

Research Report

Health, ethics and environment: A qualitative study of vegetarian motivations

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the motivations of vegetarians by means of online ethnographic research with participants in an international message board. The researcher participated in discussions on the board, gathered responses to questions from 33 participants, and conducted follow-up e-mail interviews with 18 of these participants. Respondents were predominantly from the US, Canada and the UK. Seventy per cent were females, and ages ranged from 14 to 53, with a median of 26 years. Data were analysed using a thematic approach. While this research found that health and the ethical treatment of animals were the main motivators for participants' vegetarianism, participants reported a range of commitments to environmental concerns, although in only one case was environmentalism a primary motivator for becoming a vegetarian. The data indicate that vegetarians may follow a trajectory, in which initial motivations are augmented over time by other reasons for sustaining or further restricting their diet.

Keywords: Environmentalism; Ethics; Food choices; Health; Vegetarianism