

Health, ethics and environment assignment

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Health vegetarians emphasized personal reasons for their diet above concern for animals, and were accused by some ethical vegetarians of being selfish and interested only in improving their own quality of life. Ethical vegetarians considered that their own practices were fundamentally altruistic, and involved personal sacrifice in order to prevent cruelty to animals. Lineman and Israelis (2001 182) have suggested these perspectives have different ideological bases, with ethical vegetarianism broadly associated with humanistic commitments and health vegetarianism with conservative and normative values. While initial motivation to adopt a vegetarian diet may thus be divergent, exulting in animosity between health and ethical vegetarians on occasions (Fox and Ward, submitted), there may also be convergence among those who have adopted a vegetarian diet, possibly to provide further cognitive support for a difficult life choice (Santos and Booth 1996, 204), or as a consequence of exposure to other vegetarians' motivations, beliefs and practices (Bison et al 2002).

In this paper we report data that explores this convergence, and specifically the emergence of environmentalist concerns among vegetarians whose motivations initially derived from personal health or animal welfare. We examine, by means of online ethnographic methods, vegetarians' own perspectives on how health, ethical and environmental beliefs motivate their food choices, to investigate the interactions between beliefs over health, animal cruelty and the environment, and how these may contribute to food choice trajectory.

Methods Design and Setting The data reported here are drawn from 'online ethnographic' research carried out in a web-based forum concerned with <https://assignbuster.com/health-ethics-and-environment-assignment/>

secular vegetarianism, which will be referred to here as the Vigorous. The forum was selected because it attracted a high volume of users who posted secularly to the message boards, creating a lively website with a heavy flow of ' traffic'. The forum had a number of message boards, which included the provision of advice to new vegetarians, health, animal rights and ecology.

Participants were an eclectic mix, from vegans who avoided all animal products for food or clothing to those who ate dairy products or even fish. The language of communication was English, and participants were predominantly from North America, the UK and Australia. Our research was largely confined to one discussion board that was intended to provide purport to new vegetarians. There is a growing body of research using Internet-mediated ethnographic methods, and there are various advantages and limitations.

Internet interviewing is appropriate for sensitive subjects not amenable to face-to-face interviews (Lingeringly 2001 and Glasses et al. (2002, 189-190) suggest that the anonymity of the Internet permits 5 research into marginal groups for whom self-disclosure may have costs, and where participants may be suspicious of researchers and outsiders. The Internet provides a cost-effective way to access small or hard to find groups ho interact in specialist for a (Noses et al. 2002, Lingeringly 2001 On the other hand, there are issues of validity in Internet-based research.

Anonymity increases the potential for intentional or unintentional deception (Glasses et al. 2002: 198) and for identity manipulation (Wesson et al. 2003, 1 15, Noses et al. 2002, 172). Internet samples will under-represent poor and

minority groups (Noses et al. 2002, 168). Wesson et al. (2003, 32) consider that this bias is disappearing with the rapid spread of Internet access, although research (Henning 2005) indicates that Intermediates social outworking is a predominantly youthful activity.

Participants need access to hardware, skills in typing and motivation to participate in what can be lengthy online interviews (Chem. and Hint 1999). Thomson et al. (1998) suggest that multi-method triangulation using textual analysis, prolonged participant observation and qualitative interviews can provide valid and reliable data, and we have used this approach in past studies (Fox and Ward 2006). In this study, observation of forum interactions, and active participation were triangulated with survey and online interview methods.

As with most qualitative approaches, we did not claim to be establishing a 'representative' sample, but did apply a range of methods to gather data broadly and gain data saturation through follow-up questioning. Data Collection All interviews were conducted by K. To access the field of study, K subscribed to the Vigorous, announced her 'presence', and explained that she Was researching attitudes and beliefs among vegetarians. The research was carried out between August 2005 and February 2006 and consisted of three stages: ; ; Participation in discussion within the Vigorous.

Permission was gained from participants to reproduce relevant posts from discussions. K posted a survey to one of the message boards within Vigorous, to which there were 33 responses. Respondents were predominantly from the US and Canada, with some UK members. Seventy

per cent were female, and ages ranged from 14 to 53, with a median of 26 years. The survey contained open questions designed to elicit participants' motivations for vegetarianism, attitudes to meat-eating, health and animal welfare, and related life-style choices.

Respondents were also asked for their age and nationality. Respondents were invited to participate in online follow-up interviews, and 18 agreed to this. These were conducted using the Voyageur's own messaging system. These were unstructured interviews based on cues in respondents' answers to the survey questions, to enable respondents to enlarge on their responses concerning their beliefs and attitudes, triggers and other factors that had led them to become vegetarian, and the effects of being vegetarian on their lives.

Data Analysis Data were analysed using the framework methodology for qualitative analysis. This is an approach to analysis that is appropriate to deductive research that addresses preset aims and objectives (Pope et al 2000), and enables data to be systematically collated and displayed within a spreadsheet or other software package, in order to address specific topic areas. Collated data can then be indexed and key findings extracted. The topic areas then form the basis for the structure of the report, within which data extracts may be used to illustrate key findings from the ethnography.

All data from the case study have been reported in the ethnographic past tense, participants have been fully anonymised, and spellings have been corrected to aid reading. **Rest Its Health and the Vegetarian Diet** Many participants in our study associated positive health and well-being with

dietary choice. Diet was perceived as central to good health and longevity, with poor diet associated with lower levels of health and even specific diseases. Will argued that 'nothing affects your mind and quality of life as much as nutrition' 7 while Ruby suggested that 'you can't expect your body to treat you right if you fill it full of crap all the time'.

Participants offered evidence for this link When eating a vegan diet my symptoms go away and feel great. I never call myself a vegan or vegetarian. Tell people that have food allergies and have to eat like this for my health. I feel so much healthier when I eat vegan meals. (Mark) Participants contrasted their current healthy diets with previous or childhood food intakes that they perceived as unhealthy. The change to vegetarian diet was associated directly with an improvement in health. Was overweight as a kid, ate junk food, no veggies, and did not drink water.

All of my liquid came from sodas. It was a long process to get out of that dietary sinkhole, and sometimes I am surprised that did. Nowadays typical dinners for me are home-cooked with plenty of whole foods. I'm not 100% whole foods and I don't strive to be. I like white basmati rice way too much. But taken as a whole, my diet is full of fiber from other whole grain and legume sources. (Finny) Respondents reported a range of health issues that motivated them, from an effort to 'cut down on my dairy for cholesterol reasons' or to avoid high blood pressure and kidney stones'.

My family has a history Of breast/ovarian cancer and high cholesterol and I figured that eating the best possible diet of the cost healthful foods (combined with exercise) would be the best thing could do to prevent myself

from developing these diseases as much as possible. Also most of my family is lactose-intolerant and though I didn't get sick when I ate dairy, I've noticed that when I don't eat it I feel better overall. (Lucy) While health reasons were an initial motivator, it was also a justification for continuing a meat-free diet.

Jane supported her ideological claims with personal experiences, which she suggested justified the decision. 8 If you want to live a longer life, then eating healthy is key. Eating unhealthy odds can really change your personality. When you switch to a healthy diet from an unhealthy diet you get this sudden spring in your step, so to speak. Every day that I wake up, feel so much healthier and alive than I used to. It's so awesome to feel awake and alive. Animal Welfare and the Vegetarian Diet The desire to avoid killing animals for human consumption was the other main reason offered for becoming vegetarian.

At the heart of this perspective lies a view that animals should not be mistreated for human benefit. Not consuming meat was thus a sacrifice to be made by individuals as part of an ethical commitment. Still use dairy and infertile egg sometimes because full paganism is hard for me. But the early death of male chickens and cattle is evidently a usual part of egg production- as a rule, they aren't needed where they are born. This, coupled with the bad conditions many laying hens are kept in, has driven me to almost completely eliminate those foods from my diet. Tom) Often a specific incident had been a trigger. Went vegetarian after dissecting a chicken in seventh grade science class, and noticing that chickens were similar in build up to humans. I went vegan hourly after, because of animal rights, and because I felt that <https://assignbuster.com/health-ethics-and-environment-assignment/>

was being hypocritical to be vegetarian in order to stop animal abuse, but still support it in other major ways. (Jane) became a local-vivo vegetarian when I was 13 years old, because I was sitting in my living room eating an Italian sub, and the thought came to me that an animal is not being honored by sitting between two slices Of bread.

It made me so very sad that the reason that animal was born was to die. Three months ago I adopted a vegan diet because think too much about where things come 9 from, and was tired of feeling grossed out every time I ate dairy or eggs. The guilt was too much. (Victoria) While many health vegetarians offered experiential reasons for adopting and sustaining a meat-free diet, ethical vegetarians often cast their motivations within a philosophical, ideological or spiritual framework. Bills commitment was initially to animal rights, before adopting vegetarianism. Awe the ' Meet Your Meat' video and began to research animal rights/ways vegetarianism can help the environment. Realized that I love animals dearly and couldn't call myself an animal rights supporter and eat meat. It seemed so contradictory. So, one day I just decided to become vegetarian. For Catch, her ethical choices were associated with a perspective on her place in relation to the world and to her spirituality. Try to grow as much of my own food and buy organic when I can because most farming practices are disrespectful to the Earth. I don't consume meat because it is disrespectful to the animals.

I choose not to buy meat, leather, or eggs because I believe that the torture and enslavement of feeling beings it is the ultimate form of disrespect to the creator. Some of our ethical vegetarian respondents indicated that avoiding meat was not just a dietary choice, but a way Of life. Vega*ism [an <https://assignbuster.com/health-ethics-and-environment-assignment/>

abbreviation used on Vigorous to cover both vegetarianism and paganism] is a lifestyle for me, because instead of just trying to not eat animals, try to live my life with the least harm to animals. I buy products not tested on animals or have animal products. I don't buy leather, silk, etc. It isn't just about what I eat, but how live my life. Rick) Being vegan I made the basic vegan changes, using products that I know have not been tested on animals, boycotting companies that do still test. I have also become more environmentally aware. I'm not much of a dieting person, in 10 act hate diets, I don't think of my paganism as a diet, it's more a lifestyle. (Millie) Elsewhere we have differentiated these reasons for a vegetarian diet in terms of identity (Fox and Ward, submitted). The focus within health vegetarianism is internal, addressing desires to sustain good health and avoid illness. For ethical vegetarians, by contrast, the focus is outward, towards other living creatures.

Often for the latter, their own health and well-being came second to the welfare of other creatures, with strict vegans suffering poor health as a result of their diet (ibid.). This major difference led to conflict among the participants in the Vigorous, with ethical vegetarians critical of perceived selfishness by health vegetarians. Now, about health vegans. I certainly don't jump for joy just because 'one less animal is killed'. If people only care about themselves and their health, that shows they are selfish and egoistical find their motivations for being vegan boring and selfish.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to stay healthy. Obviously, that goes without saying. But there are lots and lots of healthy people who eat meat and/or fish every day of their lives and they live till here 100. (Diana)
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Stephen considered health vegetarians insufficiently radical, while Ruby saw ethical vegetarianism as superior to health vegetarianism, but still contributing to her overarching objective of preventing harm to animals. In any group, there are people who are going to play the 'holier than thou' card. This includes Vega*ins, of course.

Some people believe the only 'true path to Vega*miss' is through the ethical abstaining of animal products. Then there are some who believe that any reduction in harm to animals is good, regardless of the reasons behind them. I personally would be happy if embers of my family or my [boyfriend] gave up meat because it was better for their health even if they didn't care about the animals. I can't quite put myself into the mindset of not caring about killing animals and eating their flesh, but obviously plenty of people can, whether they eat animals or not. 1 In our research we found surprisingly few respondents who genuinely straddled the two motivations of health and ethical commitments. However, in one specific area, environmental concerns, we did find common ground between those who identified either as health or ethical vegetarians. Environmental Commitments among Vegetarians Among our sample of 33 participants in the Vigorous, only one respondent, 29 year old Canadian Simon, had become vegan for explicitly environmental motivations, in order to 'do something to maintain the planet'.

At the same time as his adoption of a vegetarian diet, he also 'went back to biking walking, and trying not to travel by automobile'. However, other respondents in the study whose initial motivations were for health or ethical reasons, described a range of environmental commitments. Sometimes <https://assignbuster.com/health-ethics-and-environment-assignment/>

concern with the wider environment emerged directly from a perspective related to the impact of meat consumption for human or animal health. Try and only eat organic egg and milk products, for the animal and human population health and well being.

Non organic farming of animals are breeding grounds for antibiotic resistant bacteria and viruses, which can spread to humans. As well as not being very nice for the animal. I try and be environmentally friendly as can. (Bryn) The availability of organic foodstuffs that avoid the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers provided a direct link to the dietary concerns for some lath vegetarians. Try to eat primarily organic. Being where live the cost of organic food isn't really an issue. I try to eat as few processed foods as possible and eliminate added sugars.

For the most part all of the above are working. (Will) f get the choice, like to get organic vegetables, but it's not a high priority. I do try to be environmentally friendly - I recycle, try not to be wasteful. (June) Tom started his vegetarian diet because of animal welfare. However, this broadened subsequently, linking environmental reasons for his diet to other ecological concerns. 12 I've found there are health and environmental benefits to vegetarianism, as well as lessened injury to animals.