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Short title: VARIATION IN MEAT AVOIDANCE

Stability and change in meat avoidance habits and their motivation in young women

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the stability or otherwise of the avoidance of flesh foods and of its motivation in some young women at a British university in the mid-1990s. In 1993/94 and again in 1995, 40 female undergraduates in the U.K. were asked about foods they avoided and their reasons for and any changes in this avoidance. Most (29 out of 40) of these students maintained the same pattern of avoidance for 18-24 months, although about 66% (19 out of 29) of them changed their primary reason for not eating flesh. Also, most (8 out of 11) of those students who had changed their pattern of avoidance reported a different motive. Those women who became less strict ($n = 8$) accepted more poultry and/or fish or even beef or lamb. Only 3 students became stricter in their avoidance of animal species. Some students ate more variedly at home, because of more money and time, but also to conform to the family's eating patterns. Most family members and friends (meat eaters) responded favourably to those who became less strict. However, more extreme peers (vegetarians) reacted negatively. Thus, although meat avoidance was sustained by many for at least 18 months, the range of avoidance and its reasons varied over time and with context.

Introduction

It is commonly assumed that people who start to avoid 'red meat' (e.g. beef, lamb) are likely to become vegetarians in due course. Many who only eat some flesh foods, or who are ovo-lacto-vegetarians, excluded red meat from their diet initially, later 'white meat' (e.g. chicken, turkey) and, it is claimed, finally fish (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Draper & Wheeler, 1990; Dwyer *et al.*, 1973; Neale, Tilston, Gregson & Stagg, 1993; Safeway, 1991). However, fish is not always the last flesh-food to be avoided (Santos & Booth, 1996).

Young people who have come to avoid flesh foods may not remain vegetarian indefinitely: while some vegetarians exclude all food products that are of animal origin (therefore becoming vegan), others become flesh eaters again, at least consuming poultry and/or fish if not red meat (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Keane & Willetts, 1996; MORI, 1989; Neale *et al.*, 1993). That is, true vegetarianism cannot be assumed to be a stable pattern of behaviour (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Beardsworth & Keil, 1991a & b, 1992; Keane & Willetts, 1996).

Furthermore, the less well informed among those who profess to be vegetarian in fact eat processed meat or fish because it is not readily recognisable as an animal product (Fiddes, 1991; Keane & Willetts, 1996; Richardson *et al.*, 1994). Even fully informed individuals may conceptualise themselves as vegetarians even though they know that they are consuming some sort of flesh food (Barr & Chapman, 2002; Beardsworth & Keil, 1991a & b, 1992; Dwyer *et al.*, 1973; Fiddes, 1991; Keane & Willetts, 1996; Lea & Worsley, 2004; Richardson, 1994).

In addition to these changes and differences in the conception and practice of flesh avoidance, the motives for not eating flesh foods may change over time (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Beardsworth & Keil, 1991b; 1992; Draper & Wheeler, 1990; Stiles, 1996). Those who

change towards complete vegetarianism or back to being omnivores might well have different motives from their initial reasons for avoiding (some) flesh foods. Indeed, even people who have been avoiding flesh consistently for a long period of time may develop different motivation. For example, Amato and Partridge (1989) claim that people adopting vegetarian practices tend to move from an initially more personal motivation (e.g. health benefits, disgust at or dislike of meat, economics, social conformity) to concern about ethical-social issues (e.g. animal ethics or the love for animals, concern with the environment, world hunger and non-violence).

A further complexity in the psychology of vegetarianism is that people usually provide more than one reason when justifying their avoidance of flesh-foods. This could simply be a result of perceiving several advantages of a non-flesh diet. It could, on the other hand, be a rationale developed as a response to others' criticisms. A plurality of reasons may also serve to reinforce the behaviour.

In order to provide further information on such diversity and changes in practice and motivation of flesh avoidance, particularly in the British context, we re-contacted by mail a sample of the women in an earlier study which included students of both genders (Santos & Booth, 1996). In the first study, students who had just chosen a vegetarian dish were given a questionnaire about their flesh-avoidance habits before arrival at the university a few weeks previously. More women than men had avoided meat and other flesh foods, with the exception of fish. Reasons for avoiding meat, among other issues, were elicited by open-ended interviews in 41 women who had responded to the subsequent invitation to participate in the further research reported here. Only women were selected for the interview as many more females ($n = 125$) than males ($n = 33$) had completed the original questionnaire. Others in several countries have also observed a greater incidence of vegetarianism and/or meat avoidance among women than among men (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999; Draper &

Wheeler, 1990; Erlichman, 1991; Freeland-Graves *et al.*, 1986; Griffin, 1992; Holm & Møhl, 2000; Jabs, Devine & Sobal, 1998; Kim, Schroeder, Houser & Dwer, 1999; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad & Risvik, 2002; Larsson, Klock, Åstrøm, Haugejorden & Johansson, 2002; Lee & Worsley, 2004; Mooney & Walbourn, 2001; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001; Sims, 1978; Social Surveys, 1995; Twigg, 1983; Vegetarian Society, 2001; RealEat Survey Office, 1990; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998).

By comparing data from the two studies, we examine here the extent to which flesh avoidance is a dynamic process, whether individuals who avoid eating some animal species become strictly vegetarian in some cases, while others remain partial flesh avoiders or revert to eating any sort of meat. Another aim was to see if any reasons for not eating flesh changed over time and whether or not these changes were related to individuals' choices among flesh foods. We enquired too if respondents had experienced cravings for flesh foods and also what they felt if they ate a flesh food after a time of abstinence. Finally, we sought their views on future practice.

Other authors have pointed out changes in both practices and motives for flesh avoidance (Amato & Partridge, 1989; Beardsworth & Keil, 1991b; 1992; Draper & Wheeler, 1990; Keane & Willetts, 1996; Kim *et al.* (1999); Stiles, 1996) but as far as we knew this was the first cohort study of vegetarian choices and reasons for them. The follow-up was at a relatively short delay of 18 to 24 months in order to keep within the students' degree studies, as it would have been difficult to contact them after leaving university. There was no intention either to collect a lengthy corpus of narrative or to seek quantitative generalisation from the results. The aim was to explore the viability of existing generalisations and assumptions so that future work could be designed realistically, whatever the methodology.

Method

Participants

Forty female students of the University of Birmingham in their early twenties, both avoiders of some flesh foods and full vegetarians, who had participated in a similar study in 1993/94 (Santos & Booth, 1996), were questioned again in 1995 concerning their flesh avoidance and reasons for it. In the first study, 41 women were interviewed; however, one did not reply to this subsequent questionnaire. Information about socio-economic, ethnicity and religious background was not elicited explicitly but directly relevant aspects of family or peer relationships could be inferred at the interview.

Questionnaire

To provide data on the participants' avoidance of flesh-foods independently of their self-categorisation as a vegetarians or not, written Question number 1) was closed, "Nowadays, do you normally avoid any of the following foods? (please tick as appropriate): Beef or lamb, Pork, Chicken or turkey, Fish, Vegetarian food".

Questions 2 and 3, "Do you have a reason for avoiding that/those food(s) now?" and "Any other reasons?", respectively, were open-ended so that respondents were free to use their own words to express their motive(s) for avoiding flesh foods, instead of having to choose among a predetermined list of reasons that may not agree with their own ideas (Oppenheim, 1992). Respondents varied in whether they added a second reason or a third one or more. The present report is based on the first reason written, on the assumption that it was the motive which had come to the mind initially and thus was liable to be the most important to the respondent. In any case it is difficult to represent differences between individuals from diverse numbers of later-written answers.

To assess any changes recalled in avoidance of flesh-foods and/or in motives behind the changes, Question 4 first asked “Have you always avoided the same kind of food that you avoid now?” and then, “If yes, were your reasons for avoiding it the same in the past?” or “If no, what was the difference between foods avoided in the past and now and what was/were your reason(s) for that past avoidance?”

Question 5, “Do you eat the same kind of food that you eat nowadays here at University when you are back home for holidays?”, and “If no, what is different? What are your reasons for that difference?”, allowed flesh-food avoidance to be compared between university and home, as well as eliciting justifications for any difference.

Procedure

The questionnaire was sent by post. Thirty students provided evidence in their written responses for some change in their food habits and/or in motives behind those choices. These 30 women were invited to an interview, which sought a more detailed description of when, how and why that change had occurred. Two of these participants were not available on campus (part of their degree required a year abroad) and so were asked instead to answer the same questions by letter.

Only 10 respondents did not report any changes in either flesh avoidance practices or primary motive; these were not interviewed.

Analysis of data

Responses by these 40 women to a similar questionnaire and interview were reported by Santos and Booth (1996). Changes in practice between first and second questioning were categorised by this paper’s authors into three groups - greater, less and the same strictness of flesh avoidance. These changes in reported practice were compared with the recalled changes

in practice at follow-up.

Responses were analysed as frequencies of avoidance of foods at each period of questioning and the reasons given for the avoidance. The reported patterns of flesh avoidance from both periods were fitted to a gradation designed by the present authors from least to most strict, namely: Eater of meat and fish, Eater of meat but avoider of fish, Avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish, Avoider of red meat and fish but eater of white meat, Avoider of all meat but eater of fish, Vegetarian and Vegan. This classification differs from others in the literature, in specifying which species are avoided as well as the foods consumed.

In accord with techniques of content analysis (Weber, 1990), each particular phrasing of a reason for avoiding flesh-foods was assigned to one of a set of categories constructed by the present authors using data from 443 respondents (to be reported elsewhere), namely: dislike, disgust, convenience, economy, ethics, fashion, health, "I'm a vegetarian," others' influence, rebellion and religion (Table 1).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Results

Changes in pattern of avoidance of flesh foods

A substantial majority of the students (29 out of 40) had persisted with the same pattern of flesh avoidance for 18 to 24 months (Figure 1). Of the eleven individuals who had modified their choices, eight had moved down one or two steps in a flesh-food avoidance gradation: that is, they had become less strict in avoiding flesh foods, now accepting poultry and/or fish or even beef or lamb. The three who had become stricter moved up one step, i.e. latterly avoided all flesh foods, and two of them even dairy products.

It is noteworthy that almost all the changes were toward an extreme from an intermediate position of the gradation: apparently full vegetarianism or acceptance of all meats were the most stable strategies among this sample of young women at this time and place.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Changes in motivation of respondents who became stricter in avoiding flesh foods

The three women who became more strictly vegetarian gave ethical reservations about killing and/or raising animals as their primary reason for avoiding meat at the first interview in 1993/94. The respondent who avoided meat but ate fish in 1993/94 and subsequently became vegetarian reported a self-construct as a vegetarian as the main reason for avoiding all flesh foods in the questionnaire in 1995. However, when interviewed, it became apparent that this woman's motivation also included both ethical considerations and the emotion of disgust:

I suddenly associated meat with animals and dead flesh basically. I became more aware of ethical reasons behind eating meat and started to enjoy less and I was eating less and less

Another woman, who had changed from vegetarianism to veganism, mentioned a less salient role of her original rationale for avoiding flesh food and the decisive role of another person:

I was a stronger believer in animal rights. Now I do it mainly out of habit. There is no difference in the actual foods avoided apart from turning more vegan and that is because my boyfriend has [become vegan] and I eat the same food as him.

Only one of these three women presented the same single motive for her avoidance of flesh

foods at both periods of questioning, based on animal welfare. This reasoning did not explain the increase in strictness, since providing milk is not fatal to the cow, although it requires her to be confined:

For the last 9 years I have avoided all meat products. I now avoid dairy products as well. I used to avoid meat products for the same reasons as I avoid them now, that is because I regard the meat trade as a very cruel one and because I do not believe human beings have the right to take animals lives. (Currently vegan; before: vegetarian).

Changes in motivation of respondents who became less strict in avoiding flesh foods

In most (6 out of 8) of those who became less strictly vegetarian (Figure 2) the first reason mentioned for avoiding flesh changed over 18-24 months. Most of these changes were among reasons to do with personal benefits -- latterly disgust, dislike and health. The others professed religious motives for switching to acceptance of fish and/or poultry.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Two individuals who had been vegetarian before maintained the motivation of disgust and ethical reservations (broken lines in Figure 2). Only one respondent gave no reason during the second questioning, because she no longer avoided flesh foods.

Convenience and others' influence. For one woman, returning to eating of white meat was convenient, in order to conform to others' practice, because her only flesh food had been fish:

I've started cooking a lot more with my friends who I lived with, and also my boyfriend eats a lot of meat. So really a lot of it is fitting in with other people. If it was just me living on my own without any other influences I probably would remain vegetarian.

Similarly, it was convenient for one of the vegetarians to consume poultry again in order to cope with a new living situation: *"I am no longer a vegetarian - these things are almost impossible in a country like France"*.

Disgust. The women who had come to accept white meat over the study period were still disgusted by red meat. The emotion of disgust was triggered by the visible presence of fat and/or of the physical structure of the flesh of the animal:

When something like pork or lamb looks like its origin, i.e. an animal - tendons, fat, gristle, etc. - I immediately find it difficult to eat. I am also put off by fatty meat: it has a very unpleasant texture and feel ... I find fish physically beautiful but prefer to eat it when it's not a whole fish. (Currently, avoider of red meat and fish but eater of white meat; before: vegetarian).

The feeling of disgust could be minimised if the respondent did not perceive so clearly the animal nature of the food: *"... the thought of eating animals made me feel sick ... but now I can eat it, though only in the form of a schnitzel."* (Now accepts white meat; before: avoider of all meat but eater of fish).

Similarly, for another woman:

We [she and her brother] refuse to have fish with the eyes still in. We wouldn't just touch it at all, the skin ... She [mother] had to disguise it and pretending it wasn't a fish, because just the smell and the sight of it (Currently, eater of meat but avoider of fish; before: avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish).

Sensory characteristics. When providing more details (at the interview) of the motives behind their avoidance and acceptance of flesh foods, most of the sample revealed other motives, either supporting the reason written first in the questionnaire or being a more relevant reason than that. On the other hand, five of the women stated that appealing sensory characteristics brought them to consuming some flesh-foods, despite their original motives for avoiding them:

I tried to give up meat because of all the issues related to vegetarianism and animals ... I just had the temptation [to eat chicken] once too often, so I thought if I would be doing this I was not doing it properly. So I'd just come back to eating meat without feeling guilty ... This red meat has a high cholesterol and things like that and I don't really like it as much as others [white meat] ... I still have got feelings about the way animals are treated but I think I don't have the strong enough will to just stop eating others [white meat]. (Now accepts white meat; before: avoider of all meat but eater of fish).

I just decided that I was going to start eating fish [again] because I was bored by the stuff I was eating ... I like fish a lot and I just really missed it ... I suppose I'm just trying to justify my moral reasons for starting to eat fish again, but because I think that they [fish] have a bit more freedom [than land animals]. (Currently, avoider of all meat but eater of fish; before: vegetarian).

I used to avoid meat due to cruelty of killing and quality of life ... Irresistible smell of bacon sandwiches. (Currently, eater of meat and fish; before: avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish).

There was the [Jewish] festival and there were loads of meat around ... I never disliked the taste of meat. I just stopped eating because I thought it was unhealthy and the thought of eating animals made me feel sick ... but now I can eat it, though only in the form of a schnitzel. (Now accepts white meat; before: avoider of all meat but eater of fish).

When I was at school everyone just became vegetarian and I did it because they were my friends. I think it's one of those things that when you were young. And also the rebellion thing against your parents ... can't control my food! ... but I really liked meat. (Now an eater of meat but avoider of fish; before: avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish).

Religion. Although religion was often invoked to justify the avoidance of a flesh food, only one of these women, who was a vegetarian at the previous interview, professed a religious motive to justify her return to white meat and fish eating: *“In the New Testament, Paul specifically says that it's okay to eat meat; you should eat it without a question of conscience”.*

Changes in motivation of respondents who continued avoiding the same flesh foods

More than half of those who professed unchanged behaviour gave a reason for

rejection of flesh foods that was different on the second occasion from initially (Table 2).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Still avoiding red meat. Five respondents who continued to avoid red meat gave a different motive from previously (Table 2). Three of these individuals changed from an ethical motive to a personal one, two to disgust and one to economy. The other two respondents switched between personal motives, that is from disgust to dislike for flesh foods or to health.

The other four who continued to avoid red meat gave the same motive at both times of questioning about their food habits: their reason was health in two cases and convenience and religion once each (Table 2).

Still avoiding red meat and fish. There were only two women who continued consuming only white meat (Table 2). One of them reported the same motive, disgust, for still avoiding red meat and fish, while the other changed from health concerns to dislike.

Still avoiding red and white meats. Four women whose only flesh food was fish maintained their ethical concerns, while two changed from personal and interpersonal to ethical reasons (Table 2). Another two changed from disgust at meat to dislike of its taste. The remaining pesci-vegetarian became more concerned with her health than with the ethical issues about raising or killing animals that she had mentioned first in the earlier interview.

Still avoiding all meats and fish. Five avoiders of all flesh foods expressed a self-construct as a vegetarian as their main reason in the second questionnaire, whereas the reason stated first in the initial questionnaire for abstaining from all flesh foods was either ethical or based on dislike (Table 2). Of two vegetarians who expressed dislike for flesh foods, one

maintained this motive while the other changed to disgust. Another student changed from ethics to disgust. One woman reported that she was now concerned with ethical issues instead of being subject to the influence of other people as she had originally indicated.

First experiences of consuming flesh foods again

When someone became less strict about avoiding flesh foods, the first experience of eating meat once more was usually unpleasant. Some reported bad physical reactions, e.g. “*ill... bad indigestion*”, “*nauseated*”, “*heavy ... lethargic and tired*”. Others reported psychological upset, e.g. “*guilty... hypocrite*”, “*feeling weird [at] the thought of eating flesh*”. Nevertheless, liking the taste of meat, convenience or conformity with others were motives enough for not going back to avoiding those foods.

One woman who had become vegetarian since the first questionnaire (fish before had been her exclusive flesh food) had to cope with a craving for the food she avoided: “*I find fish a lot harder not to eat than meat ... I enjoy fish a lot more ... I get real craving!*”.

Social relations

Most family members and friends who were meat eaters responded favourably to individuals when they changed back to eating more flesh. However, some of these students felt that they had to hide their new position because they suspected that peers who were more extreme in their flesh avoidance might react negatively. Indeed, some peers had reacted negatively, e.g. “*Most of my ... friends were surprised because they were vegetarian ... I didn't tell everybody. For me it's a right thing to do and they didn't like that because I was challenging the way they were*” (Now an avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish; before: vegetarian).

Another woman who returned to fish eating was also criticised: “*My friends ... the*

vegetarian ones were saying: ‘Oh! You’re an hypocrite, you can’t call yourself a vegetarian anymore, you are caught in the middle.’ So, I actually don’t tend to call myself a vegetarian now”.

The only woman who went completely back to meat-eating also experienced a similar reaction: “*Some [friends] thought I’d failed, a superficial person”.*

On the other hand, one of the vegans refrained from criticising meat eaters:

The cruelty aspect of meat still bothers me, but not to the extent where I try to do something about it because I respect the rights of other people to eat meat which is an integral part of most food cultures.

Differences between foods consumed at University and at home

A large minority (16 out of 40) of the students, most of them avoiders of some flesh, ate more varied food (meat and/or vegetables) at home than at university, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 8.2, p < 0.005$ (Table 3). Two sorts of reasons were given for such differences – the greater amounts of money and time available at home or the convenience of conforming to the family’s food choices. On the other hand, almost all full vegetarians at university consumed the same kind of food at home. This is another illustration of the stability of an extreme strategy.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Views on future practices

Some of the interviewees who had modified their habits (for less or more strictly vegetarian) since the previous interview were considering a return to their previous practice, perhaps temporarily. However, these women did not intend to return fully to eating red meat. In some cases, this depended on their expectancies about future relationships:

I’m getting married next year and my boyfriend eats meat and expects meat with

every meal. So, I'd probably eat meat more often then. (Now an avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish; before: vegetarian).

I think when I'll start a family I might change again. I might decide then I want to eat chicken. I can't see me eating beef. ... I'll probably just think more of cooking and what I should give to my children in terms of nutrition and not forcing them, and

giving them a choice, so giving them vegetarian and meat options ... I take vitamins

substitutes and things I wouldn't necessary want to give to my children, I'd rather just [prefer] to give them a varied, general diet. (Now an avoider of all meat but eater of fish; before: vegetarian).

Others gave less specific reasons for expecting to eat flesh occasionally in the future:

I think eventually I might get back to eating fish occasionally because I find it so hard not to eat it, but I'll do my best not to; but I don't think that I'll eat meat again. (Now a vegetarian; before: avoider of all meat but eater of fish).

I can see myself eating less meat and avoiding red meat, unless for old favourites like an occasional steak or a 'chilli con carne'. As before, it will depend on money and time. (Currently an avoider of red meat and fish but eater of white meat; before: vegetarian).

There might be odd phases that I'd like to be more healthy... a vegetarian.

(Currently an avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish; before: avoider of all meat but eater of fish).

There was only one individual who reported an unqualified intention (although in the long term) to become stricter, i.e. to go back to eating fish and vegetarian foods and to give up white meat. She was the respondent who reported "*feeling weird [at] the thought of eating flesh*" just after eating meat again. This feeling apparently was a stronger factor in her intention to avoid flesh strictly than were the influence of others' opinions and conformity to others' practice (reasons given at both first and second questioning).

The only woman who went completely back to meat-eating nevertheless continued to operate from principles which informed her previous avoidance of meat: "*I think I'd continue to eat meat but generally organic/free range types. I hope to keep eating healthy with a balanced diet, lots of fruit and vegetables and avoiding snacks like too many crisps or chocolate*" (she used to avoid red meat only).

Discussion

Most of the individuals from this study reported that they were still avoiding the same flesh foods as 18-24 months previously. Indeed, nearly all of them continued to avoid some foods derived from animals. Nevertheless about a third of the sample had modified their pattern of behaviour towards flesh foods. Most of the individuals who had changed moved away from stricter forms of vegetarianism. Thus, the general dynamic of vegetarianism is not a shift towards strict exclusion of flesh foods. Rather, those full vegetarians who change become stricter, while the partial vegetarians who change usually become less strict.

Rational motivation for avoiding flesh-foods, familial and other social pressures and

the sensory characteristics of the food varied in expression among respondents. These reasons related to either persisting with avoidance of the same animal species, modifying the choice or, in some cases, succumbing to cravings on occasion. Possibly, pressures towards less strictness in flesh-food avoidance were more powerful on partial flesh avoiders, since most of them accepted more flesh foods after 18-24 months. Nevertheless, there were also some vegetarians who went back to eating some flesh foods.

Some respondents in this sample reported a primary motive for maintaining their food avoidances which differed from that given 18-24 months previously. We were not able to confirm the report by Amato and Partridge (1989) that people adopting new motives tend to move from a more personal concern to ethical-social issues. Most of these female students changed among reasons of benefit to themselves or changed from ethical concerns about raising and killing of animals to personal benefits. Only a few moved from personal benefits to an ethical concern. These different outcomes may be attributable to differences in age, gender and cultural background between respondents in this study and the work by Amato and Partridge. Although the majority (71%) of participants in Amato and Partridge's study were women, they ranged widely in age and had a variety of occupations, whereas this study was exclusively on university students. In addition, 82% of the participants in Amato and Partridge (1989) were from the U.S.A. and the remainder from other countries, but only 6% were from England.

When strictly vegetarian students were interviewed for the first time, they were concerned mainly with ethical issues, although dislike of meat was also given as a major reason for avoiding it. When asked again, about 2 years later, the vegetarians changed from dislike to disgust at flesh foods. In other words, unpalatability may have been replaced by feelings of repugnance at the thought of eating an animal or at the sight of its tissues, either raw or cooked. Perhaps dislike is given initially as a reason for avoiding meat, instead of

disgust, in order not to seem strange in a society where the slaughtering is out of sight of most people and the portions of meat available in shops show few reminders of the living animal (Elias, 1978; Fiddes, 1991). Thus, with time, vegetarians may be gaining courage to admit the basis of their avoidance. Indeed, by the second time of questioning, five vegetarians simply stated “I’m vegetarian” as the reason to refrain from eating any flesh food instead of justifying the choice ethically or in terms of palatability. Being vegetarian for some time may make it seem such a normal way to live that there is no need to justify the practice.

The partial flesh avoiders in this sample gave signs of a more diverse range of reasons. This may be because they felt a need to justify their equivocal position on the issues of flesh-eating and vegetarianism. Indeed, some explicitly mentioned being regarded as hypocrites by their peers, whether flesh eaters or vegetarians. There were more negative reactions towards these individuals who ate some flesh foods by those of their peers who were more extreme in avoidance of flesh. Similarly, lack of social support for maintaining vegetarian practice was reported by former vegetarians studied by Barr and Chapman (2002). On the other hand, for some in the current sample a positive relationship with the family and/or with meat-eating friends was possible when the student became less strict.

Some of the women in this sample had considered a return to eating meat because of social relationships to be maintained or developed, i.e. with present/future partner and children. Because of cultural norms specifying the role of providing food for the whole family, these young women appeared to anticipate accommodating the food preferences and nutritional needs of partners and children. Consequently, they may have included more flesh foods in their diet than they would have done if they had been alone (Barr & Chapman, 2002; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Holm & Møhl, 2000).

Other kinds of change might have been found if the two periods of questioning had been longer apart. Respondents would then have been more exposed to the different

influences already discussed and could have reflected longer on their decisions. Cross-sectional studies have found that people avoiding flesh foods are not all alike: even people professing the same pattern of avoidance differ in their motives for avoiding flesh foods as well as in their reactions to food and to social circumstances. Thus the present study serves as a basis for further longitudinal research. The results could guide the design of more extensive qualitative and quantitative investigation of large samples and of patterns of consumption of animal-based foods and also of changing motives behind the avoidance of flesh foods. Further research should also include young men because of differences remaining between genders in cultural norms for appropriate foods and for roles in the feeding of children.

In summary, although people who avoid flesh foods are called 'vegetarians', they do not necessarily have stable behavioural characteristics nor do they usually end up as fully vegetarian within a year or two.

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Table 1. The investigators' categorisations of reasons given by respondents for choosing or avoiding flesh foods in 1993/94 and in 1995, with examples of the open-ended statements written.

Categories	Examples
convenience	convenience ... practicality of living with a vegetarian easier to cook habit time consuming
dislike	bored by the stuff I was eating fatty and chewy greasy I dislike the taste and the smell of it cooking I don't like the flavour I don't like/enjoy the taste/animal products monotonous not fond of tastes disgusting tastes horrible unpleasant texture
disgust	acquainted meat with animals and dead flesh an animal - tendons, fat, gristle ... difficult to eat animal on a plate ... the head and tail blood... made me feel really queasy... squeamish disgust disgusted by the idea of a dead thing on my plate eating meat now ... the thought repulses me Fat is visible around the meat when raw feeling not clean, disgusted fish with the eyes still in ... fish smell is horrible I do not like handling raw meat I don't like butchers... wouldn't prepare raw meat I don't like to touch raw meat ... it was an animal I feel sick - red meat is too bloody it was flesh... repulsive makes me feel sick... taste, smell and the sight of big joints pork is horrible the thought of eating flesh the thought of what meat is

Table 1 continued over

Table 1 continued

Categories	Examples
economy	cheapest expensive financial reasons I can't afford money
ethics	concern about animals concerned about intensive animal rearing cruelty of killing and quality of life cruelty to animals dislike of the meat industry ... battery farm don't like the way animals are treated ... animal rights ethical reasons I disagree with killing animals for food ... animal rights I don't agree with the way animals were slaughtered I don't agree with the way humanity exploit animals I find modern farming methods cruel inhumane and standards of cruelty to animals facing slaughter intensive farming is wrong killed inhumanely political reasons production of dairy products is also very exploitative the screaming of animals being killed the way the animals are treated before and during being killed
fashion	I was vegetarian because all my friends were it's one of those things that when you were young
health	fattening have it for the protein healthier ... I get my B12 high cholesterol hormones do to us I object to the use of chemicals and hormones lower fat content more aware of the health aspect my diet would be inadequate proper/careful ... diet saturated fat unhealthy weight control
I'm a vegetarian ¹	I am vegetarian still vegetarian I'm vegetarian still

Table 1 continued over

Table 1 continued

Categories	Examples
others' influence	class friends were vegetarian group decision I became vegetarian because my mum became vegetarian influence of a family peer group bonding - vegetarian society to fit other people turning more vegan ... because my boyfriend has [turned vegan]
rebellion	avoiding traditional family meal just to make a point, as rebellious rebellion
religion	religious reason

Note: ¹ I'm a vegetarian - this category stands independently from other categories. The respondents who presented reasons under this category have conceptualised the identity of a vegetarian, i.e. professing to be a vegetarian was sufficient to justify the avoidance of a flesh food.

Table 2. Reasons for avoiding flesh foods stated first by each respondent whose behavioural pattern did not change between 1993/94 and 1995 (N=29); when the later reason was in a different category from the reason given initially, it is underlined.

Avoiders of red meat but eaters of white meat and fish (N=9)		Avoiders of red meat and fish but eaters of white meat (N=2)		Avoiders of all meat but eaters of fish (N=9)		Vegetarians (N=9)	
1993/94	1995	1993/94	1995	1993/94	1995	1993/94	1995
Convenience	Convenience						
Disgust Disgust	<u>Dislike</u> <u>Health</u>	Disgust	Disgust	Disgust Disgust	<u>Dislike</u> <u>Dislike</u>		
						Dislike Dislike Dislike	<u>Disgust</u> <u>Dislike</u> <u>I'm veg.</u>
Health Health	Health Health	Health	<u>Dislike</u>	Health	<u>Ethical</u>		
				Others' influence	<u>Ethical</u>	Others' influence	<u>Ethical</u>
Religion	Religion						
Ethical Ethical Ethical	<u>Disgust</u> <u>Disgust</u> <u>Economy</u>			Ethical Ethical Ethical Ethical Ethical	<u>Health</u> Ethical Ethical Ethical Ethical	Ethical Ethical Ethical Ethical Ethical	<u>Disgust</u> <u>I'm veg.</u> <u>I'm veg.</u> <u>I'm veg.</u> <u>I'm veg.</u>

Table 3. Food avoidances and acceptances at university and at home by complete and partial flesh avoiders (N=40) at the time of the second questioning, in 1995.

<i>Food-choice patterns</i>	<i>Patterns at university and home</i>	
	<u>same</u>	<u>different</u>
Vegetarian/Vegan	11	1
Avoiders of some flesh:	12	16
same pattern as at first interview	10	10
less strict than at first interview	2	5
more strict than at first interview	0	1

Captions to Figures

Figure 1. Frequencies of reported patterns at the start and finish of a period of 18-24 months.

Figure 2. Categories of reasons for avoiding meat given at the start and finish of the 18-24 period by those who became less strict.

PATTERNS

1993/94

1995

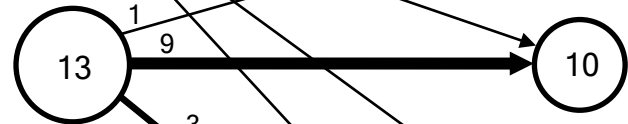
Vegan



Vegetarian



Avoider of all meat but eater of fish



Avoider of red meat and fish but eater of white meat



Avoider of red meat but eater of white meat and fish



Eater of meat but avoider of fish



Eater of meat and fish



Santos-Merx & Booth: Figure 1

