledge acquisition and how their context, or objects of care they consider important, influence which sources of knowledge they consider relevant. Therefore, the deficit model of communication may not be suitable in this context.

2.1.3 The Concept of Legitimacy in Knowledge Acquisition

Moving beyond the deficit model of communication, I choose the concept of legitimacy of knowledge sources as a crucial consideration within this thesis. This concept aligns with the constructivist perspective and provides a more nuanced understanding of knowledge acquisition and dissemination among individuals.

Legitimacy refers to a “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). The perceived legitimacy impacts the way people engage with the information offered by authority figures and other sources of knowledge. People judge the legitimacy of knowledge based on their subjective perceptions and beliefs (de Boon et al., 2022; Gross, 2007). As a result, individuals do not passively accept information from all sources as legitimate (Gross, 2007).

For example, when people do not perceive the actions of authority or a source as addressing the correct problems, the perceived legitimacy lowers, and so does the willingness to comply with the suggested measures (de Boon et al., 2022). Conversely, if individuals perceive a knowledge source as legitimate, they are more likely to trust and accept the information provided by that source (de Boon et al., 2022). Therefore, the legitimacy of knowledge sources influences individuals' reception and acceptance of information provided by a source. If individuals do not view the sources as credible or trustworthy, they may resist behaviour change despite receiving information (Gross, 2007). This highlights the importance of considering individuals' perceptions of legitimacy and engaging with trusted sources when designing communication strategies to promote behaviour change.

In the context of studying the perspectives of vegan parents and understanding how they integrate different objects of care and sources of knowledge, the concept of legitimacy of knowledge sources becomes particularly relevant. By exploring the perceived legitimacy of knowledge sources, we can gain insights into the factors that influence individuals' reception and acceptance of information related to vegan parenting. This understanding is crucial for designing effective communication strategies that resonate with vegan parents and promote informed decision-making and behaviour change.

2.1.4 Intermediate summary

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the complex nature of knowledge and its implications for understanding individuals' perspectives. The adoption of a constructivist approach to knowledge acknowledges the active role of parents in knowledge construction and the social context of knowledge acquisition. This challenges the deficit model of communication and emphasizes the significance of legitimacy in evaluating knowledge sources. Understanding the legitimacy of knowledge sources is essential for designing effective communication strategies that promote informed decision-making and behaviour change among vegan parents.

2.2 Multiple Objects of Care

Building upon the constructivist perspective, in the second part of the Theoretical Framework I introduce the feminist care ethics and, subsequently, the critical lens on the care ethics that were utilized in this thesis. The feminist care ethics perspective emphasizes the significance of care in our lives and provides insights into the moral dimensions of caring practices, the importance of social relationships, and the role of emotions in guiding decisions. On the other hand, the critical care perspectives bring attention to the broader scope of care practices beyond conventional caregiving relationships, including nonhuman entities. In addition, they highlight the potential tensions and contradictions within caring practices and call for an examination of the ways in which care practices can reproduce existing power structures. These frameworks were chosen, because, similarly to the constructivist theorizations on knowledge,

they recognize the importance of social context in shaping one's understanding and ethical decision-making.

2.2.1 Ethics of care

In this section I delve into the ethics of care, its basic features and implications for understanding the perspectives of individuals. This framework emphasizes the significance of care in our lives and provides valuable insights into the moral dimensions of caring practices, the importance of social relationships and emotions in guiding ethical decisions.

Ethics of care challenges conventional moral theories that centre on logic and reason while devaluing care practices usually associated with women (Held, 2006). In her book, Tronto (1993) demonstrates how society tends to devalue care, contributing to the maintenance of the power of privileged people. The ethics of care was developed to conquer this devaluation, illustrating that care is necessary in order for society to function (Held, 2006) and that care matters in structuring society (Bartos, 2018). This perspective stresses that care is a fundamental part of society wherein everyone at some point gives and receives care (Langford et al., 2017).

Within this paradigm, care is often referred to as “a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p.40). Care is necessary because not all people or objects are able to take care of themselves (Tronto, 1993). Additionally, all who are able to read this, are able to do so because someone took care of them, at least in their early years (Bartos, 2018). Therefore, living is the result of care, and care is integral to daily life (Mol et al., 2010). Understanding care as central to daily life challenges the prevailing notions that devalue care practices and underscores the significance of care in sustaining and maintaining our world (Tronto, 1993).

Ethics of care can be seen as a mosaic of insights that cannot be described in universal terms, nevertheless, there are some common features of this approach that are worth mentioning. The first feature of ethics of care is the emphasis on caring and relationships. It places a strong importance on the attendance and response to the needs of others for whom responsibility is taken (Held, 2006). This perspective stresses the moral responsibility that comes with caring for someone because caring enables humans to live and advance. In that way, the actions and decisions of people have an impact on others. Therefore, in ethics of care, caring and social relationships are more valued than logic and reason (Held, 2006).

The second feature of ethics of care is the valuation of emotions in the guidance of morality rather than the rejection of them. Again, full reliance on logic and reason when considering morality is seen as deficient. At the same time, emotional understanding and empathy are valued because they enable the morally concerned caretakers to understand what is best for the one for whom care is taken. In this way, emotions can guide good decisions (Held, 2006).

The third feature of ethics of care is the critique of universal rules when it comes to morality (Held, 2006). Situational cues and social context can be crucial in care and, as Tronto (1993) argues, the construction of care also depends on the culture and social context. This perspective recognizes that each situation is unique, and moral judgments should consider the specific circumstances and relationships involved. For instance, caring for one's child can be in the foreground of someone's moral concerns based on their relationship with them. In this way, ethics of care recognizes that the caring agent is not unbiased or objective and that the relationships one has with others can guide moral decision-making. Therefore, in ethics of care, the moral claim of the dependent might be compelling even if it contrasts with universal moral judgments, like impartiality principles in conventional moral theories (Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993).

By adopting the ethics of care approach, the importance of situational cues, social relationships and social context in caring relations are recognized (Held, 2006). Vegan parenting involves navigating complex social dynamics, including interactions with family members, friends, and society at large. Understanding how vegan parents negotiate and integrate their objects of care within the practice of vegan parenting requires an exploration of their social context, emotional considerations, and perspectives. Therefore, the ethics of care framework provides a suitable lens for examining this interplay between care practices, social relationships, and the broader societal context in which vegan parenting takes place.

2.2.2 Critical care perspectives

Even though ethics of care provides a useful framework for understanding the perspectives of parents engaging in vegan parenting, some authors criticize this approach for letting out some other important aspects of care. In this section, I aim to describe these aspects and argue why this critical perspective on care ethics is another useful lens to investigate the practice of vegan parenting.

The critical care perspectives, as suggested by Raghuram (2016) and applied by Bartos (2018), bring attention to the broader scope of care practices beyond conventional caregiving relationships. This framework highlights that care extends to various objects of care, including nonhuman entities such as animals, places and the environment (Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). While the ethics of care approach acknowledges this perspective, it tends to focus primarily on traditional care relationships, such as those between parents and children (Shisler & Sbicca, 2019; Held, 2006). By adopting a critical lens of care ethics, the study of vegan parenting can delve into the complexities of caring for multiple objects and the potential conflicts that arise when caring practices for one entity impact others.

Furthermore, a critical lens on care ethics allows for an examination of the potential tensions and contradictions within caring practices. It recognizes that not all care relations are inherently good or pure, and that dominant discourses and ways of practicing care can perpetuate existing power relations and social inequalities (Bartos, 2018; Robinson, 2011). This critical perspective challenges the notion of care as universally positive and instead acknowledges the complexities and potential negative consequences that can arise from caring relationships. This framework calls for examination of the ways in which care practices can reproduce existing power structures (Bartos, 2018).

Taking it a step further, the critical lens of ethics of care goes beyond traditional care ethics by questioning power dynamics and inequalities inherent in relations of care. It recognizes that care is intertwined with power dynamics and shapes societal structures (Bartos, 2018; Raghuram, 2016). In fact, as Mol et al. (2010) stress that good and bad could be intertwined, with good care intentions having bad results or a good care practice having bad elements. Some people or entities can thrive and others can suffer as a result of caring relationships that they have or fail to have. In this way, a care practice can, at the same time, result in care for one entity and “carelessness” for another entity (Bartos, 2018). For example, as Chattoo & Ahmad (2008) argue autonomy and self-direction of the cared-for could be potentially impaired in the context of caring relationships. In other words, caring could be viewed as an infringement of one's autonomy (Giddens, 1998). To understand the structural impact of caring practices in society, it is crucial to explore the diversity of caring practices and the context in which they take place. By investigating these dynamics of power and the potential impairment of autonomy in caregiving relationships, this study can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the practice of vegan parenting and the ethical considerations involved.

In summary, adopting a critical lens of ethics of care in the study of vegan parenting provides a valuable framework for exploring the complexities, power dynamics, and ethical implications inherent in caring practices. By questioning power structures, recognizing the diversity of objects of care, and examining the tensions and contradictions within caring relationships, this critical perspective offers a deeper analysis of the socio-political dimensions of vegan parenting. Moreover, by adopting this lens we can

shed light on the complexities and challenges faced by parents as they strive to uphold ethical caregiving practices.

2.2.3 Intermediate summary

In conclusion, the combination of the ethics of care framework and critical care perspectives offers a comprehensive lens to study the practice of vegan parenting. The ethics of care recognizes the importance of situational cues, social relationships, and social context in caregiving, providing insights into how vegan parents navigate the complexities of caring for their children. In addition, the critical care perspectives take this framework further by questioning power dynamics, recognizing the diversity of objects of care, and examining the tensions and contradictions within caring relationships. This approach allows for an exploration of how vegan parents navigate the diverse objects of care, including their children's health, animal welfare, and environmental concerns, and how they negotiate the potential tensions and contradictions within these care practices.

2.3 Summary Theoretical Framework

In summary, the Theoretical Framework presented in this section integrates constructivist theorizations on knowledge, feminist care ethics, and a critical lens on care ethics to provide a comprehensive understanding of how parents navigate and integrate different objects of care and sources of knowledge in the context of vegan parenting. While each theory emphasizes different aspects, they share common ground in their focus on subjective experiences, social context, and the relational nature of knowledge and care. These perspectives enable a nuanced analysis of the ethical, social, and practical dimensions of vegan parenting, unveiling the intricate dynamics that shape parental decision-making and caregiving practices. By adopting these theoretical lenses, I aim to shed light on the multifaceted nature of vegan parenting and contribute to our broader understanding of caregiving practices and knowledge integration.

3 Methodology and methods

3.1 Study design

Given that the aim of the study was to investigate how parents negotiate different objects of care and sources of knowledge in the practice of vegan parenting, the qualitative, Big Q, non-positivist methodology of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) was utilized. Within this reflexive thematic analysis, there is no assumption of “unbiased or objective knowledge generation” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.8), but rather this paradigm recognizes the researcher’s subjectivity and positionality during the process of data coding and analysis as a resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis embraces the constructivist perspective by emphasizing the active role of the researcher in constructing knowledge. The researcher is seen as an active agent in the construction of the results, bringing along the researcher’s personality and theoretical assumptions. Therefore, in the context of reflexive thematic analysis a purely inductive approach to the data is impossible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this research, the Theoretical Framework was used as a lens. In practical terms, this meant that the researcher held the theories from the Theoretical Framework (deductive approach) in mind during the analysis while incorporating an inductive data analysis coding technique to keep an open mind to emerging phenomena. This created space for new, unexpected findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Additionally, consistent with reflexive thematic analysis approach no hypotheses were established before the data collection. Furthermore, the reflexive thematic analysis approach comes closer to a cluster of methods rather than a methodology. Nevertheless, methodological integrity can be achieved through a conceptually coherent design (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.2 Positionality

To ensure quality of reflexive thematic analysis, reflexivity should be evident. Therefore, it is important to consider the researcher’s personal positioning in relation to the researched topic (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study, the researcher herself identifies as a vegan and holds strong concerns about the excessive consumption of animal-based products and its impact on the environment and animal welfare.

It is important to acknowledge that the researcher's personal positioning may have influenced the interpretation of the data, particularly in relation to reconciling different objects of care in challenging situations. Specifically, the researcher's perspectives on climate change and animal welfare may have played a role in shaping the analysis of how participants navigate these objects of care in challenging situations.

Additionally, the researcher’s shared identity as a vegan enabled her to create a sense of empathy and connection with participants, because the researcher was able to relate to the experiences and challenges of the participants. This vegan identity likely heightened her sensitivity to the issues and concerns faced by vegan parents, because of her own encounters with similar issues in her personal life. This may have enhanced a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns faced by vegan parents.

However, the researcher is not a parent herself. This lack of experience as a parent provided the researcher with an outsider’s perspective, allowing her to approach the topic of vegan parenting without imposing her own parental experiences and beliefs onto their stories. This allowed her to approach the topic with fresh eyes and to be more receptive to the individual experiences of parents.

Furthermore, the reflexivity in this study was approached through the discussions with the supervisors during the analysis. These discussions provided an opportunity for critical reflection, allowing the researcher to consider her personal positioning, potential biases, and the influence they may have had on the research process and analysis.

3.3 Data collection

The data collection method used in this study included semi-structured in-depth interviews. This method was used, because the researcher was interested in the perspectives on knowledge from a constructivist standpoint. Qualitative interviews allowed the researcher to explore the participants' perspectives and participants to share their thoughts and experiences in their own words. Moreover, qualitative interviews provided a context-rich environment that allowed the researcher to delve into the social, cultural, and personal factors that shape participants' perspectives on knowledge and care.

In reflexive thematic analysis there are no specific guidelines regarding the sample size. However, it is important to be able to identify patterns across data and to capture the diversity of views within the "population" (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To do this, a total of 17 parents were interviewed by one researcher in 15 distinct interviews (see Table 1). The sample of interest in this study was parents who raise their children on a vegan diet. The inclusion criteria were that the participants had to speak Dutch or English, and their children had to follow a vegan diet which is imposed upon them by their parents. If a child decided to follow a vegan diet itself, it not being the decision of the parents, the parents were not qualified to participate in the study.

Most participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method, namely through Facebook vegan groups, particularly the ProVeg Dutch Vegan Parenting group. Additionally, two participants were recruited using the purposive sampling method, by sending them a personal e-mail with invitation for the research. All participants described themselves as vegan and engaging in the practice of vegan parenting. They were interviewed in the Netherlands, eleven of them being mothers and six of them being fathers with their age varying between 28-48 years old. All participants were Dutch, with one participant having a Costa Ricans' nationality. Also, all interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch.

Approximately half of the interviews were conducted in person and the other half through Microsoft Teams. The reason for the second option was either time constraints of the participants or long travel times for the interviewer. The interviews were conducted in the period of January-February 2023 and began with asking for the informed consent (see Appendix 1). The informed consent gave background information about the research, informed the participant about the duration of the research (approx. 60 min) and the participant's right to terminate the interview at any time if the participant wished to. Moreover, by signing the informed consent, participants gave permission for the researcher to record the interview and to the data management procedures as described in the section 'Data Management'. The interview schedule contained parts with questions about vegan parenting in practice, objects of care, knowledge sources and the social environment. See Appendix 3 for the general interview schedule and Appendix 2 for the semi-structured interview schedule. The questions were open-ended and the interviewer asked follow-up questions during the interview while attending to the interviewees' answers. The sequence of questions was sometimes adjusted organically.

3.4 Data analysis

To ensure quality of this research, the steps used in the analysis should be described in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The reflexive thematic analysis of this research was informed by the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) which includes the following steps: familiarize with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes and produce the report. The theoretical lenses used during this analysis are described in the Theoretical Framework. The first step, familiarizing with the data, involved listening to the audio recordings, transcribing and reading them. The second step, generating initial codes, was an inductive enquiry to make sure to not miss any essential information that could have been missed when focussing extensively on existing theories. The coding software that

was used in this research is ATLAS.TI and the coding was performed by one person. This is a common practice in reflexive thematic analysis, as coding quality depends on reflexivity and depth of interpretation, rather than intercoder agreement (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The third step included searching for themes. The researcher's and supervisors' subjectivity were used to make sense of the data. In this step, the researcher linked parental objects of care to the levels of strictness. Also, the researcher constructed patterns across the data in the formation of knowledge in parents. Based on this, two main themes were constructed by the researcher. However, in the fourth step, the themes were reviewed. In this step, the researcher focused more on existing theories from the Theoretical Framework. The comparison of the obtained inductively analysed data against existing theories allowed the verification of existing theories or the identification of new dimensions and concepts when puzzling empirical findings emerged (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The fifth step continued with renaming the themes and sub-themes and forming three main themes instead of two. This change allowed the researcher to create a connection between the constructivist theories on knowledge and critical approach to ethics of care in the care practice of vegan parenting which can be seen in the second theme in the section 'Results and Discussion'.

3.5 Data management

The data management plan for this research followed the guidelines of the data management policy of the Consumption and Healthy Lifestyles chair group at Wageningen University & Research (WUR). The data obtained during this research, namely the audio-recordings, the corresponding transcripts as well as the informed consents will be stored in the shared WUR server (W-drive). During the research only the researcher (Adrianna Konkol) and her supervisors (Hilje van der Horst and Yolie Michielsen) had access to the data. This means that the collected data are closed access. One year after the completion of the research, those data will be archived in the W-drive for a period of 10 years. This is in accordance to the code from The Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). In the case of publication of this research, the data will only become available upon request.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research is believed to satisfy common norms for ethical treatment of participants. First of all, this research was conducted in competent adult subjects, meaning that no vulnerable groups took part in this research. Additionally, no known social, emotional, political nor physical risk is bounded to the participation in this research. Furthermore, no data is collected on confidential or sensitive issues and all personal data were anonymized so that the identity of participants could not be inferred. Moreover, the participants were presented with an informed consent which enabled them to decide to voluntarily participate in the research. The informed consent (in Dutch) can be found in Appendix 1. Lastly, to ensure general standards of ethical conduct, the ethical aspects of this research were reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee (SEC).

4 Results and Discussion

To explore how different sources of knowledge and objects of care are integrated in the practice of vegan parenting, 17 parents were interviewed in 15 distinct interviews. Their demographics can be seen in Table 1. Three main themes with corresponding subthemes have been created in the analysis of the results, which can be seen in Table 2. In line with the suggestions on reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2021), frequency counts were avoided, as frequency does not equal importance.

Respondent(s)	Respondent's gender	Respondent's age (years)	Amount of children	Children's age (years)
Olivia	female	37	1 (and pregnant)	2
Lara	female	28	1	1,5
Kevin	male	37	2	6 and 8
Frank	male	49	2	18 and 19
Nathan	male	32	1	1
Kate	female	39	2	2,5 and 5
Andrea and Bruce	female and male	35 and 35	2	1 and 3
Angela	female	40	2	5 and 7
Lily	female	38	3	2, 5 and 7
Karen and Chris	female and male	37 and 37	1 (and pregnant)	8
Tina	female	33	2	8 and 8
Sara	female	37	2	4 and 6
Oliver	male	48	2	8 and 11
Iva	female	36	1	1,5
Mara	female	43	2	8 and 12

Table 1. Demographic table of the participants in the study. The names have been changed due to privacy reasons.

Themes	Subthemes
Integrating multiple objects of care through three levels of strictness in vegan parenting	Objects of care in vegan parenting (care for animals, environment, identity, (children's) health and children's social welfare)
	Universal strategies to integrate objects of care during challenging situations
	Three levels of parental strictness (strict vegan parenting, semi-strict vegan parenting and not-strict vegan parenting)
Integrating multiple objects of care through knowledge formation and implementation	Care for children's health through knowledge formation
	Interactions between objects of care and the legitimacy of knowledge sources
	The implementation of the acquired knowledge in daily practices
Phases of knowledge formation and the corresponding sources of knowledge	Five phases of knowledge formation and the corresponding sources of knowledge
	Knowledge Formation in daily practices

Table 2. Themes and subthemes that have been constructed from the data.

4.1 Integrating Multiple Objects of Care through Three Levels of Strictness in Vegan Parenting

In this chapter, I adopt an inductive approach, complemented by the lens of the ethics of care and critical ethics of care to explore the complex dynamics of vegan parenting. First, I focus on objects of care that shape vegan parenting: animals, environment, (children's) health, (vegan) identity, and children's social

welfare. Subsequently, I explore the inherent conflicts of interest these objects of care can produce when parents are confronted with challenging situations, highlighting the relational and context-dependent aspects of care. After presenting the challenging situations where conflicts of interests between objects of care arise, I describe universal strategies parents employ to reconcile these competing objects of care. As parents balance their care for objects of care related to veganism with the practicalities of their children's needs, compromises may become inevitable. Subsequently, I introduce the concept of “strictness” towards children’s veganism, categorized into strict, semi-strict and non-strict vegan parenting, which are influenced by parental differences in their views on care for identity, children’s social welfare and health. This analysis contributes to the broader discussion on the ethics of care by illustrating how care, identity, and ethical choices intersect and influence each other in the context of vegan parenting.

4.1.1 Objects of Care in Vegan Parenting

In this section I describe the objects of care that were deemed important to parents in the context of vegan parenting, and their connection to values. Additionally, I examine the various challenging situations that parents encounter, which present tensions and difficulties when attempting to integrate these objects of care. By delving into these aspects, I aim to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics of vegan parenting.

During the inductive analysis, care for animals, environment and health were captured as important objects of care motivating parents to adopt a vegan lifestyle and engage in the practice of vegan parenting. This finding corresponds with other studies researching people’s motives to adopt a vegan diet (e.g. Bivi et al., 2021; Fresán et al., 2020; Ghaffari et al., 2022) and suggest that objects of care, indeed, extend beyond conventional caregiving relationships to other entities (Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). The interviews also gave insight in a consistent pattern amongst participants, wherein veganism extends beyond mere dietary choices and becomes a comprehensive way of life. In a typical trajectory, participants emphasized that veganism encompasses a broader philosophy and set of values that guide their daily choices and actions which became an important part of their identity.

Values, as defined by Schwartz (1994), refer to beliefs pertaining to desirable end states or modes of conduct that transcend specific situations. Values play a crucial role in the formation of social identity, as they provide individuals with the emotional and value significance attached to their membership in specific social groups (Tajfel, 1972). By adopting and internalizing the values of their in-group, individuals develop a sense of belonging and affiliation, shaping their behaviours, and judgments within the group (Hogg, 2016). Values differ from objects of care in that they act as guiding principles that influence behaviour and decision-making (Schwartz, 1994) while objects of care are specific entities or areas to which parents direct their care and attention (Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). In essence, values provide a moral compass for individuals' caregiving actions and shape their priorities, motivations, and commitments towards specific objects of care.

In this study, parents became vegan at a certain point in their lives and expressed commitment to continue this lifestyle. This led to the inductive construction of a fourth care object in the analysis: care for identity. This finding aligns with Greenebaum (2012) qualitative research in which she observed the desire of some vegans to construct their authentic vegan identity through actions and performances that align with the values and norms of veganism. These findings are also consistent with Twine’s (2014) notion that veganism represents a social practice deeply rooted in the beliefs and values of vegans, extending beyond dietary choices.

“As a parent, it's important for me to hold my ground and find ways to involve my child in everything while still staying true to my own beliefs and values.” Tina

"There's no turning back (...) I wish I'd switched sooner (...) Everyone can say, well, you're not sure if this is forever. Yes, I'm sure it's forever. I'll always be vegan, no matter what. It doesn't matter, even if I have to starve." Iva

Additionally, the analysis gave insight in that vegan parenting comes with fifth object of care: care for the child's social welfare. Parents frequently talked about situations where they experienced difficulties in integrating all the objects of care: animals, environment, (children's) health, identity and their children's social welfare. This aligns with empirical research on nursing practices wherein carers experience conflict of interests when they need to follow the prescribed guidelines while attending to the needs of the cared-for elderly who express needs that deviate from these guidelines (Breitholtz et al., 2013; Solum et al., 2008).

In some situations, parents need to prioritize one object of care over the others, for example, by making compromises to objects of care related to animals or environment to ensure child's social welfare or health. This prioritization can be understood within the framework of ethics of care, where the parent, as the caregiver, attends to the needs of their child, the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). It involves being attentive to the child's needs rather than solely focusing on the objects of care related to veganism, potentially leading to conflicts between objects of care for parents. The individual care ethics within these relationships require negotiation, reflecting the nuanced and context-dependent nature of the ethics of care (Tronto, 1993).

Furthermore, conflicts between objects of care can be viewed through the lens of critical perspectives of ethics of care. This perspective recognizes that caring for one entity can impact the other (Held, 2006). Noddings (2012) discusses similar conflicts in the context of teachers who have to follow a prescribed curriculum while addressing the individual needs of their students, which may deviate from the assumed needs of the educational system.

During the interviews, the conflicts and tensions between objects of care were frequently mentioned when the children were not under the parents' direct control, for instance when they are outside of their home. Participants reported facing numerous challenging situations that tested their ability to reconcile these competing objects of care. The most frequently mentioned challenging situations were school, day-care, treats for the child, playdates at a friend's house, outings, celebrations, being outside with parents, visiting a (petting) zoo, and visiting grandparents. The notion of school being an issue when it comes to vegan parenting aligns with the findings of Bivi et al. (2021) who observed that according to parents, schools were unlikely places to find vegan food, support the notion that school is a challenging area in vegan parenting. The following quotes show some examples of how participants talk about those challenging situations:

"For us within the family, it's very easy (...). But when you have older children who go to school, uhm... then you do encounter more problems, especially because it's less socially accepted." Tina

"Where it gets a bit trickier is when the kids are outside of the house or at school without us. With treats, there are some potential issues, you could say." Kevin

"I find it difficult, for example, your family, they all eat cheese... it's really... (...) also parties and such... Yes, that's very hard." Andrea and Bruce

"My child can hardly eat anything with some children, because they have nothing without milk." Karen and Chris

"Going to kids' parties can be tough. Like last time they were at a party at Monkey Town... Yeah, how are we supposed to handle that? I explain it to them. But that's difficult too and then they see other kids all eating a cookie. Yeah, that's what I find difficult." Tina

"What is true is that since my daughter started going to school, there is quite a lot of external influence with treats and children's parties with cakes." Sara

"The difficult thing is when you go somewhere, you have to search for where you can go. That's the little thing. (...) My in-laws may be difficult, and my mother as well." Oliver

4.1.2 Universal strategies to integrate objects of care during challenging situations

In this section, I build upon the previous discussion by exploring the universal strategies employed by parents to integrate their objects of care when faced with challenging situations. By examining these strategies, I aim to achieve a deeper understanding of how parents navigate the complexities of vegan parenting and reconcile their objects of care.

When faced with challenging situations, participants employed various strategies to integrate their objects of care. There are some shared strategies employed by the majority of participants. Firstly, participants disclosed their child's veganism to their child's social environment, including school, day-care, grandparents, and parents of their children's friends to ensure adherence to the child's vegan diet. Secondly, participants reported to follow a strict vegan diet at home and when the children are with them, with the majority only allowing exceptions from veganism when their children were not with them. This corresponds with Bivi et al.'s (2021) findings, in which 82.9% of their surveyed sample indicated that they would not prohibit their children from tasting animal-based products, if they expressed interest in it. Lastly, most participants talked to their children about veganism to inform them about why they choose to follow this lifestyle and motivate their children to adhere to a vegan diet voluntarily. These strategies imply that parents try to adhere to their vegan values, or objects of care related to veganism, in their parenting practices.

"When my child goes to play with friends, I then say, 'He follows a plant-based diet'." Sara

"What we do is a strictly vegan lifestyle at home. There's no arguing with that, but when our kids are somewhere without us, we always make it clear that we're vegan." Lily

"I think it's crucial to talk to your kids about why you're making that choice, and explain that there are other people who do not make this choice. And... sometimes it can be hard for them to understand, you know, like why would people choose to eat animals if they don't have to?" Kevin

4.1.3 Three levels of Parental Strictness

In this section, I build upon the previous discussions by further exploring the strategies employed by parents to integrate their objects of care when faced with challenging situations. By exploring the differences in strategies between parents, I introduce three categories of parental strictness: strict vegan parenting, semi-strict vegan parenting, and non-strict vegan parenting. These categories reflect different levels of adherence to veganism and varying priorities placed on different objects of care. In this section I examine the strategies employed by parents in each category and highlight their motivations. By delving into these categories and exploring the differences in parental strategies, I aim to further provide a comprehensive understanding of how parents navigate the integration of their objects of care within the context of vegan parenting.

Building upon the common strategies to reconcile objects of care discussed earlier, it is observed that participants differ in how they prioritize and address different objects of care during challenging situations, as well as the strategies they use to balance these objects of care. Different patterns have been generated in how parents deal with challenging situations, particularly regarding their level of strictness towards adhering to their child's veganism. This notion of strictness is constructed in the analysis as a reflection of their varying focus on different objects of care. It is striking that parents generally shared similar objects of care but had different perspectives on them, resulting in the construction of varying levels of strictness. As a result, parents in this study have been categorized in three categories: strict vegan parenting, semi-strict vegan parenting, and non-strict vegan parenting (see Table 3). Notably, it is worth noting that while many parents who were categorized in the less strict categories identify themselves as "not strict," there is one case of a parent categorized in the strict category that self-identifies as "strict." This self-identification aligns with the established patterns observed in how parents navigate challenging situations.

One significant finding is the association between strictness and the care for identity. Parents who were categorized as strict exhibited a strong focus on their vegan identity and its representation in their parenting practices. This suggests that care for identity may influence the level of strictness in parental adherence to their children's veganism. On the other hand, parents who appeared to place less importance on their vegan identity were categorized in the less strict categories. They seemed to have a more flexible approach, indicating a lesser emphasis on maintaining a strict vegan identity. Furthermore, no significant differences were observed between the levels of strictness and the care for animals or the environment. It is important to note that the level of strictness can vary depending on the context. For example, some parents may adopt a stricter approach in situations involving school and grandparents, while being more lenient during their child's birthday or celebrations with friends. In the upcoming paragraphs, I shall delve deeper into the three distinct categories of strictness constructed in this study.

Additionally, the analysis sheds light on that, generally, parents of young children tend to exert greater control over their children's dietary choices, while this control decreases as children grow older and face increasing social pressures, underscoring their attunement to the children's social needs by allowing exceptions. Consequently, this suggests that having younger children and maintaining strict adherence to veganism does not necessarily compromise the fulfilment of all parental objects of care simultaneously. However, as their children grow older, parents are faced with the task of reconciling all their objects of care, which may require making compromises towards their vegan values.

(Challenging) situations:	Not-strict vegan parenting (n=5)	Semi-strict vegan parenting (n=4)	Strict vegan parenting (n=6)
At home with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully vegan consumption Talk to child about vegan norms and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully vegan consumption Talk to child about vegan norms and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully vegan consumption Talk to child about vegan norms and values
Outside of home with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sporadic vegetarian exceptions to child's veganism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully vegan consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully vegan consumption
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform school about child's veganism Child can decide if he wants to make vegetarian exceptions Offer to think along with a vegan solution with school staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform school about child's veganism Prefer no exceptions to child's veganism, but let the child decide Offer to think along with a vegan solution with school staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform school about child's veganism No exceptions to child's veganism allowed Control if carried out correctly Offer to think along with a vegan solution with school staff
Day-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform day-care about child's veganism (except for one case) Sporadic vegetarian exceptions to child's veganism Little control if carried out correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform day-care about child's veganism Child has to eat vegan Prefer no exceptions to child's veganism, but little control if carried out correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform day-care about child's veganism Vegan lunch from home No exceptions child's veganism allowed Control if carried out correctly
Treats at school/day-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide no separate vegan treat tray Child can eat vegetarian treats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide separate vegan treat tray child can choose between vegan and vegetarian treat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide separate vegan treat tray child has to choose a vegan treat from the vegan treat tray
Grandparents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform grandparents about child's veganism Child has to eat vegan Sporadic exceptions to child's veganism allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform grandparents about child's veganism child has to eat vegan little control if carried out correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform grandparents about child's veganism Child has to eat vegan No exceptions child's veganism allowed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not control if carried out correctly 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control if carried out correctly
Playdates with friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other parents about child's veganism Prefer child to eat vegan Do not control if carried out correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other parents about child's veganism Offer to give separate vegan food Do not control if carried out correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other parents about child's veganism Offer to give separate vegan food Control if carried out correctly
Festive gatherings (e.g. Easter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child can choose vegetarian food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others about child's veganism Give separate vegan food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others about child's veganism Give separate vegan food
Children outings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others about child's veganism Child can choose vegetarian food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others about child's veganism Talk to child what he can and cannot eat Let the child decide vegan/vegetarian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others about child's veganism Talk to child about what he/she can and cannot eat
(petting) zoo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do visit zoo's 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not visit zoo's

Table 3. Parental strategies to integrate their objects of care (care for child's health, care for child's social welfare, care for identity, care for animals and care for environment).

Strict vegan parenting. In general, parents who were categorized into the “strict vegan parenting” category were reluctant to make exceptions to their child’s veganism and employed various strategies to avoid doing so. They seemed to exert greater control over their children’s adherence to veganism. Additionally, it has been observed that parents who fall in the “strict vegan parenting” category seemed to emphasize their vegan identity more than parents who have been categorized into other groups. For example, in the interviews they self-identified as “vegan” and discussed how a vegan should behave in certain situations. In the analysis, this has been constructed as their way to care for their (vegan) identity. Care for identity was particularly expressed through their motivation to not make exceptions from veganism for themselves and their children. Additionally, in two interviews parents stressed that their children were allergic to animal-based products which motivated them to be more controlling to their children’s veganism due to not only care for the animals, environment or their identity but also as a means to care for their children’s health.

“My child also has real allergies to eggs and milk, so that’s an extra factor outside of the principle of, well, I just don’t want him to eat animal products.” Lara

“You know, as a vegan, it’s... umm, the dilemma you face. And I can also imagine that... at least not for myself... I would never choose cow’s milk. But I can understand that some vegan parents... have the desire to raise a child vegan and then, in a situation like this (not being able to breastfeed), they would still choose to give cow’s milk.” Iva

In the following quotes, Nathan and Lara discuss their strategies for the challenging situation of day-care. In those examples it can be seen that these parents exert control over their children’s adherence to veganism during day-care.

“They always make something separate for him. So if they eat something with meat, then he just gets potatoes with carrots or something. Sometimes he has eaten something vegan, but then it’s not registered correctly in the system. And then I think: shit.” Lara

“At the day-care, she receives a warm lunch. We skip that and provide her with her own lunch. And during the intake, you make sure they know that we want her to be raised vegan (...) you remind them that she cannot have animal products.” Nathan

It is noteworthy that parents in this category have young pre-school children (except for Tina). There could be several reasons for this. The first one is that parents of young children are probably able to exert more control over their children’s food choices, because young children are less independent than older children who can potentially make more food choices themselves. The second reason is that these parents may be more idealistic, not having faced as many challenging situations yet compared to parents of older children, who in this study have made more compromises towards their vegan objectives. For both these reasons, it is argued that caring for animals, the environment and identity does not compromise caring for their children’s social welfare, and being strict in the child’s veganism fits in reconciling all parental objects of care related to veganism and parenting.

“It’s a matter of figuring out how he doesn’t feel left out. I mean, he’s still so young, does he really care at this point? He eats what we give him.” Olivia

Parents who fall in the “strict vegan parenting” category and have pre-school aged children differed in how they envision their approach to vegan parenting in the future. The mother from the previous quote envisioned adhering to a strict vegan diet for her child in the future. A reason for this is also her care for her child’s health. She believes that a vegan diet is healthier than other diets and wants to provide it for her child out of care for her child’s health.

“But of course, there will come a time when he wants to start grabbing things himself. (...) I envision that we will just provide alternatives ourselves. If there's cake and it's not vegan, then I'll make sure there's a piece of cake for him that is vegan.” Olivia

“I believe that, as long as you eat a varied diet, which applies to any diet, it is definitely healthier. He doesn't consume all those saturated fats and cholesterol that come from meat and such. Moreover, if you look at all the scandals in recent years regarding what is found in meat, it further reinforces this decision.” Olivia

On the other hand, Nathan admitted being strict now but considers that this may change in the future, depending on how his daughter is. This exemplifies that, if needed, he is willing to compromise his vegan objectives out of care for his child's social welfare.

“Maybe eh... when she's a bit older (...) when she experiences more peer pressure, then maybe we'll think differently. Um... It also depends a bit on how she is herself.” Nathan

Tina, the only parent in the “strict vegan parenting” category who has school-aged children turned vegan four years ago out of care for animals. Since then, she strives to make no exceptions to her and her children's veganism. This could also be seen as a form for caring for her vegan identity. She admits being strict herself and she is proud of her choice to be vegan and engage in vegan parenting.

“My father (...) says 'I'm not as strict in my beliefs as you are.' Well, my mother and I are. So when my children go there, everything is also vegan. When they go to their best friend's house... everything is also vegan there.” Tina

“It really stems from my beliefs and that I don't want to participate in this (animal cruelty); I find it so terrible.” Tina

Next to her deep care for animal welfare, she also sees vegan diet as the healthiest option for her children. So for her, caring for the animals as well as her children's health goes together through strict adherence to a vegan diet for her children.

“A piece of meat is naturally very unhealthy. Eggs are also considered unhealthy. Eventually, milk as well, well, you can go on. So (...) I do believe that veganism is healthier.” Tina

Tina employed various strategies to ensure that her children follow a strict vegan diet outside of home:

“We agreed beforehand that they would eat fries there. I said: Just take fries with ketchup. And they did that nicely. We tried to explain that to them beforehand.” Tina

“As the one teacher suggested, is it an idea to put a treat box at school with vegan treats in it that are tasty for them. When a treat is given out, then I'll check beforehand if they can eat it. And if not, they'll get something from the treat box.” Tina

“Then we sort the treats out together, we look at what they can eat. Sometimes they may not find anything suitable among the treats, in which case we go to Albert Heijn (supermarket) and let them choose their own (vegan) candy.” Tina

Even though Tina appeared to be strict on her children's adherence to veganism, reflecting her care for animals, identity and her children's health, she acknowledged that veganism could pose social difficulties for her children outside of home. She tried to compensate her strictness with alternative

strategies to ensure her children's social welfare. A strategy showing Tina's care for her children's social welfare can be seen below:

"When they go to a children's party (...) make it a party for them too, so that they don't feel like they're just chewing on vegetables (...) but also give them tasty things (...) for a child to be able to say, 'Look, I have delicious things too,' and then it becomes fun, and I always give a little more so that other kids can taste it and feel involved." Tina

All in all, the category of "strict vegan parenting" entails parents who adhere strictly to veganism for their children and make efforts to avoid exceptions. Strict vegan parenting is driven by the reconciliation of care for animals, the environment, identity, (children's) health and children's social welfare. Various strategies are employed by these parents to reconcile objects of care related to veganism with care for children's social welfare, such as providing their own food for their child outside of home, reminding instances about their child's veganism, and providing (tasty) vegan alternatives at social events. The parents in this category typically emphasize their vegan identity more than parents in other categories, viewing veganism as an important set of values. It is notable that parents with very young children were put into this category, possibly due to greater control over food choices and the possibility to reconcile all their objects of care by being strict without much conflict of interest between their objects of care. While some envision maintaining strict veganism for their children in the future, others acknowledge the potential for flexibility depending on their child's needs and social pressures. Overall, strict vegan parenting is driven by care for animals, the environment, identity, and health, with various strategies employed to balance these vegan objectives with social welfare of the children.

Semi-strict vegan parenting. Parents categorized as the "semi-strict vegan parents" tended to allow more exceptions and be more flexible towards their children's veganism than parents who fall into the "strict vegan parenting" category. Semi-strict parents seemed to combine strategies from the other two categories constructed in this research to make it work for them (see Table 3). They preferred not to make exceptions to their child's veganism out of care for animals, environment and identity, but they let it voluntarily happen from time to time depending on the situation. Typically, children of these parents were somewhat older than children in the previous category, with an exception of a couple who just recently started vegan parenting, suggesting that these parents have less control over their children food choices when the children are not with them. Interviewees in this category placed more emphasis on their children's own choice and autonomy than the parents of children from the "strict vegan parenting" category. As a typical strategy, they usually (offer to) provide vegan food for their children outside of home but let the children decide if they want to choose vegetarian options.

"Yes, I did indicate that (children are vegan). I left boxes of raisins at the day-care and then I said: if someone wants to treat (...) candy and sometimes candy does contain milk or egg (...) Well, then I also say, let him choose for himself whether he wants that or raisins." Sara

Allowing children to make more of their own food choices outside of home is constructed as parental way of caring for their children's social welfare, because parents allow the children to individually assess whether they want to eat the same food as their peers or whether they feel okay with vegan options. This aligns with the views of Bou-Habib and Olsaretti (2015) that embracing children's autonomy is linked to their well-being. Another explanation of the "semi-strictness" could be that caring for older children's social welfare would be compromised by a very strict adherence to a vegan diet, so parents choose to allow exceptions to somehow balance all their objects of care. For example, parents talked about their desire to prevent their child from feeling like an outcast due to veganism, this being the biggest motivator to allow exceptions from veganism from time to time. According Herring (2022), in terms of ethics of care, being responsive to the child's needs instead of moulding the child into parent's ideal could be seen as a form of attuned care for the care-for person. Giddens (1998) argues that relations of care could be viewed as an invasion to the autonomy of the cared-for person. However, Chattoo and Ahmad (2008)

argue in their research that, in some cases, autonomy can be fostered through caring practices, a concept that could be exemplified by the approach of these “semi-strict parents.”

“I really want to be 100% vegan... in everything. And I just notice that it can be quite challenging when it comes to children and activities outside the home. Let me give you an example: Tomorrow, my middle child has a party. I asked in advance about the lunch or if I should pack something. But they're going to some children's play paradise where they'll be having pancakes and fries. Now, I could dig in my heels and say that only the fries are allowed, and I would give them vegan mayonnaise, but I don't do that because I also consider whether it should still be manageable, you know? I don't want it to be too difficult for others and for my son.” Lily

However, for some “semi-strict parents” allowing exceptions was also a way to care for animals and the environment. For example, parents in this category talked about allowing exceptions in order to prevent their children from developing an aversion to veganism in the long-term. This can be viewed as a way of caring for animals and the environment because by occasionally allowing exceptions when their children are not with them, they hope to instill a long-term commitment to the vegan lifestyle of their children without fostering resentment, ultimately benefiting the animals and the environment. For example, Kevin, admits not to be too strict and letting his children decide if they want a vegetarian treat at school, out of care for their children’s social welfare and objects of care related to veganism:

“We are intentionally not too dogmatic about it. We are a bit pragmatic... we are not 100% strict about it. The reason being that we want to avoid it becoming a social isolation-like thing for the children which could potentially lead them to develop an aversion to veganism. By doing that, you prevent less suffering than occasionally weighing the social aspect and animal welfare concerns. (...) In practical terms, they each have their own treat box in class. And if someone brings treats that aren't vegan, they can choose something from there. But they can also choose a non-vegan treat as long as it is at least vegetarian. (...) So, if you think about it very strictly, it's not entirely correct, of course.”
Kevin

In the last sentence of Kevin's quote, his genuine care for his vegan identity becomes evident. After explaining his strategies to reconcile various aspects of care, he highlights that straying from strictness is not completely aligned with his values. What’s also striking in Kevin’s quote is that he, as well as other parents who allow children’s exceptions during challenging situations, only allow vegetarian exceptions. This implies that vegetarian consumption is a kind of safe compromise where parental main objects of care are still somehow united.

In the typical trajectory within this category, parents place more emphasis on their children’s freedom of choice and autonomy when they envision the future of their children, compared to parents categorized into the “strict vegan parenting” group.

“At the moment they're at an age where everything I say, they agree with it. Yes, ultimately that might change, and they'll also start looking at their friends. I was very consciously thinking ahead... I thought okay, I want children. But they are independent human beings who have their own life and if they choose to live differently, it's their choice. I cannot influence that choice. I can only show them how I do it. But beyond that, I wouldn't get upset or think that my parenting has failed.” Sara

But they are independent human beings who have their own life and if they choose to live differently, it’s their choice. I cannot influence that choice. I can only show them how I do it.

All in all, semi-strict vegan parents are of opinion that strictness may lead to social isolation or resistance and choose to allow exceptions to reconcile all their objects of care. By permitting occasional exceptions, parents aim to foster a long-term commitment to veganism without developing aversion or resentment, thus benefiting animals and the environment, or they aim to respect their children’s

autonomy, which could be seen as their care for their children's social welfare. They still care for their vegan identity, however, care for their children's social welfare does not always allow them to adhere fully to the vegan objectives. Notably, parents in this category did not discuss care for health, suggesting that this might not be a relevant object of care for this group. It is notable that parents of slightly older children were put in this category, when compared to the parents who were put into the "strict vegan parenting" category, suggesting that the older age of children goes together with more compromise towards strict vegan objectives.

Non-strict vegan parenting. The "not-strict vegan parenting" category includes parents who tended to be more lenient with allowing (vegetarian) exceptions for their children compared to other categories. Moreover, these parents expressed less care for their vegan identity. However, they talked more than other categories in terms of not being strict when it comes to their children's veganism which could also be seen as care for their (not strict) identity. As a strategy in the typical trajectory, they informed individuals in their child's social environment about their child's veganism without exerting control over the implementation of these dietary choices.

"And also when they go to play with friends, I ask... I do say: he eats plant-based, but I'm not going to be too pushy about it, even with treats, or with Easter that they can't have eggs, or when they're at grandma and grandpa's, they all do their best, but if he asks me, can I try a piece of cow's cheese, I let him try it, I am trying to be a bit relaxed about it." Kate

"Yeah, just mentioned that at school (...) and with treats, yeah, they don't have any allergies, so (...) what's being treated, they can eat it." Mara

These parents have had various reasons for allowing exceptions to a vegan diet for their children, including concerns about social exclusion, a desire to avoid burdening others, autonomy of their children to make their own decisions and simply to make life easier. Typically, they still followed a strict vegan diet at home, with sporadic exceptions outside of home when the children were with them.

"When it comes to my children, it's important to me to just show them that it's possible (to eat vegan). (...) That's why I'm not very strict about what they eat at school and such." Angela

"I hope that we raise them in a way that they will naturally align with our norms, values, and choices, but if they choose differently, they may have a good reason for doing so." Andrea and Bruce

Typically, parents in this category prioritized their children's autonomy and freedom of choice over adherence to a strict vegan diet. This is constructed as an expression of care for their children's social welfare, because they put their children's (social) needs over strict adherence to veganism. Additionally, in the less typical trajectory, parents in this category decided to now and then introduce animal-based products like eggs and milk to their children's diet. They had several reasons to do so. The first one was to prevent the development of allergies so that their children could still choose to eat animal-based products in the future. In the analysis, this is constructed as parental way of care for their children's autonomy, thus, their social welfare. The second reason was to prevent their children from getting sick if they accidentally eat animal derived products outside of home. In the analysis, this is constructed as their expression of caring for their children's health.

"They eat cheese sometimes, mostly when they're out, so we don't have to prepare it. I'm concerned about them developing lactose intolerances. I want my children to be free to make their own choices later in life, and not be hindered by something like a lactose intolerance." Andrea and Bruce

"When we are in a restaurant or something, and they want something like Fristi (soda containing milk), I try not to let them have too much (...) On one hand, I want to give it on purpose so they don't

develop an allergy or something. I don't know if that can happen, but I still think it's good for them to get eggs or milk every now and then." Angela

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier parents in this category express positive attitudes towards not being strict to their children's veganism. In the following quote, Mara talks about not being strict as her way to maintain being vegan in the long-term, which shows her care for her vegan objectives such as care for animals and the environment. On the other hand, in the less typical trajectory participants in this category stress that they are not as strict as other vegan parents, expressing their concern about strict vegan parenting and its potential constraints to children's autonomy.

"The enemy of good is perfect. So, I am not super hardcore, making a drama if there is an animal product in something when we are outside of home. For example (...) we are going to France this summer and we will eat croissants, even if they contain butter. (...) So, although I always have a little guilt about eating something with milk or eggs in it, on the other hand, I think that we can eat in this way all our lives. Whereas if we are too rigid, even on vacation, not allowing ourselves to have ice cream, then there is a greater chance that at some point we will say, "Screw it, we might as well go back to eating meat." Mara

"There are also parents that I personally dislike... they tell their children, 'you can't have cheese or whatever, you cannot accept it.' I don't think you should burden the children too much with it, you know. It's your choice." Frank

All in all, not-strict vegan parents prioritize their children's autonomy and social welfare over strict adherence to a vegan diet, allowing exceptions and showing flexibility towards their vegan objectives. They still maintain a vegan diet at home and inform others about their child's dietary preferences but avoid imposing it strictly. They emphasize their not strict identity more than other categories. Occasionally, some of them introduce animal-based products to prevent potential allergies and ensure their children's future dietary freedom of choice, expressing care for their children's health and social welfare. Others believe in sustaining veganism long-term by being flexible and express concern over strict vegan parenting potentially restricting children's autonomy. Typically, parents of older children fall into this category, suggesting that as children grow older, more flexibility towards strict vegan objectives might be necessary to ensure their children's social welfare.

4.1.4 Intermediate summary

All in all, this theme captures that vegan parents hold a deep concern for the following objects of care: animals, environment, (children's) health, identity and their children's social welfare. In addition to some universal strategies, parents adopt different strategies to integrate these objects of care when faced with challenging situations, resulting in varying levels of strictness towards their children. The differences in strictness towards their children is a clear representation of the relational and context-bound aspect of care ethics (Tronto, 1993). It shows how parents are continuously adjusting their approach based on their children's changing needs and social pressures, and their evolving understanding of what it means to live out their vegan identity.

Despite a shared care for their vegan objectives, like care for the environment and animal welfare, parents employ different strategies to reconcile these objects of care with care for their children's health, social welfare and their own identity. This suggests that care for animal welfare and the environment does not influence their level of strictness. Rather, the level of strictness seems to depend on the way parents care for their (vegan) identity, with parents who care more for their vegan identity tending to be more strict towards their children. In contrast, parents who are not strict seem to emphasize their "not-strict" identity more.

Additionally, the analysis sheds light on that, generally, parents of young children tend to exert greater control over their children's dietary choices, while this control decreases as children grow older and face increasing social pressures. This decreasing control underlines parents' attunement to their children's social needs and their growing autonomy, allowing for exceptions from veganism. Consequently, this implies that having younger children and maintaining strict adherence to veganism does not necessarily compromise the fulfilment of all parental objects of care simultaneously. yet, as their children grow older, parents are faced with the task of reconciling all their objects of care, which may require making compromises towards their vegan objectives. The decreasing control over older children's dietary choices reveals an aspect of the ethics of care that values the autonomy of the cared-for and their capacity to make decisions for themselves. While parents may initially exert more control, recognizing their children's growing ability to make independent decisions aligns with an ethical approach that respects and fosters individual autonomy within relationships.

4.2 Integrating Multiple Objects of Care through Knowledge Formation and Implementation

In this chapter, I delve into the mechanics of knowledge formation and its implementation in the context of vegan parenting. Drawing upon the constructivist view that knowledge is not passively received, but actively constructed, I initially unpack how various objects of care introduced in the previous chapter shape parents' active process of knowledge formation. In this process, they critically evaluate the legitimacy of various sources of knowledge, demonstrating how knowledge is context-dependent and tied to individual experiences and interpretations. Subsequently, I show how parents incorporate their acquired knowledge into both their vegan parenting practice and other practices compatible with care for their objects of care. In this exploration I emphasize the importance of considering the constructivist perspective when examining knowledge formation in vegan parenting. This analysis contributes to the broader discussion on the integration of the ethics of care and knowledge formation in the context of vegan parenting.

4.2.1 Care for Children's Health through Knowledge Formation

In this section, I delve into the significance of care for children's health in the context of vegan parenting, and how it motivates parents to actively construct their (nutritional) knowledge. By emphasizing the constructivist perspective, I portray parents not as passive receivers of knowledge, but as active knowledge constructors, who delve on the journey of knowledge formation to ensure their children's health.

When it comes to vegan parenting, care for child's physical health was seen to be an important theme in the interviews. Parents provided care for their children's health by conducting research on the health aspects of veganism and translating the acquired (nutritional) knowledge into their everyday food practices. In the typical trajectory parents expressed the importance of researching the health aspects of veganism to ensure that their children receive all the necessary nutrients from a vegan diet and to prevent the development of potential nutritional deficiencies. In this way, parents embody the constructivist perspective, as they actively construct their own understanding and knowledge about the health aspects of veganism through research. The finding of importance of researching vegan nutrition is consistent with Bivi et al. (2021), who discovered that parents look at nutritional adequacy data for children before deciding on vegan parenting. This reinforces the constructivist view that knowledge is actively built by the individual, not passively received from the environment.

"We have so many prejudices about plant-based eating, especially when it comes to young children (...) I also didn't know any better than that you would develop all kinds of deficiencies. So I really had to do some thorough research and answer some questions before I was sure that it would be a healthy choice." Olivia

"I did a considerable amount of research when my children were young, to know what to pay attention to, how much protein is there in different legumes, which supplements to take or avoid, how much iron and calcium they need. I practically turned it into a study." Mara

"That's actually the only thing I would suggest, which is: just do your research." Iva

There was one exception to this trajectory by a mother who was vegetarian before and stated that her children did not consume a lot of animal-based products before transitioning to a strict vegan diet. This suggests that individual knowledge construction can differ based on the previous experiences and background of the parents (Grant & Phene, 2022).

4.2.2 Interactions between Objects of Care and the Legitimacy of Knowledge Sources

In this section, I build upon the previous discussion by further emphasizing parents' constructivist approach to knowledge formation. I delve into the intersection of care, knowledge construction, and legitimacy of information sources in the context of vegan parenting. While in the prior section I highlighted that care for a child's physical health often motivates parents to research the health aspects of veganism, in this section I show how additional objects of care can influence which knowledge sources parents perceive as legitimate. By doing that, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how parents negotiate and integrate various sources of knowledge and how their objects of care influence this process.

Even though care for child's physical health has been constructed in the analysis to, amongst other things, motivate parents to do their research on health aspects of veganism in the first place, other objects of care, such as care for animal welfare and environment have been constructed in the analysis to influence parental views of the legitimacy of different sources of knowledge. These objects of care highlight how vegan parents actively build their own understanding through a constructivist approach to knowledge, influenced by their values and practices (Grant & Phene, 2022; Halkier, 2018).

When certain sources of knowledge, such as official dietary guidelines or regular healthcare professionals disapproved on vegan parenting, parents were inclined to search for information elsewhere. For instance, some participants stated that they began their research by consulting the official national dietary guidelines or their general practitioner, but had to turn elsewhere as they found no helpful information there regarding vegan diets for children. This aligns with the findings of Gvion (2022) who states that when sources of knowledge do not align with their practices, individuals seek alternative sources of knowledge that better align with their practices. Consequently, this highlights the idea that nutritional advice should not be presumed to influence consumption in a direct manner and that knowledge has to fit into the practices of parents in order to be used (Halkier, 2018). This search for alternative knowledge reflects a manifestation of constructivism, as parents selectively seek and interpret information that resonates with their objects of care. This may be because vegans believe that the advice provided by these sources does not adequately address their objects of care, which are influenced by parental values, norms, and political judgments (de Boon et al., 2022).

"I just started Googling and first looked at the Dutch national dietary guidelines (Voedingscentrum), but I realized that it didn't seem right. So, I started looking for more scientific papers." Mara

"I wish that the Dutch national dietary guidelines (Voedingscentrum) provided better advice. I'm not sure if that's currently the case, but I do hope that they focus on informing people rather than just scaring them." Angela

The motivation to ensure children's health encouraged them to research the health aspects of veganism. However, their care extends to other objects of care: the environment and animals. In navigating through these care objectives, parents actively evaluate the legitimacy of sources of knowledge. Often, the

conventional healthcare professionals and official dietary guidelines failed to align with vegan practices of parents, motivating parents to seek alternative sources of knowledge. This emphasizes the constructivist and critical process where parents challenge the mainstream standards. From the critical care perspectives, this could be seen as advocating for the marginalized voices, such as animals and challenging the dominant ways of doing things (Bartos, 2018).

Due to the inability to reconcile all the objects of care based on specific sources of knowledge, participants in the study regarded these sources of knowledge on vegan nutrition as lacking legitimacy. Specifically, the abovementioned official dietary guidelines and "regular" healthcare professionals such as general practitioners or consultatiebureau workers were oftentimes viewed as unreliable. For context, consultatiebureau is a type of health clinic in the Netherlands that offers medical and developmental check-ups, advice, and support to parents and their young children, and is available to all families free of charge.

Participants talked about regular healthcare professionals not being educated on nutrition and vegan diets for children, oftentimes discouraging this practice, congruent with the findings of Bivi et al. (2021). The tendency among vegans to view regular healthcare professionals and official dietary guidelines as having low legitimacy has also been observed by Gvion (2022), who noted their critical stance towards conventional medical and nutritional practices as they are unable to translate food knowledge into vegan terms. Despite the perceived lack of legitimacy regarding nutritional information, in the typical trajectory interviewees still attended regular check-ups for their children's growth at the consultatiebureau to monitor their children's health and growth, indicating their care for children's health.

"My view of the medical sector has changed a bit since I've seen all those documentaries, podcasts, and books, because in the education of medical specialists, they receive zero hours of knowledge or lessons about nutrition. (...) But they really know a lot and they are super smart, but for nutrition, you should not... you should look to other people." Andrea and Bruce

"Well, I don't have too much confidence in the child health clinic (consultatiebureau) (...) (but) we are going to the child health clinic and they weigh and measure him." Lara

"At the child health clinic (consultatiebureau), I kept receiving advice that I thought was incorrect." Mara

In addition to official dietary guidelines and regular healthcare professionals, other sources of knowledge considered not legitimate by parents were blogs/vlogs. This underscores that parents critically evaluate their sources of knowledge, rather than passively acquiring information as stressed in the deficit model of communication (Halkier, 2018).

"No blogs, as everything is perfect there. (...) No. You really need someone who has invested time seriously. (...) Not to have more followers." Andrea and Bruce

"Not... Yeah, I don't know... some YouTube conspiracy theorist or something." Lily

On the other hand, the most legitimate sources of knowledge considered by parents in this study were: dietitians and scientifically substantiated sources such as websites, articles and books. These findings align with the research conducted by Bivi et al. (2021). In the current study, vegan healthcare professionals were seen as a reliable source of knowledge for parents, underlying the importance of values and norms in the judgement of legitimacy of a source (de Boon et al., 2022). Similarly, in his research, Gvion (2022) also observed vegans' reliance on vegan healthcare professionals when transitioning to veganism, as it helps vegans to translate nutritional knowledge into vegan terms.

Notably, the sources of knowledge parents considered legitimate were perceived as either endorsing vegan parenting or, at the very least, not discouraging it. This, again, highlights that using these sources of knowledge enabled parents to reconcile their objects of care, such as animals, environment, identity and their children's physical health. These findings align with Gvion (2022) who argues that in order for scientific and medical knowledge to be recognized by vegans, it must be spread by professionals who are able to translate the information into such terms, that it allows vegans to practice veganism. This underscores the idea that nutritional information needs to fit into parents' everyday practices in order for this knowledge to be used (Halkier, 2018).

“Actually, I think the information from the dietician was most impactful. And that was just very practical too since she goes shopping in the same supermarket as us, so she can just say which apple syrup and which peanut butter we have to buy.” Olivia

“I also have a cookbook (...) that is very well substantiated by a dietician. The author has worked out complete daily menus with information on the nutrients they provide. It's really interesting to read and become aware of what foods contain which nutrients.” Sara

“Of course, I can google certain things, but if I know a plant-based dietician, I will ask them instead. And then I won't google it. Because everyone has their own blog and their own opinion, you know. And I really look for scientific studies that really support something.” Karen and Chris

“She has written two books on plant-based nutrition. She is a top athlete, a rower. And... what I really appreciated about her book and her stories, at that time at least, was that she scientifically substantiated everything and that it was not just a story pulled out of thin air.” Lily

“(I read) the scientific literature or the popularized version of the scientific literature.” Frank

4.2.3 The Implementation of the Acquired Knowledge in Daily Practices

In this section, I continue to build on the constructivist understanding of knowledge established in the previous sections, showing how parents not only form their knowledge about vegan parenting but also actively apply it to their daily routines. This implementation of knowledge aligns with constructivist theorizations where knowledge is actively interpreted and adapted in tune to one's context. Furthermore, I delve into the practices that vegan parents commonly adopt, showing how these practices align with their vegan practices. These practices also illustrate the critical stance to the ethics of care, where parents actively question and challenge conventional parenting practices. By doing that, I aim to demonstrate how knowledge and objects of care are embedded in daily routines of vegan parents.

Parents do not only fill in the care for their children through conduction of research, but also by the implementation of the gained knowledge into practice. This is consistent with Twine (2014) who states that people need certain knowledge in order to engage in the practice of veganism, such as knowledge of how to cook vegan meals. Parents engaging in vegan parenting in this study translated their knowledge into action mainly through: cooking healthy food to their children, rich in vegetables, fruit and legumes and supplement their children with various vitamins and minerals. This aligns with the constructivist perceptions of knowledge, showing how parents interpret and translate the acquired (nutritional) knowledge into their everyday food practices, adapting it to their unique familial context and child's health needs.

“We eat a lot of legumes, a lot of soy quark, whole wheat bread (...) and we eat at least six types of vegetables with dinner every day, so in that regard, I think we're doing really well, but yeah, B12 (...) we supplement and take algae capsules (...) Um... and in the winter, we take vitamin D and the multivitamins, but yeah, no, no heavy iron pills or anything like that because if you eat a lot of leafy green vegetables and eat in tune with the seasons, I feel like it's already taken care of.” Mara

Another way in which parents applied their knowledge into practice is by engaging in other practices, including prolonged breastfeeding and the use of the Rapley method. Prolonged breastfeeding as a practice in vegan mothers corresponds with the findings of Baldassarre et al. (2020) that state that this practice is frequent among mothers who engage in alternative diets, such as vegan diets. Prolonged breastfeeding aligns with the practice of vegan parenting because it eliminates the need for animal-based infant formulas, enabling care for animals and the environment. Therefore, prolonged breastfeeding fits with the practice of vegan parenting as it reduces harm to animals and minimizes one's ecological footprint.

"He already eats a lot of solid food, yes. But I believe that when you still breastfeed, there are still a lot of important things in it. So he doesn't need an alternative in the form of animal milk." Lara

"I breastfed both of my children for a year and a half, and I combined it with the Rapley method, and never gave them baby food. So I was already used to making somewhat unconventional choices as a mother." Mara

The second practice, Rapley method, involves letting babies self-feed with finger foods instead of purees, aligning with the values of veganism that encourage a natural and intuitive approach to eating. The finger foods introduced through the Rapley method are compatible with parental objects of care related to veganism, as animal-based products are only introduced in the third year of life. Therefore, this method encourages early consumption of plant-based foods, thus aligning with vegan objectives. While the Rapley method is not inherently vegan, its use by vegan parents highlights how shared beliefs and values influence the sources of knowledge that parents find relevant to their social context (Lovell, 2016) and how people with certain values tend to engage in practices typical for their social group (Twine, 2014).

"Rapley method (...) there is also an introduction schedule for when to introduce which foods. And meat is only introduced very late, from three years old." Kate

By engaging in these practices, parents were confident that their children were receiving all the necessary nutrients for optimal growth, while simultaneously allowing them to care for the animals and the environment. This demonstrates how the practice of vegan parenting is a holistic approach to care, harmonizing care for children's health, animals and the environment.

4.2.4 Intermediate Summary

Overall, this chapter critically analyses the processes of knowledge formation and implementation among vegan parents through a constructivist lens. It illuminates how parents' knowledge formation and practices are influenced by their objects of care, and their judgments of source legitimacy are shaped by the alignment of these sources with their objects of care and social context. It underscores that parents are active constructors of knowledge, using multiple sources of knowledge to build their understanding of vegan parenting. It emphasizes that parents are not mere receivers of information but active constructors of knowledge, driven by their care for their children's health, environment and animals. The findings emphasize the need for nutritional information to be relevant and applicable to parents' everyday lives for effective utilization in vegan parenting. This suggests that parents in this study evaluate which sources of knowledge are relevant to their situation based on their objects of care. As Lovell (2016) supports, this implies that the deficit model of communication may not be representative of how parents engage with (nutritional) information.

4.3 Phases of Knowledge Formation and the Corresponding Sources of Knowledge

In this chapter, I explore the journey of knowledge formation in vegan parenting, divided into distinct phases. This chapter complements and builds on the findings of the previous chapter by adding a temporal dimension to the knowledge formation process, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of vegan parenting practices. I also examine the role of various sources of knowledge in this journey and how their significance varies through the constructed phases. Finally, I delve into the sources of knowledge utilized by parents in their daily lives, emphasizing how both offline and online vegan communities play a role in knowledge formation and sustenance of vegan parenting practices. This chapter aligns well with constructivist theorizations of knowledge, underscoring that knowledge is not merely received passively but is actively constructed and reworked over time through experiences. By writing this chapter, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the processes behind vegan parenting, shedding light on how individuals actively acquire, interpret, and implement knowledge in alignment with their objects of care.

4.3.1 Five Phases of Knowledge Formation and the Corresponding Sources of Knowledge

In this section, I explore the journey of knowledge formation, divided in distinct phases: pre-veganism, the orientation phase on health aspects of veganism, the introduction of vegan food to the children, the initial months/year of veganism and the period after a year/few years of veganism. As the participants navigate through these phases, they actively construct their knowledge about vegan parenting. Additionally, I explore the role of different sources of knowledge in these phases of knowledge formation.

During the analysis, a consistent pattern of five distinct phases of knowledge formation was constructed, each of which involved different sources of knowledge that were considered most useful by the participants at the time (see Table 4).

Phase	Sources of knowledge
	Documentaries (mostly on Netflix, such as What the Health)
	Social network (friends or family)
	Internet (Google)
The orientation phase on health aspects of veganism	Books on health aspects veganism (such as How Not to Die by dr. Gregor)
	Scientific websites (such as Dutch Vegan Association, Nutrition Facts or World Health Organization)
	Scientific articles
	Vegan role models on social media (such as dieticians, athletes or doctors)
	Vegan parents groups on Facebook
The introduction of (vegan) food to child(ren)	Consult(s) with dietician
	Rapley method (book or website)
	Vegan Challenge (from Dutch Vegan Association)
	Vegan cookbooks
The initial months/year of vegan parenting	Feeding schemes (from dieticians/self-made/Dutch Vegan Association)
	Common sense
The period after a year/few years of vegan parenting	Intuition
	Experience

Table 4. Five phases of knowledge formation in vegan parenting and the corresponding sources of knowledge.

During the first phase, pre-veganism, in the typical trajectory participants experienced a growing sense of discomfort or ethical concern about consuming animal products, which motivated them to seek out information about veganism. In few other cases, parents stumbled upon one of the following sources, which has “opened their eyes” and motivated them to consider more sources of knowledge on veganism. In this phase most participants began their research by watching (Netflix) documentaries, searching for information on the internet (Google) and/or talking to their social network. This findings aligns with Bivi’s et al. (2021) findings on vegan parents obtaining information from documentaries and social network. This phase is mainly characterized by searching for information about objects of care related to veganism, such as animal welfare, environment and to a lesser extent, health considerations. After this phase, participants were motivated to try veganism (and vegan parenting).

In the second phase, orienting phase on health aspects of veganism, most parents began to look for sources on the adequacy of a vegan diet for children. To do that, participants mostly read books, scientific articles and (scientific) websites. Additionally, in the typical trajectory interviewees in this phase used their social media accounts to join vegan (parenting) groups on Facebook and to follow vegan role models, like vegan dieticians, doctors and athletes on Instagram. Remarkably, some role models/influencers were named multiple times by the participants, indicating that vegan parents have certain preferences regarding their sources. This is in congruence with the finding of Lovell (2016) who states that parents tend to focus on knowledge sources that conform to their already existing (nutritional) beliefs. After this phase, parents were convinced that vegan diet for children is possible and they were motivated to try it out. The first two phases of knowledge formation are nicely demonstrated in the following quotes.

“In the beginning we mainly watched a lot of those very easy documentaries via Netflix. I believe ‘What the Health’ and that’s where it all started. But when we seriously started to delve into it, we mainly relied on two people as sources. And those are Van der Meulen (vegan athlete), because I knew she was very careful with her source choices. And (...) Dr. Gregor. He’s an American doctor, he has written two books. I think one is called How Not To Die (...) But we really kept them as our sources of information, so to speak. Yeah, and also Dutch Vegan Association and other similar sources, scientifically backed, at least.” Lily

“Initially, when there wasn’t a child involved yet, I got a lot of information from documentaries and books. We read a lot and did research. I don’t know if you know The Nutrition Facts, for example, by Dr. Gregor (...) He has also written a book, How Not To Die. And ultimately, when it was time to introduce solid foods to the child, we also had a consultation with a dietician (...) we actually made a customized plan with her (...) I think that the dietician’s information weighed the heaviest.” Olivia

The third phase, introducing (vegan) food to children, is the phase when vegan parenting starts. For participants with very young children in this study this phase goes together with the introduction of food to their baby for the first time with the majority of parents opting for the Rapley method. During this phase the most common sources of knowledge among parents were consulting with a dietician and sources on the Rapley method, such as books or internet. Oftentimes, consult with a dietician involved making a feeding scheme for the first few years of child’s veganism.

“Most people make purees and feed them to their babies. We let him discover his own food, because we knew that as long as he was breastfed, it didn’t matter if he didn’t have a lot of solid food in his stomach (...) that’s called the Rapley method.” Olivia

Parents who did not consult with a dietician during the third phase of knowledge formation often created their own feeding schemes by consulting books and the internet. In addition, a few parents found the Vegan Challenge provided by the Dutch Vegan Association to be a valuable resource during this phase, as it involved input from vegan dieticians and nutritionists. One mother mentioned following the Vegan Challenge Facebook group, where she frequently consults vegan dieticians for advice.

"The Vegan Challenge has also helped me. It also helps to not have to figure it all out on your own, because dieticians are involved to make sure everything is okay." Frank

"I have actually made tables with overviews, like okay, she needs this... these foods contain that... and then you have to add those things... so I have really taken it very seriously. (...) I haven't looked at it for a long time now, because by now it's become a bit automatic." Sara

In the fourth phase, the first months/year of vegan parenting, parents frequently used feeding schemes provided by a dietician, the Rapley method or ones they developed themselves, cookbooks, social media and closely monitored their children's food intake. This phase is characterized by the development of habit and common sense about what their children should eat in order to be healthy. In the last phase, after a year or more of vegan parenting, parents relied more on their intuition and common sense, having developed a better understanding of their children's needs over time through experience. They still acquired new knowledge through various sources of knowledge but this process was less active. This aligns with the thoughts of Harris (2007) who notes that knowledge is acquired through time, work and experience. He argues that acquiring knowledge is an ongoing process that is reworked by practice (Harris, 2007) which aligns with the constructivist approach to knowledge.

"Well, now I'm not counting proteins and those kinds of things anymore, but we just have a sort of routine now where I just roughly know, yeah, what we eat..." Mara

"We don't keep track of everything in detail anymore, but we have a general idea of what they need." Angela

4.3.2 Knowledge Formation in Daily Practices

In this section, I expand upon the previous findings by not only examining the daily sources of knowledge for vegan parents but also emphasizing the vital role of social networks and online communities in their knowledge formation process. It complements the prior discussion to vegan parenting by exploring the role of social networks, bringing into focus the significance of shared experiences and mutual support in fostering and reinforcing vegan parenting practices. It adds a new dimension to our understanding of vegan parenting as a socio-cultural phenomenon that transcends mere dietary practices and highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships in knowledge formation. Thus, I aim to offer a more nuanced and contextual understanding of the journey of vegan parenting.

The influence of various knowledge sources in the knowledge formation process of vegan parents is prominent, with certain sources consistently utilized across different phases constructed in the previous section. Particularly, social media, social networks, the internet, and vegan cookbooks were frequently consulted for practical how-to questions, such as recipes or advice on daily issues.

"For recipes, I often look on Instagram and in cookbooks, but not so much for parenting advice. Sometimes I do check on Facebook pages if there's an interesting post, and then I read the comments, for example." Kate

"There are so many accounts with a wealth of meal examples and information. Actually, I find Instagram to be a really great source." Iva

It is noteworthy that in the typical trajectory participants considered other vegans as a source of knowledge throughout all the created phases of knowledge formation. For instance, following vegan role models on social media was a common practice among parents, which aligns with Stano's (2021) research emphasizing the role social media platforms play in disseminating vegan knowledge. Typically, vegan influencers were considered trustworthy sources in the current study. In addition, most

interviewees followed vegan (parenting) Facebook groups for social support, to connect with others who share similar experiences and to occasionally ask for practical advice. This interaction with fellow vegan parents often enhanced parents' confidence and enabled them to maintain vegan parenting practices more effectively.

“What I also really like is a Facebook group, I think it's called ProVeg Vegan Parents. It's just nice to read experiences from other parents. Also about the social aspect, the prejudices. And occasionally you can also ask a question yourself. It's just very nice to be able to talk about it with like-minded people, because you're still a bit of an odd one out.” Olivia

Moreover, consistent with the findings of Bivi et al. (2021) interviewees who had vegan or vegetarian friends or family reported discussing veganism and vegan parenting with them, underlying the importance of social networks in the perception of legitimacy of dietary information (Lovell, 2016). One's social environment and the groups one belongs to not only influence the knowledge one possesses but also which sources of knowledge one deems relevant (Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Lovell, 2016). For instance, some participants reported sharing knowledge sources with each other via word of mouth.

“A friend of mine is also completely vegan and her son is too (...) we also give advice to each other, like, I don't know, how do you do this? And then we share that with each other.” Olivia

“We also exchange tips (with friends), indeed... about supplements and such. And delicious recipes. And yes, we definitely talk about that (vegan parenting). It's a sort of shared interest. Yeah, we exchange cookbooks and stuff like that.” Sara

This shared knowledge formation through interaction with other vegans emphasizes that vegan parenting could be understood as a practice shaped by shared experiences and collective shaping of knowledge. The focus on social networks and online communities in knowledge formation among vegan parents is an illustration of the importance of relational and contextual factors in shaping knowledge formation (Held, 2006).

Vegan parents' engagement with sources of knowledge and participation in social networks could be seen as a manifestation of their care for vegan identity. These parents do not passively absorb knowledge but shape it through their experiences and share it with their social networks. They are not passive recipients of knowledge but active constructors in its creation and legitimization. This underpins a form of care that resists dominant norms and reaffirms alternative ways of living and caring, aligning with the critical ethics of care (Bartos, 2018).

“You start to know more and more people. So, your vegan network becomes much larger. And then it becomes much easier to obtain information or ask a question.” Iva

Remarkably, one couple who recently started vegan parenting felt lonely in this practice and was actively searching for new vegan friends. Another interviewee reported losing some friends due to veganism and gaining new vegan friends as a result. These phenomena were also observed by Twine (2014) who states that becoming vegan can create social distance towards people who do not express the same beliefs, making vegans search for new relationships with other vegans.

From a critical ethics of care perspective, power dynamics and social structures profoundly shape care practices (Bartos, 2018; Raghuram, 2016). This is illustrated by the experiences of some parents who reported feelings of isolation due to their vegan parenting practices, suggesting the influence of broader societal norms and pressures on diet and parenting. The commitment of vegan parents to persist despite potential social challenges underscores their resistance to dominant societal norms. This highlights the transformational potential inherent within the critical ethics of care perspective (Bartos, 2018).

4.3.3 Intermediate Summary

All in all, this theme captures that in the typical trajectory vegan parents go through five distinct phases of knowledge formation each of which is informed by different sources of knowledge. Moreover, while parents share beliefs about the legitimacy of knowledge sources as demonstrated in the previous section, the sources used in their daily lives differ from those they consider most authoritative. Social media, social networks and the internet remained important sources of practical information throughout all the constructed phases of knowledge formation. The study highlights the importance of social networks and the influence of like-minded individuals in manifesting vegan identity. Through connection with fellow vegans, parents gained support, confidence and a sense of belonging. Vegan parents actively contribute to the dissemination of knowledge, further thickening their vegan identity. Despite social challenges, their commitment to vegan parenting underscores the strength and transformative potential of the vegan identity. These findings emphasize the importance of both online and offline communities in the knowledge formation and maintenance of vegan parenting practices.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the integration of different objects of care and sources of knowledge in the practice of vegan parenting, using qualitative semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. The interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, wherein five key objects of care and their negotiation were constructed, along with the typical trajectory encompassing five phases of knowledge formation in the context of vegan parenting. Additionally, the findings shed light on how the objects of care influence the evaluation of the legitimacy of knowledge sources in the context of vegan parenting.

In terms of the negotiation of objects of care, parents employed diverse strategies to integrate various objects of care when faced with challenging situations. As a result, three levels of parental strictness towards their children were constructed, indicating differences in how parents prioritize and balance objects of care such as: animal welfare, environmental concerns, (vegan) identity, their children's health and social welfare in the practice of vegan parenting. It is notable that parents in all categories demonstrated strong care for animals and the environment, indicating that these objects of care do not influence their level of strictness. Instead, care for (vegan) identity, health and the children's age are constructed as factors influencing the level of parental strictness.

The findings suggest a typical trajectory wherein parents who deeply care for their vegan identity are stricter in their parenting approach compared to those who place less emphasis on their vegan identity. Conversely, parents in the "not-strict vegan parenting" category prioritize a "not-strict" identity and express concerns about the social consequences associated with strict vegan parenting. Additionally, parents of children with allergies to animal-based products or those who believe in the health benefits of a vegan diet adopted stricter practices. On the other hand, parents in the "not-strict vegan parenting" category allow exceptions from a vegan diet out of concern for their children's health and social welfare. This highlights how care for the same object of care can be interpreted differently by different parents, leading to varying levels of strictness. Additionally, parents in the less strict categories recognized that occasional exceptions from strict vegan norms could be a means of ensuring long-term instilment to a vegan diet for their children, paradoxically demonstrating their dedication to their vegan objectives.

Furthermore, in the typical trajectory, the age of children played a significant role in parental strictness. Parents with younger children were able to exert greater control over their dietary choices, facilitating strict adherence to veganism while simultaneously addressing other objects of care. However, as children grew older and encountered external social pressures beyond the home environment, parents faced the challenge of reconciling their various objects of care, particularly regarding their children's social welfare. This often necessitated making compromises in certain situations to accommodate their children's needs and social pressures. The analysis suggests that the practical reality of vegan parenting involves a degree of flexibility and compromise to accommodate their children's social needs. This resonates with the core principle of ethics of care, which is to attend to the needs of the cared-for (Held, 2006). The willingness of vegan parents to adjust their parenting strategies in response to increasing societal influences on their children shows their dedication to this principle. Notably, the importance given to children's autonomy tends to increase as they grow older and face external social pressures beyond the home environment. Typically, parents in the less strict categories placed more importance to the autonomy and freedom of choice of their children. To further enhance our understanding of the impact of parenting approaches, future research could explore whether children who experience more autonomy-supportive vegan parenting exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation to adhere to a vegan lifestyle.

In terms of knowledge formation, parents actively sought information on veganism and vegan parenting from a range of sources. These sources included social networks, dietitians, social media, scientific literature, books, and documentaries. Parents integrated knowledge from multiple sources, considering

not only nutritional adequacy but also climate change and animal welfare concerns. Parents placed the highest level of trust in nutritional information provided by dietitians or scientific literature. However, they relied on more practical sources of knowledge, such as internet, or social media, in their daily lives. After some time of practicing vegan parenting, parents tended to develop an intuitive understanding of their children's nutritional needs based on their experience. The findings also highlighted the significant role of connections with other vegans, both offline and online, in shaping knowledge acquisition among vegan parents, underscoring the role of social context (Trufanova, 2018) and relatedness in shaping knowledge formation (Lovell, 2016).

It is worth noting that while some parents initially sought advice from official dietary guidelines or regular healthcare professionals, they quickly turned to alternative sources that allowed them to reconcile all their objects of care. This finding underscores the importance of information aligning with individuals' daily practices (Halkier, 2018) and the influence of social context and objects of care on the perceived legitimacy of knowledge sources (Lovell, 2016). Parents have an active role in selecting knowledge sources based on their values, beliefs, and engagement (Lovell, 2016). This finding also suggests a potential gap in official dietary guidelines, which should be updated to incorporate information on appropriate vegan diets for children to provide reliable nutritional guidance for vegan parents. Despite the absence of such information in current guidelines, parents are likely to continue practicing veganism, making it imperative to provide reliable nutritional guidance that allows them to combine other objects of care with their care for their children's health. Moreover, healthcare professionals' knowledge on vegan diets in children is also a matter of urgency, to help parents avoid nutritional deficiencies and help them care for their children's health.

This study is not without limitations, which should be considered when interpreting the findings. Reflexive thematic analysis aims to identify patterns across the data, but the precise number of participants required to achieve this goal is unknown (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this research, I conducted 15 interviews with 17 parents, which I assumed to have yielded a comprehensive understanding of the patterns within the dataset. However, the recruitment of participants was primarily conducted through vegan (parenting) Facebook groups, with only two participants sourced through other pathways. This sampling strategy may introduce a potential bias, as it emphasizes the significance of social media as a knowledge and support source for vegan parents. Consequently, the viewpoints of vegan parents who do not utilize social media platforms are not adequately represented in the dataset. Furthermore, eleven mothers and only six fathers participated in the study. To address this limitation, future research on vegan parents could employ a more diverse recruitment approach. For instance, recruiting participants during vegan meet-ups or social gatherings, as well as utilizing posters at "consultatiebureau" (child health clinics), could help capture a broader range of perspectives from the vegan parenting population.

Reflexive thematic analysis approaches embrace the notion of researcher subjectivity as a valuable resource rather than a bias to be contained, rejecting positivist ideas of researcher objectivity. In this paradigm, reflexive thematic analysis is seen as an inherently subjective and interpretative practice, acknowledging that coding is a process of interpretation of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, this study requires the researcher to discuss how she may have impacted the accounts of vegan parents she interviewed. The interviews were conducted by a woman who identifies as vegan. Her shared vegan identity may have fostered an environment of trust and encouraged participants to openly discuss their experiences. Additionally, the researcher's affiliation with veganism may have influenced the analysis of the data, particularly when it comes to objects of care, such as care for animals, environment and social welfare and its reconciliation in challenging situations. This is because she experiences similar obstacles in her own life. Furthermore, the researcher is not a parent herself. While it was believed to allow the researcher to approach the participants with curiosity and without imposing her own parenting experiences and beliefs onto participants' stories, it may have also created a lack of understanding of particular parenting experiences.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the research makes several noteworthy contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, to the best of my knowledge, this study represents the first qualitative research that specifically investigates the practice of vegan parenting. By exploring the motivations and challenges associated with vegan parenting, this study enhances our understanding of this minority practice. As vegan parenting contributes to the mitigation of climate change and the reduction of animal suffering, understanding the nuances of this practice is crucial for developing strategies to support and empower vegan parents in their journey. Secondly, this research adopts a critical lens of ethics of care, which brings a novel perspective to the study of vegan parenting. The identification of three levels of parental strictness demonstrates the complexities involved in balancing different objects of care and the diverse strategies employed by parents. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on ethics of care by illustrating how vegan parenting can be seen as a manifestation of care for multiple interconnected entities that can collide with each other. Moreover, the insights from this study shed light on that in the typical trajectory, parents care for their children's autonomy despite of Chattoo and Ahmad's (2008) and Giddens' (1998) notions of caring relationships potentially impairing the autonomy of the cared-for person.

Moreover, by examining how various objects of care influence the evaluation of the legitimacy of knowledge sources and shape parents' practices, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between care and knowledge acquisition. It highlights that parents actively seek out sources of knowledge as a care practice while simultaneously being influenced by their concern for different objects of care in the process of assimilating information from these knowledge sources. In a similar way, the research findings also highlight the impact of vegan identity on social practices and knowledge formation. Parents' active selection of knowledge sources based on their pre-existing beliefs and objects of care demonstrates their critical engagement in shaping their understanding of veganism and vegan parenting. This challenges conventional notions of knowledge acquisition and emphasizes the significance of considering the role of identity in parental practices and decision-making processes.

5.1 Future research

Further research is needed to address the limitations and knowledge gaps arising from this research. Specifically, investigating the retrospective experiences of young adults who have been raised in vegan families could provide valuable insights into their perceptions of the objects of care prioritized by their parents and its impact on their adult lives. Exploring the interplay between parental objects of care and strictness and its impact on young adults' beliefs and behaviours, such as dietary choices, would also be an intriguing avenue to explore. Such a research could help us further investigate vegan parenting through the critical lens of ethics of care.

For example, the critical stance on ethics of care may question whether vegan parenting imposes a particular set of values and beliefs onto the child without considering their autonomy and freedom to make choices about their own diet. Within relatedness and interdependence of caring relationships, potential differences between the perceptions of the cared-for and the carer could arise (Chattoo & Ahmad, 2008). The current research explored solely the perspectives of parents, making it impossible to understand how the care practice of vegan parenting is experienced by the receiving end of care. Chattoo and Ahmad (2008) argue that autonomy and self-direction could be potentially impaired in the context of caring relationships. The perspectives of young adults who have been raised in vegan families could help us understand whether the care practice of vegan parenting, through inherent power dynamics, leads to potential injustices or oppression experienced by the cared-for vegan children.

This research project could utilize a qualitative approach, employing retrospective interviews with young adults who were raised in vegan families. Based on the limitations of the current study, it is recommended that the participants are recruited through various channels, such as vegan communities, relevant organisations, vegan meet-ups and social media platforms. It is important to balance the

recruitment channels to avoid over-reliance on social media, as was done in the current study, which may have overestimated the role of social media in participants' lives and experiences.

Moreover, the interviews could be performed with an interviewer who is a parent themselves. The current study was performed by a researcher who did not have parenting experience and was potentially unable to understand some of the decisions and aspects of parenting practices, potentially undervaluing certain aspects that could have been emphasized by a researcher with parenting experiences. By involving a researcher with personal parenting experiences, the analysis of the data in future research could be enriched, allowing their social position as a parent to shape the interpretation and understanding of the data. The findings of this project could contribute to understanding the complexities of vegan parenting and its impact on individuals' lives, with implications for research and practical support for vegan families.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, vegan parenting is a complex and multifaceted practice that involves the negotiation of various objects of care and the formation of knowledge through the combination of multiple sources. Parents balance their objects of care related to veganism with the social welfare and health of their children, making different choices based on their preferences and specific circumstances. The study also highlights the active engagement of parents in seeking information from diverse sources, wherein their concern for different objects of care plays a crucial role. Moreover, this study concludes that care practices and knowledge acquisition intersect, with objects of care influencing which sources of knowledge parents consider relevant to their context. Similarly, this research underscores the influential role of identity in shaping parental practices and decision-making processes, emphasizing how individual values and beliefs guide the negotiation of objects of care and the selection of knowledge sources in the context of vegan parenting. Theoretically this research contributes to our understanding of how objects of care intersect with knowledge acquisition, with care practices influencing which sources of knowledge individuals view as legitimate in their social context. The research expands our understanding of vegan parenting as a manifestation of care for multiple interconnected entities and underscores the importance of supporting and empowering vegan parents in their journey. By further exploring the suggested avenues for future research, we can continue to enhance our knowledge and practical support for vegan families.

6 Literature

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Informatiebrief

Geachte ouder,

Mijn naam is Adrianna Konkol en ik ben bezig met het afronden van de masteropleiding Communication, Health and Life Sciences aan de Wageningen Universiteit. Voor mijn masterthesis doe ik onderzoek naar ouders die hun kinderen veganistisch opvoeden. Steeds meer ouders kiezen ervoor om hun kinderen veganistisch op te voeden. Echter is er nog weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de ervaringen van ouders betreffende dit onderwerp. Aangezien u uw kind veganistisch opvoedt, wil ik graag een paar vragen stellen over uw ervaringen.

Het doel van het onderzoek

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om in kaart te brengen hoe de praktijk van veganistisch opvoeden eruitziet en hoe ouders besluiten om hun kinderen veganistisch op te voeden.

Het interview

Het interview zal ongeveer 40-60 minuten duren. Tijdens het interview stel ik u vragen over uw ervaringen betreffende het veganistisch opvoeden van uw kind(eren).

Anonimiteit en vertrouwelijkheid

Door het tekenen van deze informatiebrief, geeft u toestemming om het interview op te nemen met een audio-recorder. Deze opname en het bijbehorende transcript worden gebruikt om de verkregen data te analyseren. De data verkregen uit het interview zullen voor het schrijven van de masterthesis, en mogelijk wetenschappelijke publicaties, worden gebruikt en vertrouwelijk, geheel anoniem worden behandeld. De enige personen die toegang krijgen tot de opname en het transcript, zijn ik (Adrianna Konkol) en mijn thesisbegeleiders Hilje van der Horst en Yolie Michielsen. In het geval van het publiceren van dit onderzoek, zullen de data alleen beschikbaar worden op aanvraag in verband met visitatieregels. De opname, het transcript en de ondertekende informatiebrief zullen voor een periode van 10 jaar worden opgeslagen op een beveiligde server van de Universiteit Wageningen (W-drive).

Recht om te stoppen

U heeft recht om tijdens of na het interview, om welke reden dan ook, te stoppen met het deelnemen aan het onderzoek. De verkregen data van het interview zal dan worden verwijderd. Ook kunt u weigeren om een interviewvraag te beantwoorden.

Ondertekenen informatiebrief

Indien u besluit deel te nemen aan dit wetenschappelijk onderzoek, dan vraag ik u de onderstaande toestemmingsformulier te ondertekenen.

Mocht u nog vragen hebben naar aanleiding van deze informatiebrief, dan kunt u mij mailen naar adrianna.konkol@wur.nl of bellen op 06-37469942.

Verklaringsformulier

Ik heb de informatiebrief over het onderzoek naar veganistische opvoeding gelezen en de mogelijkheid gehad om eventuele vragen te stellen.

Ik weet dat de deelname aan dit onderzoek geheel vrijwillig is en dat ik op elk moment, zonder de reden aan te geven, kan stoppen met de deelname.

Ik geef toestemming om mijn geanonimiseerde gegevens te gebruiken voor de doelen van dit onderzoek, zoals beschreven in de informatiebrief.

Ik doe mee aan dit onderzoek en geef toestemming om het interview op te nemen.

Naam participant:

Datum: _____ **Handtekening:** _____

Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Stap 1: Introductie

- Introductie van de onderzoeker
- Doel van het onderzoek uitleggen: in kaart brengen van de praktijk van veganistisch opvoeden
- Informed consent procedure, uitleg en ondertekenen
- Heb je nog vragen voordat we beginnen?
- Bedankt voor het willen deelnemen aan het onderzoek.
- Ik ga nu de recorder aanzetten, is dat oké?

Stap 2: Practice of vegan child-rearing

Ik ga nu een paar algemene vragen stellen over het veganistisch opvoeding van je kind.

Hoe gaat het veganistisch opvoeden van je kind in z'n werk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wie eet er veganistisch thuis? Wie niet? ○ Wie kookt? Hoe wordt er gekookt? ○ Wat eten jullie? ○ Hoe eten jullie? ○ Hoe besluiten jullie wat er wordt gekookt? ○ Hoe bereiden jullie eten? ○ Hoe doen jullie boodschappen?
Hoe ervaar je het om je kind veganistisch op te voeden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waar heeft u moeite mee en waarmee juist niet?
Hoe heb je besloten om je kind veganistisch op te voeden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wat is je motivatie? ○ Wanneer heb je het besloten? ○ Wie of wat inspireerde u om uw kind veganistisch op te voeden? ○ Wat zijn nog meer de redenen voor u om uw kind veganistisch op te voeden?

Stap 3: Objects of care

Wat is belangrijk voor je als je nadenkt over veganistisch eetpatroon? (doelen)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe verhouden die doelen zich tot elkaar? (duurzaamheid, animal welfare, gezondheid etc) ○ Hoe maak je afwegingen tussen verschillende doelen? ○ Wat vind je het belangrijkste en wat minder?
Als we het hebben over gezondheid, hoe kijkt u naar de gezondheidsaspecten van veganisme ten opzichte van andere eetpatronen?	
Wat zijn de dingen waar je rekening mee houdt bij het veganistisch opvoeden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waar let je op bij het doen van boodschappen?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waar let je op bij het voorbereiden van eten voor je kind? ○ Zijn er misschien voedingsstoffen waar je op let?
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Stap 3: Kennis

<p>Je noemde net een aantal dingen waar je rekening mee houdt bij het veganistisch opvoeden van je kind.</p> <p>Hoe komt het dat je daar rekening mee houdt?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe weet je dat X belangrijk is?
Hoe bepaal je welke voedingsmiddelen geschikt zijn voor je kind?	
Waar haal je je informatie betreft het veganistisch opvoeden van je kind vandaan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waar laat je je informeren? ○ Wat voor bronnen gebruik je? ○ Hoe komt het dat je die bronnen gebruikt?
Heeft u weleens meegemaakt dat er tegenstrijdige informatie te vinden was?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe gaat u daarmee om?
Wat zijn de dingen die je tijdens het veganistisch opvoeden van uw kind hebt geleerd die u daarvoor niet wist?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe kwam je erachter?
Waar moeten volgens jou ouders die hun kind veganistisch opvoeden het meeste op letten?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe heb je geleerd dat dat belangrijk is?
Welke bronnen zou je aanbevelen aan toekomstige ouders die overwegen om hun kinderen veganistisch op te voeden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○

Stap 5: Sociale omgeving

Ik ga nu een paar vragen stellen over de sociale omgeving van u en uw kind.

Zijn er mensen in je sociale omgeving die ook veganistisch zijn of hun kind ook veganistisch opvoeden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kan je mij vertellen wat hun rol is in het veganistisch opvoeden van je kind? ○ Hoe hebben die mensen bijgedragen aan je beslissing om je kind veganistisch op te voeden?
Hoe reageert je omgeving op het veganistisch opvoeden van je kind?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe reageert uw familie erop? ○ Hoe reageren uw vrienden erop? ○ Hoe reageert de kinderarts erop? ○ Hoe reageert de school van uw kind erop?

Hoe reageren onbekenden erop als ze achterkomen dat je je kind veganistisch opvoedt?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe gaat u daarmee om?
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Stap 4: Achtergrondinformatie participant

Ik wilde nog ff een paar dingetjes van u weten. Nu stel ik een paar algemene vragen over uzelf.

Kan je mij iets meer over jezelf vertellen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hoe oud ben je? ○ Welke opleiding heb je gedaan? ○ Wat voor werk doe je? ○ Waar en hoe woon je? ○ Met wie woon je?
Kan je mij iets vertellen over je kind(eren)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender? ○ Leeftijd?

Stap 5: Einde van het interview

We zijn aangekomen bij het einde van het interview.

- Heb je nog dingen die je graag wil delen of toevoegen aan de hand van dit interview?
- Hoe vond je het interview?
- Wil je het thesisrapport ontvangen als die klaar is?
- Als ik nog vragen heb tijdens mijn onderzoek, mag ik dan contact met je opnemen voor aanvullende vragen, bijvoorbeeld via de mail of telefonisch?
- Bedankt voor het interview.

Appendix 3: Interview Topic List

Topic	Prompts
Introductie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doel • informed consent • opname
Veganistisch opvoeden in praktijk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eten (wat, hoe) • koken (wie, hoe) • boodschappen • moeilijkheden/obstakels
Objects of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivatie/inspiratie vegan opvoeding • verhoudingen tussen objects of care • afwegingen tussen objects of care • gezondheidsaspecten
Kenniss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informatiebronnen • leerproces • opletpunten • aanbevelingen voor anderen
Sociale omgeving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invloed van sociale omgeving • reacties van sociale omgeving
Achtergrondinformatie participant en kind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leeftijd • gender • opleiding • werk • woonsituatie