



On Becoming Vegetarian

A Study of Belief and Motives

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of Education in Part Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) at the University of Malta

April, 2004

ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports, by the use of a qualitative method, the findings of the beliefs and motives of 13 vegetarians. Particular experiences in the respondents' histories are examined along with experiences and influences deemed to have affected the conversion in a direct manner. The majority of respondents reported one primary motive for having converted to vegetarianism, and one or more secondary motives underlying the main one, which transpired later on. The motives which transpired are ethical, health, gustatory and challenge, with ethical motives positioned in a central role. The present motivations for remaining a vegetarian are also examined briefly. Three distinct types of conversion processes were identified, with a focus on both attitudinal and behavioural change. For the majority of respondents there was a change in the meaning of meat after conversion, in particular meat become a source of revulsion and disgust. In conclusion, the effect of the conversion on relationships with significant others is examined, along with a discussion of two types of vegetarian networks, the private and the public network.

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I am the author of this dissertation being presented in part fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) at the University of Malta. I do further confirm that this dissertation is an original and unpublished work.

APRIL 2004

CHRISTINE GARZIA

Ma lhaqtx

Lil Emanuel (1931-2004)

*Ma lhaqtx sirt tafni,
Missier.*

*L-assenza tieghek nixxiegha ta dmugh jahraq,
Qalb b'morsa maghha,
Nieqsa minn nifs,
Nieqsa mill-hajja.*

*L-istorja tieghek immortali,
Miktuba b'demmek qalil,
Mistura fl-irkejjen tal-genna li bnejt,
Mnaqqxa f'kull qalb li kienet tafek,.*

*F'hajja wahda hraqt l-incens,
Waqt li fl-ohra imxejt fuq l-ilma,
Qatt ma bzajt tohlom,
Qatt ma bzajt tghix.*

*Ma lhaqtx ghedtlek grazzi;
Ta' l-iljieli bla rqaghad meta kont tarbija,*

*Ma lhaqtx ghedtlek inhobbok;
Talli ghamiltni dak li jien illum.*

*Ma lhaqtx kellimtek qabel tlaqt:
Kiefra l-firda bla stennijja.*

*Ma lhaqtx sirt nafek,
Missier.*

Christine Garzia

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my tutor, Ms. Roberta Zahra de Domenico, for all her guidance, encouragement and support throughout this research, who believed in my work and always pushed me to do my best.

I am also thankful to the respondents who played a fundamental role in this research; whose experiences I hope will be an inspiration to others. Special thanks also go to Mr. John Darmanin, Chairperson of the Maltese Vegetarian Society, for his assistance and support.

Last but not least, special thanks go to my family and my partner Matthew, who understood how important this research was for me and who supported me throughout.

I would also like to mention and thank the various researchers whom I contacted in the earlier phase of this research and who generously provided me with free reprints of their work: Dr. Alan Beardsworth & Dr. Theresa Keil, University of Loughborough; Dr. Swinder Janda, Kansas State University; Professor Paul Rozin, University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Kenyon, University of Sheffield; Dr. Anthony Worsley and Dr. Emma Lea, University of Adelaide, Dr. Michael Allen, University of Newcastle; Dr. Susan Barr, University of British Columbia; Dr. Daniel Fessler, UCLA; Dr. Cheryl Perry, University of Minnesota; Dr. Rachel Povey, Staffordshire University; Dr. Marjaana Lindeman, University of Helsinki; Dr. Yolanda Martins, University of Toronto; Dr. Jeff Jordan, University of Delaware.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 Subject and its significance

“Eating is not only biologically necessary, but also culturally symbolic, & partakes in the social flow of commodities...The production, circulation & representation of food provide ways of understanding society” (Morton, 1994, pg 13).

Food is not simply indivisible from the history of the human race, but fundamental to it (Tannahill, 1988). In particular, meat carries with it layers of meaning (Adams, 2002; Birke, 1993), one meaning being “the primary oppression of animals” (Adams, 2002, pg. 77). In view of the notion that meat eating is a highly symbolic act, it follows that the voluntary rejection of meat is similarly particularly symbolic (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). The latter authors state that some theorists presume that deliberate meat rejection may have arisen primarily in established agricultural societies, amongst people in a nutritionally advantaged and secure position. Such refusal would have implied a strong symbolic meaning, possibly one of disagreement from current cultural supposition (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). This refusal to eat meat is the focus of this dissertation.

1.1.1 Historical background

Thus, the way a culture grasps certain basic categories of its world can be understood through the enquiry of food and eating systems (Meigs, 1997). Meat rejection among the privileged and the educated, in both Greek and Roman culture, was in itself a manner of criticizing the conformist ethical and cultural assumptions of the time (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). One such group was the *Pythagoreans*, who attempted to purify their minds by imposing definite taboos, one being the consumption of flesh (Hergenhahn, 2000). In India vegetarianism developed to an extent that it became positioned at the very centre of Hinduism. In their caste

system, consisting of five strata, it is only the *Untouchables*, deemed outcasts and impure to be considered as worthy human beings, who can touch dead animals and eat meat (O'Neill, 2003).

1.1.2 The origins of the word

In 1842, the founders of the British Vegetarian Society are accredited to have coined the word 'vegetarian'. It is derived from the Latin word 'vegetus', meaning "whole, sound, fresh, or lively" (Davis & Messina, 2000, pg. 1). The original meaning of the word implies a balanced philosophical and moral sense of life, and not just a diet of vegetables and fruits.

The Society defines a vegetarian as "one who abstains from the use of flesh, fish and fowl as food" (Davis & Messina, 2000, pg. 1). A more restrictive form of vegetarianism is veganism; vegans choose to avoid all animal products, including dairy produce and eggs.

1.1.3 Diverse motives for vegetarianism

Certain vegetarians adopt vegetarianism as their diet either because they are motivated exclusively by moral grounds, frequently regarding animal rights and saving the environment, or else they are motivated exclusively by health grounds, showing concern about the long-lasting health effects of eating meat. However, many vegetarians cite both types of motives for adopting such a diet (Rozin, Haidt & McCauley, 2000).

1.2 Objectives and motivations for the study

Since limited research on vegetarianism has been done in Malta (Miruzzi, 2000), carrying out research in this area is significant, given that increasing number of people are choosing to adopt this lifestyle. The study of patterns of food selection and avoidance offers a chance to gain significant insights into one of the most fundamental aspects of human activity: the fulfilment of the body's constant demands within a given culture (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992). Apart from questioning why Maltese individuals are motivated to become vegetarians, I will also examine this transition in a society which does not advocate vegetarianism, at times is indifferent, and even intolerant, towards it.

1.3 Specific aims and research questions

As a researcher, I am interested in the topic primarily because I became a vegetarian more than two years ago. This has had a major effect on my life from a psychological, physical and emotional perspective. Another reason for choosing this particular topic is to help people become aware that a choice as simple as eating meat has a direct and indirect impact on society. Lastly, another reason is to contribute to the research already done locally (Miruzzi, 2000).

1.3.1 Research question

This study aims to find out and understand the motivators that lead an individual in the Maltese culture to choose a vegetarian diet, essentially asking “What motivated you to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle?”, since vegetarians in Western culture are in the majority converts to the practice of vegetarianism i.e. they weren't raised in a vegetarian family (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992).

The dissertation will focus on several possible motivators that impel individuals to become vegetarians, *voluntarily*. As Beardsworth & Keil (1997) aptly put it, “the real challenge for the social scientist, in fact, is the explanation not of involuntary but of voluntary vegetarianism” (pg. 218).

1.4. Theoretical framework

In understanding motivation, one cannot circumvent the values and beliefs that individuals hold. What motivates us depends on our principles and attitudes. Moreover, in accord with the human motive of cognitive consistency, people will try to resolve apparent inconsistencies in their attitudes and behaviours (Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997), even though many individuals attain cognitive consistency simply by manipulating (albeit unconsciously) reality (Worsley, 2002b).

1.4.1 Vegetarian orientation and individuals’ beliefs

Vegetarian beliefs predict vegetarian habits considerably, in particular beliefs about the animal origin of meat, health, and taste consequences of meat ingestion and avoidance (Worsley and Skrzypiec, 1998). Other research (Janda and Trocchia, 2001) shows that individuals’ vegetarian orientation is related to their concern for animals, and their concern with nutrition. Results also showed that females and younger people had a higher probability of having a vegetarian orientation.

1.4.2 Meat as symbolizing masculinity and dominance

Principles and attitudes, in turn, depend on our culture. Several anthropologists and sociologists propose that, “meat, symbolises the endorsement of hierarchy and inequality,

particularly compared with other basic foods” (Allen & Ng, in press). Other authors (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992) argue that meat is perceived as representing patriarchy, thus they view meat eating jointly with the establishment and expression of male authority. According to Adams, (2002), “people with power have always eaten meat”, (pg. 36) and the author argues that the myth that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity pervades all social classes.

Research (Allen & Ng, in press) also indicates that people who endorse the principles of masculinity and dominance like red meat, not really for its taste or dietary benefits, but for what it represents, because red meat represents the values they support i.e., it permits them to convey their self-concept. In a similar vein, Lindeman and Stark (1999) indicate that the manifestation of one’s identity via, what they refer to as “ideological food choice motives” (pg. 141) was mostly predicted by magical thinking both about food and health, vegetarianism, individual efforts both for environmental welfare and for understanding self and the world.

1.5 Summary of chapters

This chapter introduced the subject of vegetarianism, along with the objectives and motivations of the study, the research questions and the theoretical framework which will structure this study. In Chapter 2 there is an evaluation of past and contemporary international studies and theories about vegetarianism. In Chapter 3 there is an in-depth examination of the research design, comprising of the methodology and data collection methods. The results are presented in Chapter 4, and a discussion of the results follows in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes with the implications of the research findings, along with the study’s strengths and limitations. Moreover, recommendations for further research are considered.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Literature Review – Studies of Vegetarianism

This chapter presents an overview of contemporary theories and research on vegetarianism. Differences between vegetarians and non-vegetarians are outlined, focusing on the possible motives for conversion to vegetarianism. Some issues that are mentioned are the connotations of meat; the consequences of conversion; the multitude of current motives, in particular ethical, health and sensory concerns; the possible and complex links between vegetarianism and eating disorders; and a discussion relating to vegetarianism as a source of identity. To conclude, there is a focus on individual attitudes towards different animals, relating to the way society distinguishes between different categories of animals.

2.1 Vegetarianism as a challenge – the moment of conversion

An individual's attitudes regarding food habits are an element of societal principles that they have incorporated through social experience (Worsley, 2000). Since meat consumption is regarded as the norm in prosperous nations and among the affluent strata of the population (Dietz, Kalof & Frisch, 1996), vegetarianism may be seen as challenging conventional nutritional culture in several ways: nutritionally, morally, spiritually and ecologically (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993).

Although individual conversion to vegetarianism is in itself an extremely private experience, Beardsworth and Keil (1992) outline two distinct types of conversion processes. The first kind is that involving a rather lengthy process in which the individual's ideology progresses to a point where the decision to convert is finally taken. The idea of progression is advanced by claimsmakers, who argue that individuals should slowly reduce and ultimately eliminate the

products of animal pain and misery, thereby striving towards ethical consistency (Maurer, 1995). The second kind of process involves a change that is sudden and even impulsive, which, according to Beardsworth and Keil (1992) is “frequently triggered by a conversion experience” (pg. 267).

Nonetheless, whichever type of process the individual goes through, once the connection is made “between animals in the field and what ends up on the dinner plate” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993, pg. 230) as expressed by one respondent, this might be the instance where the change occurs. Similarly, according to McDonald (2000), this learning experience is characterised by a catalytic experience: the information obtained serves as a catalyst to either repression i.e. the individual stores the information until a different catalytic episode assists its recall, or else to what the author calls “becoming oriented” (pg.4) in which the individual has the intention to learn more, makes the decision to convert, or both.

Conversely, MacNair (1998) outlines three techniques to becoming vegetarian: (a) the choice is made and the individual gradually phases out meat; (b) the choice is made abruptly, however the individual’s meat consumption has been decreasing for a while and (c) the individual switches from high meat consumption to none at all.

2.1.1 The development of ‘False naming’

Adams (2002) argues that the development of “*false naming*” (pg. 79) – for example the carcass of a cow is labelled ‘beef’ – provides a way to mask the association between the food on the plate and the butchered animal. “Through detachment, concealment, misrepresentation, and shifting the blame, the structure of the absent referent prevails” (pg. 78). This means that

there is an absence behind every serving of meat: the slaughter of the animal whose position the meat takes.

Human subjugation of nature is symbolized in the way we are culturally disconnected from the fact of killing (Birke, 1993). We as a society partake in language that disguises realism (Adams, 2002). However, vegetarians may again become aware of this association by consciously breaching these linguistic rules. According to Adams (2003), vegetarians restore the '*absent referent*', which is that which disconnects the person eating the meat from the animal and the animal from the end product. The absent referent's function is to keep "meat" removed from the reality that it was once an animal who was slaughtered, "to keep *something* (like hamburger) from being seen as having been *someone* (a cow, a lamb, a once-alive being, a subject)" (2003, pg. 23). Hence, vegetarianism may be viewed as a progression in which the individual consciously attempts to restructure human-environmental associations, at both the private and communal levels (Dietz, Kalof & Frisch, 1996).

2.1.2 New connotations for 'meat'

This hedonic shift is one of the most fascinating aspects of the process of converting to vegetarianism: meat, which was previously liked, is now disliked, and even considered revolting (Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997). Kenyon and Barker's research (1998) illustrates how adolescent vegetarians and non-vegetarians differ in the extremely dissimilar meanings they both attribute to meat: the vegetarian respondents loathed the notion of killing an animal and ingesting blood, thus meat assumed a negative representation for the vegetarians. In contrast, the non-vegetarians were less disturbed by meat and its origins, and were more inclined to attribute positive terms to meat. The authors note that it is striking that vegetarians

were repulsed by blood and also that meat was associated with blood. According to Twigg (1979, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1992), “red meat with its high blood content is seen as the main focus of vegetarian revulsion” (pgs. 258-259).

2.1.3 The consequences of conversion

Once the change occurs, there are several consequences, both positive and negative. Several vegetarian converts asserted that “...they could now be ‘at ease with their conscience’” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993, pg. 230). The feeling of guilt and disgust associated with the consumption of animals has been mentioned in other research (Janda & Trocchia, 2001) and the avoidance of meat can at least provide “a partial resolution of a range of anxieties” (Beardsworth, 1995, pg. 135). Thus, commercialised types of vegetarianism may signify new means of dealing with the remorse, anxiety and ambivalence related to the use of animals for consumption (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993).

On the other hand, certain drawbacks may manifest themselves after the conversion, one being the effect this might have on social relations, since consumption patterns are such a crucial part of daily life (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). Research (Povey, Wellens and Conner, 2001) in which the differences between the attitudes and beliefs of four dietary groups – meat eaters, meat avoiders, vegetarians and vegans – were examined, proves that individuals hold “most positive intentions, attitudes, social pressure and greater perceived control towards their own diet” (2001, pg. 24). Respondents viewed the diet most different from their own as the least positive and were inclined to show more ambivalence vis-à-vis the diet closest to (but not the same as) their own. In this particular study, meat-eaters held the most negative attitudes regarding vegetarian diets.

Therefore, it might be possible that vegetarians become the focus of great resentment by non-vegetarians, and such reactions might exert strain on the vegetarian individual to consume meat (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). The tension felt by vegetarians in retaining their vegetarian beliefs in a non-vegetarian culture, especially at social gatherings, is mentioned in other research (Janda & Trocchia, 2001) where the participants facing this tension were hesitant in disclosing their vegetarian orientation to others. It was also noted that individuals who had more conservative and less supportive families experienced more tension than those individuals who did receive support from their family.

2.2 Basic motives for vegetarianism

Motivation, as many other concepts in psychology, does not have a universally acknowledged definition (Arnold, Cooper and Robertson, 1998). The authors define motivation as pertaining to “factors that push us or pull us to behave in certain ways” (pg. 245). Hall and Lindzey (1985) highlight the fact that while only some theorists explain behaviour by only one or two motivational concepts, the majority of theorists believe that behaviour is driven by various separate motives. A theorist who sides with the latter is Allport (1961, as cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1985) who “regards adult motives as varied, and as self-sustaining contemporary systems, growing out of antecedent systems, but functionally independent of them” (pg. 354). The authors infer that by this, Allport means that a certain action or type of behaviour may develop into an end or an objective in itself, even though it was primarily undertaken for another distinct cause.

An extension on this theory is that “...the motivations which a person experiences or the justifications which he or she employs frequently combine and interact with one another” (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997, pg. 230). Whereas some persons do identify a sole motive, others

may be reluctant or incapable of doing so. This is illustrated in a study by Amato and Partridge (1989, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), in which 43% of respondents identified a single motive for switching to a vegetarian diet, while the remaining 57% identified multiple motives. Another finding of this study was that motivations had a propensity to evolve as time passed. This concurs with other research (Stiles, 1998) which revealed that people who convert to vegetarianism might be motivated by several reasons, yet, eventually are likely to integrate other motives.

Grounds for motivation include physiological actions within the brain and body, and also culture and individual societal interactions (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). As other behaviours, vegetarianism is supported by several motives of qualitatively diverse kinds (Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997). Research (Kenyon and Barker, 1998) carried out on adolescent vegetarian girls revealed the following themes attributed to meat: flesh & blood; taste, texture & smell; animal; life & death; colour; health-related; and miscellaneous themes. Extensive findings (Cooper, Wise & Mann, 1985; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998; Janda and Trocchia, 2001) uncovered more or less similar themes, corresponding to ethical and health motives, and sensory concerns.

Novel motives include reference group influence (Janda and Trocchia, 2001) and influence of friends (Santos & Booth, 1996); ecological motives (Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998) often intertwined with food shortage concerns (Cooper, Wise & Mann, 1985; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001); pleasure and ideological reasons (Lindeman & Stark, 1999); and weight control, familial and religious motives (Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001). What follows is an in-depth analysis of the above mentioned motivations found in contemporary literature, with a focus on Anglo-American and Australian research.

2.2.1 Ethical vegetarianism

Animal-derived food poses a dilemma to humankind: since the majority of this food necessitates the slaughter of the animal in question, it is unavoidable that issues relating to the moral acceptability of taking the animal's life abound (Beardsworth, 1995). Adams (2002) defines ethical vegetarianism as "arising from an ethical decision that regards meat eating as an unjustifiable exploitation of the other animals" (pg. 27-28), and argues that health vegetarianism alone does not include concern for animals. According to MacNair (1998), those individuals who start with animal concerns will probably increase interest in the health perspective. Likewise, individuals who start with health concerns frequently develop empathy to animals as a separate motive.

The role of moral vegetarianism, where ethical concerns emerge as strong motives in embracing a vegetarian diet, has been extensively documented (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Lea, 2001). The sub-themes underlying this motive basically encompass "concern for the quality of life of animals and the feeling of guilt associated with killing animals" (Janda & Trocchia, 2001, pg. 1210). In essence, respondents felt compassion for what they perceived to be a miserable quality of life for the living being. With regard to the slaughter per se, some informants viewed the killing as objectionable due to religious reasons (Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001) while others conveyed uneasiness as regards what they thought was the "needless exploitation of other creatures" (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992, pg. 269). This uneasiness is reflected in a moral obligation where a pervading belief amongst the majority of vegetarians in a study was that "humans have no right to kill animals for food" (Lea, 2003, pg. 24). These studies illustrate that motivation usually directs behaviour toward a certain incentive that eases an unpleasant

condition (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000) in this case, the guilt and anxiety felt at killing animals unnecessarily.

2.2.2 Ecological motives

A number of ideologies may well overlap with each other (Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1997). There exists several overlap between aspects such as animal mistreatment and ecological conservation (Fessler, Arguello, Mekdara & Macias, 2003). Various findings indicate that ethical motives include a sense of concern for human welfare in countries where food resources are scarce and related to this are ecological motives (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997). There is a thread in ecological rhetoric which asks us to leave nature alone, as though somehow an unadulterated nature subsists outside of human civilization (Birke, 1993).

Beliefs analogous to universalism, which centres on harmony with nature, have been associated to vegetarianism and pro-environmental ideals and also concerns about food consumption in society (Worsley, Wahlqvist, Dalais & Savige, 2002). This has received empirical support, where research (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001) illustrates that ecological ideology – comprising of “the values of universalism, stimulation and self-direction, ecological welfare, political issues and natural content of the food as related dietary motives” (pg. 182) – proved to be a strong motive for a vegetarian diet. Distaste for meat, concern for the earth and world famine were mentioned as primary food choice motives by vegetarians. Interesting to note is that strict vegetarians show more concern for the environment than pseudo-vegetarians¹ and non-vegetarians, signifying a unique level of commitment (Janda & Trocchia, 2001).

¹ Individuals who choose to refrain from meat-based products, but who occasionally consume meat.

2.2.3 Vegetarianism as a boycott

People communicate what is favourable and what is reproachable by means of their food patterns (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001). Vegetarianism may be seen as a form of ‘boycott’, (Maurer, 1995; Singer, 2002), a word that conveys “the potentially political ramifications of changing one’s diet” (Maurer, 1995, pg. 152). According to Maurer, the continuance of vegetarian development depends on individuals partaking in the boycott against meat.

For Adams (2002), vegetarianism is a symbol of autonomous female being and represents a refutation of male control and aggression. Even adolescents, when refraining from eating meat, could be rejecting the family’s traditional eating values (Kenyon & Barker, 1998) and in the process trying to construct a more peaceful and idyllic world (Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001). In fact, Worsley and Skrzypiec (1998) hold that adolescent vegetarians and non-vegetarians live in dissimilar worlds since they vary regarding the extent to which they subscribe to current social ideas.

2.2.4 Sensory properties of meat and the emotion of disgust

The emotion of disgust is, at its core, a food-based emotion (Rozin, Haidt & McCauley, 2000). The authors propose three motivations leading to the refusal of potential food: distaste i.e. undesirable sensory properties; the anticipated consequences of eating the food in question; and conceptual i.e. what we know concerning the nature of the food. According to the authors, the process of becoming vegetarian illustrates the recruitment of disgust.

Extensive findings (Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Kenyon & Barker, 1998; Lea, 2003; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001; Santos & Booth, 1996;) show that vegetarians

hold negative sensory perceptions as regards meat produce. Mainly, these perceptions are associated with the unpleasant taste and appearance of meat, and also its foul odour and texture. It is intriguing to note that even amongst non-vegetarian females, meat and meat-eating experiences were negatively judged, and these feelings were based on disgust (Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad & Risvik, 2002).

Thus, even though disgust is not unique to vegetarians with regards to meat eating, it has been proposed that the emotion of disgust is selectively related to moral vegetarianism (Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997). However, even though aversion to the sensory properties of meat was hypothesised to be related to both moral vegetarianism and disgust, this aversion did not predominate in moral vegetarians. Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, (1997) contend that moral vegetarians become repulsed by meat *after* taking the decision to become vegetarian i.e. disgust is an outcome of adopting a moral stance. This concurs with other research (Fessler, Arguello, Mekdara & Macias, 2003) which revealed a positive correlation between the prevalence of meat eaten and overall disgust sensitivity. The authors conclude that individuals abstaining from meat for moral reasons are no more disgust sensitive than individuals who abstain from meat on taste or health grounds.

2.2.5 Health vegetarianism

All age groups show concern about health with regards to nutritional lifestyle (Lea & Worsley, 2001); although there is evidence that there is an increase in food-relevant concerns with age (Fessler, Arguello, Mekdara & Macias, 2003). In a study investigating food choice motives among both omnivores and vegetarians, health was considered the most crucial determinant of food choice (Lindeman & Stark, 1999).

Findings suggests that individuals possessing a high level of concern with nutrition have a higher probability of showing a positive vegetarian orientation (Janda & Trocchia, 2001) and that even non-vegetarians consider a vegetarian diet to have certain benefits, in particular health-related benefits regarding improved intake of fruits and vegetables and reduced intake of saturated fat (Lea & Worsley, 2003). This concurs with other research (Povey, Wellens & Conner, 2001) in which respondents who where meat-eaters, meat avoiders, vegetarians or vegans described a vegetarian diet as 'healthy'.

Various studies (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Charles, Wise & Mann, 1985; Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Lea, 2001; Lindeman & Stark, 1999; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001; Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997) illustrate the crucial role that health-reasons play in the lifestyle of most contemporary vegetarians. The probability of introducing illness-inducing agents by food consumption is of particular significance to humankind, especially to omnivores (Beardsworth, 1995).

Several respondents in a study (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992), who considered health-related motives as primary motives, did so rather out of self-interest than for other reasons. It was also noted that these participants emphasised more the detrimental nature of meat than the healthiness of the vegetarian diet. Further findings (Janda & Trocchia, 2001) confirm this, where one of the many reasons mentioned for adopting a vegetarian diet is concern about the use of hormones in livestock. Additional support comes from another study (Lea, 2003) which proves that the majority of vegetarians believe that meat (such as lamb or beef) is unhealthy to eat and also that it causes heart disease.

Accordingly, Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo (1992) argue that studies of contemporary vegetarianisms usually depict ideologies and lifestyles which “seek to ‘recover’ a purity” (pg. 45) believed to be in jeopardy by the artificiality of society, this shown in several ways, such as the avoidance of all, or certain, animal products and a revulsion to current stock-rearing practices.

2.2.6 Vegetarianism as a sign for eating disordered behaviour

Findings (Barr & Broughton, 2000) show that amongst health-conscious females the adoption of a vegetarian diet is not correlated with “differences in weight status, weight perceptions or weight loss efforts” (pg. 787) and that even though vegetarians have a higher dietary restraint, they do not differ in current dieting (Gilbody, Kirk & Hill, 1999). This conflicts with other findings (Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001) in which vegetarian adolescents were found to have a propensity to weigh themselves frequently and to be displeased with their body. In fact, amongst the reasons given for their vegetarianism, the most frequently cited reason related to the motive ‘to lose/not gain weight’, which suggests that this focus on weight and diet seems to be the principal motivation for this group in embracing a vegetarian diet.

Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story’s study (2001) also reveals that vegetarians have a higher probability to have considered, or actually attempted, to commit suicide; and also that vegetarians are more likely to practice healthy and unhealthy weight control behaviours and to have been advised by a doctor that they had an eating disorder. The latter has been documented in other research (Klopp, Heiss & Smith, 2003; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Resnick & Blum, 1997) which reveals that both adolescent and college-women vegetarians are more likely to show signs of eating disordered behaviour. Other research (Lindeman & Stark,

2000) suggests that in women who use food ideologically – meaning that the food they choose to consume is linked to their personal identity and their beliefs – the increase of incapability or reluctance to enjoy eating may drive them towards full-blown eating disordered behaviour. The results reveal “two clusters of dieters who used food as an identity negotiation strategy” (pg. 266): high ideology-low pleasure and high ideology-high pleasure. Both semi- and full-vegetarians tended to use food as an identity negotiation strategy and they were also inclined to hold more magical beliefs about food and health.

2.2.7 Vegetarianism as a means to mask concerns about weight

Other research on dietary restraint has been documented (Martins, Pliner and O’Connor, 1999), which shows that “higher levels of vegetarianism are associated with high levels of restraint, but only for women who are high in feminism” (pg. 152). These results lend support to the idea that the relationship between dietary restraint and vegetarianism is apparent just for those groups for whom dieting is socially objectionable; specifically, women high in feminist values and men. In contrast to this proposition, Adams (2002) views vegetarianism as an essential obligation for the feminist who is truly dedicated, since meat eating is symbolically linked to male power over women; thus women adopting a vegetarian diet would serve in part to challenge the male dominance that meat eating symbolises. So these two theories do agree that feminists have a higher probability of being vegetarians, but for extremely dissimilar and complex reasons.

Martins, Pliner and O’Connor (1999) argue that these individuals do not use vegetarianism as a means to mask their weight concerns from themselves. However, they are trying to cover their distress from others. For these individuals, embracing a vegetarian eating style may serve as a kind of “*social impression management*” (1999, pg. 146). Other findings (Sullivan

& Damani, 2000; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1997) support the idea that vegetarianism may provide the ideal alibi for dietary control. Worsley & Skrzypiec (1997) argue that young adults may deal more effectively with demands from both family and friends to conform to conventional eating patterns by using the label of 'vegetarianism', instead of using the term 'dieting'. The vegetarian's restrictive intake is thus seen as a way to show concern for animals and the environment, thus family and friends might view this as positive instead of negative, and consequently, will probably be more accepting of this consumption pattern. In this manner, teenage vegetarianism could serve as a façade for covert weight loss.

2.2.8 Vegetarianism as a source of identity

Worsley (2000) stresses that one of the central predictors of food consumption is the social ideology that the individual holds, meaning that the food we choose to purchase and consume appears to be controlled by our personal beliefs. Lindeman & Stark (1999) propose that in contemporary times, the ideology chosen is increasingly being linked to food. The authors researched four food choice motives, namely health, weight control, pleasure and ideological reasons, where 'ideological reasons' (pg 145) refers to the considerable variety of food choice motives, whose common feature is that food is chosen or rejected because it is in accord or disaccord with one's philosophy of life. Results show that ideological motives were more frequent among vegetarians and semi-vegetarians than among omnivores. Additionally, semi-vegetarians and vegetarians held considerably more magical beliefs with reference to animal products, and also concerning the functioning of the human organism.

The authors suggest that eating healthy or non-fattening food, or adhering to a vegetarian diet may at present serve as a source for identity, social organisation and ethical valuation, which religion has typically provided for. Other research (Janda & Trocchia, 2001) shows that

certain individuals may be motivated to become vegetarians “in order to emulate those they admire” (pg. 1214). This motivation, which the authors refer to as ‘reference group influence’ uncovered social influence as a central aspect for some informants.

2.3 Differences between vegetarians and non-vegetarians

2.3.1 A preference for hierarchical domination

A study comparing values and beliefs of vegetarians and omnivores (Allen, Wilson, Hg and Dunne, 2000) proposes that these groups vary in two major ways. The first divergence is in their preference for hierarchical domination. The argument put forward is that presuming that eating animals is a form of human over animal domination, it follows that individuals tending towards omnivorism – who most strongly sanctioned hierarchical domination in human-to-human relations – also permitted the greatest level of human-to-animal domination. On the other hand, vegetarians and vegans, who preferred rejecting human-to-human domination, endorsed the least human-to-animal domination.

Worsley (2002a) argues that individuals who hold strong democratic value systems and become vegetarian live in a non-hierarchical world and are inclined to believe that animals have rights and also that both men and women should be absolutely equal. This is exemplified in research (Lea, 2003) in which vegetarians were found to hold more universal values than non-vegetarians. Thus, vegetarians’ view of the world is unlike that of non-vegetarians (Lea & Worsley, 2001) since they have their own systems of beliefs (Worsley, 2002b).

2.3.2 Significance of emotions

The other divergence is in the significance the individuals attribute to emotions. According to Allen, Wilson, Ng & Dunne (2000), vegetarians are inclined to value their emotional states while omnivores highlight self-control and rationality. If this were true, maybe it is plausible that certain people can emotionally connect with animals more than others. In fact, research indicates that empathy is inevitably related to animal right support (Hills, 1993).

2.4 A final word on attitudes towards animals

In an analysis of attitudes towards animals (Driscoll, 1995) it was determined that animals which are eaten by humans, for example chickens & fish, received low ratings on intelligence, responsiveness and lovable-ness. Driscoll argues that it is likely that society is predisposed to devalue these particular animals because of how we exploit them. In contrast, the most popular animals – which had high scores on the dimensions of usefulness, smartness, lovable-ness and responsiveness – were large mammals, such as the chimpanzee; and companion animals, such as dogs and cats. Other research (Bjerke, Odegardstuen & Kaltenborn, 1998) regarding adolescents' attitudes towards animals revealed that pet owners scored the highest on humanistic and moralistic dimensions, defined as “interest and strong affection for individual animals, principally pets” and “concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals, with strong opposition to exploitation and cruelty towards animals (pg. 81) respectively.

As can be seen, the codes for harmful animal practices are heavily dependent on immediate context and animal species if one of a number of critical dimensions (Elder, Wolch & Emel, 1998). So why keep a dog as a companion animal and then eat a rabbit at lunch? Jordan

(2001) argues that most animals which are killed for food are potential friends for humans, whether there are any real cases or not. In essence, he argues that since humans can befriend certain non-human animals, humans should not eat these non-humans since they are potential friends. In Western culture, no one would think it odd to eat a cow, but few would readily eat a dog. This is purely a matter of cultural convention.

According to Maurer (1995) several authors (Angyal, 1941; Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Simoons, 1961; as cited in Maurer, 1995) throughout the ages have consistently outlined that “the more human-like or human-linked the food source, the more people avoid it” (Maurer, 1995, pg. 153). This is illustrated in research (Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998) where the authors argue that the greater chicken-eating of female full- and semi-vegetarians implies that their distress for animals could be restricted to the “four legged (more sentient and empathetic) variety” (pg. 401). Beardsworth (1995) further elaborates on this aspect, arguing that animal forms perceived as similar to humankind present a plethora of distressing concerns and anxieties for their potential consumers.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter delineated major research contributions on vegetarianism of the last three decades. As has been discussed, the motives for vegetarianism are diverse and range from concern for animals and for ecology, to concern for one’s physical and psychological health. Another significant aspect is that motives may remain the same or else may evolve into completely different motives. In the next chapter, the methodology for the present study is delineated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework of this research. It illustrates the suitability and the relevance of the focused interview to the area under examination. Furthermore, a description of the procedures involved in data collection is given, including the sampling method chosen, and the criteria for participation.

3.1 Qualitative research

This study is qualitative in nature, and Creswell (1998) defines this type of research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (1998, pg. 15), in which a multifaceted and complete picture is put together by the researcher, by examining meticulously the words and opinions of the participants. Moreover, it is vital that there is an understanding of the complexity of everyday experiences, therefore the context of the participants is emphasised.

3.1.1 A phenomenological study

To study the conversion to vegetarianism of the participants, a phenomenological study was used to show that it is a personal process which is both ongoing and dynamic. This type of study seeks to enter the “field of perception of the participants; seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the participants’ experiences” (Creswell, 1998, pg. 31). The primary purpose of this exercise was to assemble as much graphic and explanatory data by asking several individuals to reconstruct their experiences about why they challenged the conventional eating styles of the culture they were brought up in and, consequently, the meaning of their daily lived experiences after living this phenomenon.

3.1.2 Tenets of phenomenology

Phenomenological research explores the essence, structure or form of both experiences and behaviour. Hence, phenomenological data analysis develops “through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings” (Creswell, 1998, pg. 52). Clusters of meanings are then coupled to provide an overarching picture of the experience, after which a sole, unifying meaning is identified.

3.2 Research hypotheses

On the basis of the literature evaluated in chapter 2, the following predictions were made:

3.2.1 Multiple motives

Allport’s (1961, as cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1985) theory will be adapted and applied to explain the motives for vegetarianism, therefore:

Hypothesis 1: Participants will report one primary motive for having become vegetarian and one or more other secondary motive/s underlying this main one.

3.2.2 Prevalent motivation

Hypothesis 2: Participants will express moral vegetarianism as a prevalent motivation.

3.2.3 Relationships with others

Hypothesis 3a: Participants will be more likely to feel misunderstood both by significant others if the latter are non-vegetarians, and also by Maltese society in general, which lacks knowledge or has distorted notions about vegetarianism.

Hypothesis 3b: Participants who hold membership in vegetarian groups will feel less isolated and misunderstood than participants who do not hold membership in such groups.

3.2.4 Different meanings of meat

Hypothesis 4: Vegetarians will hold different views of meat and meat eating after the conversion, specifically, meat will have become a source of revulsion.

3.3 Data Collection Method – The interview

Personal interviews were chosen as the data collection method since high-quality data is obtained from interviews (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). All thirteen participants, ranging in age from 20 to 52 years, chose the setting, usually their residence or place of work, and the duration of the interviews averaged 30 minutes. Each interview was audio taped, and later on transcribed to facilitate analysis (Refer to Appendices A and B for interview questions). Data was collected between October-December 2003.

3.3.1 The Focused Interview

The semi-structured interview, as Coolican (1999) describes it, is informal but at the same time guided. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) call it “the focused interview” (pg. 234), and outline four distinguishing features: (a) the selected participants are identified as having experienced the phenomenon in question; (b) it relates to circumstances that have been evaluated preceding the interview; (c) it follows an interview guide detailing the issues linked with the research hypothesis and (d) it is directed at the participants’ experiences vis-à-vis the phenomenon under study.

The reasons for selecting the focused interview as the methodological tool were:

- (a) The semi-structured interview is the most practical: although the encounter is structured and standard, at the same time the interviewer can elaborate on specific points which are exclusive to the individual. Respondents are thus “given considerable liberty in expressing their definition of a situation that is presented to them” (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996, pg. 234). This takes into account the unique experiences of each individual, thus allowing room for flexibility, with the opportunity that the interview develops more like a dialogue.

- (b) There is the possibility to probe for additional information which assists the interpretation of the results. The participant is also given more liberty “to explore unpredicted avenues of thought” (Coolican, 1999, pg. 140).

- (c) Hague (1995) points out that it is easier to retain the interest of the participant for a longer time when conducting a face-to-face interview, and that it is conducive to better collaboration. In fact, the resultant natural conversation flow eases the discourse (Coolican, 1999). Face-to-face interviews also provide for better explanations and also for greater accuracy (Hague, 1995).

3.3.2 Limitations in the utilization of the focused interview

- (a) There is the risk of interviewer bias – The flexibility inherent in interviewing makes the interview susceptible to individual influence and bias (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). According to Coolican (1999), the characteristics of the interview’s style and presentation will affect the quality of information obtained.

(b) Concerns regarding anonymity – since the interviewer and the participant are face-to-face; the participant may feel withdrawn and may thus withhold certain information.

(c) The information obtained depends on the respondent's memory.

3.3.3 Reliability and Validity

Since the interviews are semi-structured, there may be dissimilarities in procedure and sequence of questions, which could make data comparison less reliable and unbiased (Coolican, 1999). To make the analysis more reliable, peer review on the transcripts was carried out, where a psychology graduate was asked to read the transcripts and elicit the themes, and a comparison of the themes was performed (Creswell, 1998).

3.4 Population and Sampling

A sample comprising of thirteen participants, consisting of nine females and four males, was selected. More females than males were identified since research consistently outlines differences between the genders, in that females are more likely to possess a vegetarian orientation (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Resnick & Blum, 1997; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998). Criterion sampling was used, since all participants experienced the phenomenon under study. This type of sampling is useful for quality assurance (Creswell, 1998). Purposive sampling was used since vegetarians form part of a marginal group in the Maltese population.

3.4.1 Difference between 'joiners' and 'non-joiners'

Research points towards a considerable variation between 'joiners' and 'non-joiners' among vegetarians in membership in groups such as The Vegetarian Society and yoga movements (Dwyer, Mayer, Dowd, Kandel & Mayer, 1974, as cited in Beardsworth and Keil, 1992). 'Non-joiners', whose vegetarianism was more personal, seemed to separate diet from other facets of everyday life, whilst 'joiners', whose vegetarianism was linked to membership in a germane faction, were "more likely to refer to ecological issues, and more likely to see their eating patterns as part of a set of spiritual beliefs which put them outside the mainstream of society" (pg. 260). Research (Dwyer, Kandel, Mayer & Mayer, 1974, as cited in Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997) also shows that membership in vegetarian factions is positively correlated to the extremity of vegetarian behaviour.

Therefore, to depict a more comprehensive picture, seven participants (participant group 1) were selected from The Vegetarian Society of Malta. It should be noted that two participants in this group (participants 3 and 6) also hold membership in a Yoga movement.

Participants of group 1 were chosen by the chairperson of The Vegetarian Society (Refer to Appendix C) by "snowball sampling" whereby identification of participants is carried out by individuals who know individuals "who know what cases are information-rich" (Creswell, 1998, pg. 119). The six remaining respondents (participant group 2), who do not belong to any societies affiliated to vegetarianism or other such movements, were recruited by word of mouth.

3.4.2 Criteria for participation

The criteria the participants needed to satisfy were that:

- (a) They had experienced the phenomenon i.e. they have converted to vegetarianism;
- (b) They were vegetarians according to the definition introduced by the Vegetarian Society i.e. “one who abstains from the use of flesh, fish, and fowl as food, with or without the use of eggs and dairy products” (Davis & Messina, 2000, pg. 1);
- (c) They have been vegetarians for over a year; the reason for this is that the participant will have experienced what it means being vegetarian in the Maltese culture, and thus being able to relate more to the questions asked; and
- (d) They are adults over eighteen years old, so as to avoid issues of consent by parents or guardians.

Apart from the above, each participant group needed to satisfy the following criteria:

- (a) Participants in group 1 were to have held membership in The Vegetarian Society of Malta for at least a year;
- (b) Participants in group 2 were not to belong or be affiliated to any vegetarian organisation.

3.4.3 Pilot testing

The first interview of each group served as a pilot interview, and in view of the fact that no changes were made to the interview questions, it was decided that both interviews would be included in the data analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

At the beginning of each interview, the participants were given full information about the rationale behind the research (Coolican, 1999). They were informed that the study concerned the motivations of individuals who have converted to vegetarianism, and consequently, their interview formed a crucial element in this research.

3.5.1 Informed consent

Participants were informed that their participation in the research was voluntary at all times. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) outline certain basics the researcher should discuss with the participants in order for permission to be reasonably informed. These include: a general description of the procedures and the rationale; an account of the discomforts, risks and benefits to be expected; an offer to respond to any questions regarding procedures and to inform the participant about the right to withdraw consent and not partake in the study. The participants were asked to read and sign the consent form (Refer to Appendix D).

3.5.2 Privacy

The respondents were also informed of their right to privacy, which is the individual's right to choose when, and also the extent to which, one's "attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and opinions are to be shared with or withheld from others" (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1996, pg. 86). The interviewee was informed that the use of the tape-recorder helps in "catching the exact terms and the richness of the interviewee's experiences" (Coolican, 1999, pg. 146) and that the content of the tape will be confidential at all times; and also that the tape will be destroyed after use.

3.5.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Due to the nature of the personal interview, the participants cannot be regarded as anonymous by the interviewer. However, vis-à-vis confidentiality, the participants were assured that the information provided will be treated as confidential, by assigning an alias.

3.6 Data analysis

Creswell (1998) identifies four steps in data analysis: (a) all descriptions are read and reread; (b) key statements are isolated and crafted into meanings; (c) meanings are grouped into themes and (d) themes are incorporated into a narrative report. As further information is analysed, categories may be changed, merged or further subdivided (Coolican, 1999).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology chosen and the rationale behind this choice; and the ethical considerations involved with the use of the interview as a data-gathering method. In the coming chapter, the study's findings are presented by the use of selections from the transcript data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter 4: Results

The findings delineated in this chapter are structured according to the themes discussed in the literature review. However, due to space limitations, the most significant selections are presented in this chapter, excerpts that illustrate the complex and dynamic process of converting to vegetarianism.

Table 1 The profiles of the respondents in group 1 (members)

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Alias</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years as a vegetarian</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
1	Gabriel	52	11	Professional
2	Ana	35	18	Yacht care
3	Olivier	32	10	Police inspector
4	George	35	19	Accountant
5	Andrea	50	10	Teacher
6	Simone	49	13	Teacher
7	Martha	48	10	Teacher

Table 2 The profiles of the respondents in group 2 (non-members)

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Alias</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years as a vegetarian</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
8	Maya	23	1	Student
9	Amy	20	8	Student
10	Sophia	22	8	Social worker
11	Jean	30	7	Teacher
12	Graham	30	8	Professional
13	Ada	32	2	Manager

4.1 Vegetarianism Ideology: Not just a diet but a way of life

The respondents' account leaves no doubt that vegetarianism is not just a diet but an ideology that pervades into their entire way of being. On being asked what the food she eats represents for her, Simone, 49, commented:

“...I can't even imagine eating meat or animals or animal derivatives...It's part of my life...It's a way of living...at first, I used to think of the reasons, something clicked that I was doing something wrong kind of and I [said] all right, then I will change my life, then it became part of my life not to eat [meat], I don't even think about why and why not... [Now] I feel it is in my nature not to eat meat”

The following excerpt illustrates how vegetarianism is intertwined with other ideologies, in this case ecological conservation:

“...it [deep ecology] has almost become a religion for environmentalists...it almost replaces religion, in the sense that, when there are individuals who are vegetarians, they put less pressure on the earth...” (Jean, 30)

4.2 Experiences leading to the conversion

4.2.1 Childhood experiences

The respondents were asked if they could recall experiences which they think affected them in becoming vegetarian, and an interesting finding was that traumatic childhood experiences were mentioned by several respondents, experiences which they said manifested their effect years later.

The following excerpt illustrates how disturbing it was for this respondent as a child to make the connection between what he regarded as companion animals and the food on the dinner plate:

“...when I was very young, we used to have chickens and rabbits in our roof and obviously I used to think they were pets, not just creatures... and they were killed for food. My mother and father would not allow me near them while killing these animals... but unfortunately I once burst into them, while actually killing them and...I had a shock...and I had a shock...and you could say I never...I always loved animals...in the sense that I never wanted to hurt them...” (Gabriel, 52)

Another respondent recounted that one thing that affected her deeply was that her father used to rear rabbits, and

“...as children, we used to play with them...we regarded them as pets...but [we knew] that they would be killed [eventually]...and he used to kill them in front of us...and the more I grew up, the more this kept bothering me...the fact that I was killing my own pets” (Jean, 30)

After some time, Jean stopped eating rabbits, thus taking the first step in what would 9 years later become her present diet. Nowadays she realised that *“It doesn’t make sense to not eat certain animals and then eat others”*. Another respondent shared a similar experience as a child:

“My dad used to rear rabbits...We were never allowed to go near him while killing them, but after a long time I realised what he did... I can still remember their screams and the blood on the floor...It was such a shock...I once was keeping these two rabbits as pets and I used to play with them everyday... one day I went to find them and they were gone...It was horrible...” (Ada, 32)

Another respondent recounted how his wife influenced him in becoming vegetarian, and he recounted the following incident as a deciding influence on his wife:

“My wife always had cats at home, and once her mother brought a rabbit...and they killed him...my wife and her sister made a great fuss because they said that the rabbit resembled the other cat, and this incident for my wife was something that already put her off certain things” (Graham, 30)

Another respondent found herself in a dilemma because of her father’s rearing practices:

“...since at home we rear animals...I never used to eat certain types of meat, for example lamb...my father used to rear animals and I wouldn’t eat them...and I said [to myself] “How come I am not eating them, and I eat other animals?”” (Maya, 23)

For another respondent, it was the death of a childhood pet that set things in motion after several years:

“...maybe the major incident that affected me was that we had a dog at home that was put down basically...and I took it rather badly...I think that was the incident that evoked in me to start doing something and sending a message that animals are not objects but have to be shown greater respect” (George, 35)

4.2.2 Experiences and factors leading directly to the conversion

For several respondents, the media was a powerful influence in deciding to adopt a vegetarian diet. The media, such as television, acted as an influential source of information and awareness:

“...there was a slaughter house...for pigs...when I saw it...I felt like going mad at the time” (Maya, 23)

“I was watching television and there was this video...about the killing of whales for meat and...after seeing the video, I told my wife “I am not going to eat meat anymore”, and it was like that, from the day after I did not eat meat” (Gabriel, 52)

For others, it was the combined influence of literature on vegetarianism and vegetarian friends:

“I was interested and used to read [on vegetarianism]...then I started meeting individuals who were vegetarians and you start sharing ideas...” (Andrea, 50)

“My decision was influenced by a friend of mine whose family was vegetarian and we became close friends and started talking...also, what happened was that I read a leaflet on vegetarianism and my conscience kind of went through a crisis...” (Simone, 50)

“I had wanted to eliminate meat [from my diet] for a long time but didn’t because I was afraid that being underweight, I would have put my health in jeopardy...then I made friends with someone who was also underweight and she had been a vegetarian for a long time and she confirmed that there were no risks...then she encouraged me to read on the subject and I started decreasing [meat] gradually” (Jean, 30)

For one respondent, it was his wife’s influence:

““When my wife and I married, we obviously moved from different households to one of our own...my wife was keener, more determined than me to not eat meat; however, eventually this became a common thing” (Graham, 30)

Other respondents mentioned the following diverse influences:

“...my decision could have been influenced by other philosophical beliefs...I practice yoga and meditation, and I first came into contact with the idea of vegetarianism through yoga” (Olivier, 32).

“We used to listen to music which had lyrics regarding humanitarian values, and vegetarianism was mentioned...then we wrote to the U.K. Vegetarian Society and started reading the information they sent us” (Ana, 35).

“...most probably teenage life...I said to myself...you are setting your own principles, your own standards...I decided to take a decision against all odds, against everyone...most probably that...” (George, 35)

4.3 Motivations

Table.3 List of motives

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Primary motive</i>	<i>Secondary motives</i>	<i>Current motives</i>
1	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	Ethical – Ecology, Health	<i>Primary motive only</i>
2	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	Health	<i>Different:</i> Feels better as a vegetarian
3	<i>Health</i>	Ethical – Ecology, Animal welfare	<i>Same:</i> Both primary and secondary motives
4	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	None	<i>Same:</i> Primary motive
5	<i>Health</i>	Ethical – Ecology, Animal welfare	<i>Same:</i> Both primary and secondary motives
6	<i>Ethical</i> – Food shortage	Ethical – Animal welfare, Health	<i>Different:</i> Feels more human
7	<i>Ethical</i> – Food shortage & animal welfare	Health	<i>Same:</i> Both primary and secondary motives
8	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	None	<i>Same:</i> Ethical – Animal concern
9	<i>Gustatory</i>	Ethical – Animal welfare	<i>Primary motive only</i>
10	<i>Challenge</i>	Ethical – Animal welfare	<i>Different:</i> Vegetarianism became her normal way of life
11	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	Ethical – Ecology	<i>Same:</i> Both primary and secondary motives
12	<i>Health, Gustatory, Ethical</i> – ecological	None	<i>Same:</i> Primary motives
13	<i>Ethical</i> – Animal welfare	Health	<i>Same:</i> Both primary and secondary motives

4.3.1 Ethical vegetarianism as a central motivation

Ethical vegetarianism was mentioned by all respondents, in one form or another. It was regarded as a primary motivation for several respondents; however, other respondents who regarded other motives as primary ones also mentioned ethical vegetarianism as a secondary motive. The main themes that emerged were animal love, concern about animal welfare and animal cruelty, ecological concerns and famine in poor countries.

Love towards animals and concern about animal cruelty emerged as straightforward but powerful motivators, most of the times as primary motives:

“...I love animals...I loathe cruelty...I loathe all forms of cruelty kind of...like I can’t stand [cruelty] on man, I can’t stand it on an animal, I don’t make a distinction between them” (Maya, 23).

“I am an ethical vegetarian...I became vegetarian... because I love animals and I do not want to hurt animals” (Gabriel, 52).

“I basically believe that animals are part of our brotherhood, thus they aren’t objects” (George, 35).

“...because of animals...I simply love them a lot and I don’t want to see them suffer, let alone kill them to eat them...” (Jean, 30)

“I love animals so much...what right do we have to inflict such suffering on them and then take their lives?” (Ada, 32)

For other respondents, animal concern emerged later on, after other motives had led them to decide on becoming vegetarian:

“...afterwards I began recognizing other issues that continued to strengthen my decision...animal cruelty and other reasons...before I didn’t think about them, but afterwards I started thinking about them” (Simone, 49).

“...along the years however...after I became a vegetarian...certain beliefs would emerge sort of, regarding concepts of cruelty to animals, for example...however, this was not my primary reason for becoming vegetarian” (Olivier, 32).

“...afterwards I began reading...first of all there is the animal concern [issue]...what the animals go through whilst rearing...apart from killing them, which is already awful in itself...the short life that is left for them is a misery, poor animals...you are partaking in all this when you eat meat...encouraging this more...” (Andrea, 50)

For other respondents, of principal significance were ecological motives intertwined with food shortage in poor countries:

“I was reading this leaflet...and one of the reasons mentioned was food distribution around the world...that a lot of people don’t eat...don’t have food because we eat meat” (Simone, 49).

“...we do it mostly for reasons of poverty, for reasons to which people say that there isn’t enough food [for everyone] in the world, which is not true...” (Martha, 48)

For others, ecological motives and starvation in third world countries were mentioned as secondary motives, which emerged later on:

“...then there is the environment...and along with the environment there are people of the third world who are hungry...apart from this, to grow all that grass for those animals, a lot of forests are being destroyed” (Andrea, 50).

“...from both the ecological aspect and the famine aspect, meaning that if we all ate more vegetables and less meat, probably more people in the world would be able to eat...but these weren’t the main reasons...I discovered them as time passed” (Jean, 30).

4.3.2 Health motives

Two respondents mentioned that they became vegetarians primarily for health reasons:

“...after this [nutrition] course, I learnt that the more you reduce derivatives of meat from your diet, the more you live in a healthy manner...” (Olivier, 32)

“...at first I was interested in the health issue...” (Andrea, 50)

However, several respondents mentioned health as a secondary motive, which transpired later on:

“...even health wise...yes; I believe that health wise the fact that you are eating something dead, I see nothing good in it...even the fact that the animal was killed with a certain aggression, that aggression will transpire in humans, and I don’t want that in my life” (Martha, 48).

“...as such, for me [an important reason is] human wellbeing...not only physical well being but mental well being and also spiritual wellbeing...” (Simone, 49)

“...the meat industry has changed nowadays...there are lots of reasons why one should be careful about consuming meat...in Malta there is no free range, and if you do research on the antibiotics that are fed to chickens...everything has changed” (Graham, 30)

Graham also recounted the following incident, which may be considered a turning point:

“I remember that once I bought a packet of lamb burgers and my wife told me “What did you buy?”, and I remember that we put two under the grill and the amount of fat that came out of them was incredible, and that was kind of the moment when we said “Listen, this is it”.

However, other respondents mentioned the health issue not as a motive but as “an added benefit”:

“...as time passed, the health issue transpired...at first I thought I was harming myself but then I obviously started reading and I realised that I was avoiding a lot of the bad things that others were eating...” (George, 35)

4.3.3 Taste motives

One respondent, whose primary motivation was for taste reasons, recounted her childhood experiences when she had to eat meat:

“...what I remember is my mother telling me “Eat that meat!” and I really did not want to... I felt sick. Then later she had told me that I had something which prevented me from actually digesting the meat. It is really not my favourite food [sarcastic tone]... I used to avoid going to eat with my mum” (Amy, 20).

Another respondent mentioned taste as a secondary motive:

“...in the beginning I remember we used to buy frozen chicken breast...I remember [it tasted] like cardboard...the quality worsened a lot...” (Graham, 30)

4.3.4 Other motives

The following excerpts illustrate a respondent’s account of her motivations; Sophia, 22, cited the feeling of a challenge as her primary motivation:

“...for me it was kind of a challenge...in our home [we ate meat] everyday...therefore for me it was very challenging that suddenly I decided not to eat meat anymore...the more I saw [my parents] get furious at home, the more I was pleased [laughs]”

Sophia added:

“There were other reasons...for the animals...I can eat vegetables and I won’t be causing so much harm as when you eat animals...I am capable of living without meat, therefore I might as well live without it”.

Finally, one respondent could not pinpoint a particular reason:

“I think that there wasn’t one particular reason why I became a vegetarian...I mean there was the health issue, nutrition [issue]...but there wasn’t only one factor...[but] a lot of reasons simultaneously...” (Graham, 30)

4.4 Present motivations to remain a vegetarian

For some respondents, their primary motivation, even after several years, remained their reason for continuing their vegetarian lifestyle:

“Still the same...the fact that I’m not partaking in so much [animal] suffering” (Ada, 32).

Some respondents mentioned other factors apart from their primary motivation:

“I feel that...if I don’t remain [a vegetarian], I would be going against my nature” (Maya, 23)

Whereas other respondents cited both primary and secondary motives:

“Nowadays I put everything together...” (Andrea, 50)

“What motivates me to remain a vegetarian...I guess the same reasons (health and ethical motives)...” (Olivier, 32)

For others, their reasons for remaining vegetarian evolved into totally different reasons:

“...I think that I have so grown accustomed [to being a vegetarian] that for me this is the normal [way of living]” (Sophia, 22).

“...nowadays I wouldn’t go back to eating meat, even if I lost my sensitivity to animals...because I feel really good, even after eating, you still feel good...” (Ana, 35)

“...I feel that the most important issue is the development of the individual...that the individual becomes more human...I feel more human...” (Simone, 49)

4.5 The Conversion

4.5.1 Gradual

Several respondents recounted how they started decreasing meat from their diet gradually.

Olivier’s transition to vegetarianism was very gradual, and took several years. He explains:

“The transition was gradual...I began by increasing the consumption of vegetable products in my diet...I decreased the [consumption] of meat, then along the way I stopped eating fish and also chicken”.

Other respondents had similar experiences. Jean's transition took a few months, while Andrea's transition took nearly a year, as she recounts:

"...I started slowly...it was gradual...at first I heard that white meat and fish were better than the red [meat], thus I switched to those...then I read more and realised that if possible it is also better to stop eating those too...slowly I even became vegan..."

4.5.2 Gradual in terms of thinking but sudden turning point

Other respondents had thought about vegetarianism throughout the years, however, their decision was based on an impulse and decided to become vegetarians overnight. When George was asked if he remembered the moment he became a vegetarian, he said *"On the bus from Valletta to home!"*, and then further explained:

"I had thought about it [before]...but I said to myself that it's impossible...I didn't know how to cook, I ate meat everyday...then I said to myself 'Might as well try changing something out of the ordinary'".

Other respondent's accounts of their transition are similar, both stressing a latent desire:

"I think that there was always this wish of becoming vegetarian...it was always there, but I never expressed it and said "I will take it one step at a time". I just arrived from school and said [to my mother] "Listen, I am not going to eat meat anymore", and I really stopped..." (Sophia, 22)

"...the ground for becoming a vegetarian was long coming, it took years...you can say it was coming along for a long while but the turning point was abrupt" (Gabriel, 52)

Simone explained that she reflected on vegetarianism for about a month, then, suddenly:

"...I became vegetarian overnight...I stopped eating meat entirely, and not decreased meat consumption slowly... suddenly I said to myself that I don't want to eat meat anymore..."

4.5.3 Sudden – overnight change

For others, the transition to vegetarianism occurred in an abrupt manner, with no conscious thoughts about vegetarianism beforehand. Martha recounts:

“...it was a decision that I took after Christmas when I went to eat at my family’s house...I saw an abundance and an excess of food and decided that that was going to be the last day that I will partake in that excess”.

While another respondent, Ana, narrated the following:

“...all of a sudden, from one day to the next...we took the meat from the freezer and we gave it to my mother in law’s dog...from one instant to the next, we didn’t reduce our meat consumption, we just stopped [eating meat]”

4.6 Consequences of the conversion

4.6.1 A sense of peacefulness

On the positive side, several respondents commented on how becoming a vegetarian brought them relief from guilt:

“...my conscience is a lot quieter than before and I feel happier about my life because I know I can live without the cruelty” (Gabriel, 52).

“...I remember that before, when I used to see a truck full of pigs on their way to the slaughter house, I used to feel really guilty, and now I don’t feel like that, because I feel I am not contributing to that” (Jean, 30).

“...Psychologically, I think one feels more at peace with one’s environment...” (Andrea, 50)

“I felt at peace with myself...I felt happy...” (Simone, 49)

“I feel good...I feel good because the decision I took and my thoughts and opinions today...I am what I am today due to these” (Graham, 30)

4.6.2 A sense of isolation

Vegetarians who converted more than ten years ago described how difficult it was in those years to have a vegetarian identity:

“...in the beginning I used to withhold [that I was a vegetarian]...psychologically I think it was a great blow...everyone is against you...especially relatives, who would not understand what you are doing...” (Olivier, 32)

“...at first everybody...my neighbours, my friends, my nearest relatives thought I was queer and crazy...bringing into the house strange ideas...” (Gabriel, 52)

4.7 The meaning attributed to meat after conversion

4.7.1 No change in meaning

For two respondents, the meaning of meat did not change after becoming vegetarians, since they both never liked meat before. Maya explains:

“I see [meat] in the same way as before....I didn't become vegetarian earlier because I couldn't...I am still distressed by meat as I was before [becoming vegetarian]...”

Two other respondents expressed a kind of indifference towards the actual meat. On being asked if she would eat meat again, Jean replied:

“I don't think the taste [of meat] would bother me, no...in fact I sometimes have to cook it...only chickens though...”

4.7.1 Different meaning

For the majority of the respondents, after becoming vegetarians, meat took on a totally new meaning:

“I would not say that meat doesn’t taste good, but...it is certainly the food of cruelty...it is utterly cruel to eat meat...yes, it means something different now...I would not argue with the taste...but I don’t miss it...” (Gabriel, 52)

“... [Before] meat didn’t bother me, I took it for granted... [nowadays] for me it’s murder, nothing more, nothing less” (George, 35)

“I loved meat [before]...nowadays, for me a piece of [an animal’s] meat is similar to human flesh... [meat] means something completely different...for me its murder...butchering an animal is similar to butchering a human and eating one...it’s really revolting” (Simone, 49)

“[Meat] formed a major part of my diet, I used to really love meat...but nowadays, I regard it as something not fit for eating...I look at it from the same perspective of how a meat eater would look at the prospect of eating a cat...it is something out of place for him...nowadays, this is the way I view meat-eating” (Olivier, 30)

“...nowadays, I don’t miss meat...to tell you the truth, I’m disgusted [by meat]...” (Andrea, 50)

“...before, meat was just food...nowadays, when I see people eating meat, I can’t believe I was like them...I have two dogs and since I can’t imagine eating them, why should I eat other animals? I don’t make a distinction between the two...before I did, but now I don’t...” (Ada, 32)

4.8 Vegetarian networks

4.8.1 Members

What transpired mostly from the members' account of their membership in the Vegetarian Society was mostly that the members received some form of support and inclusion, as these excerpts illustrate:

“...it’s good...I feel that I am not cut off from the rest of the world...at least you feel part of a greater family” (George, 35)

“...you feel supported, given you are part of a society...[it is] a kind of subculture...they are like you, you don’t feel lonely...therefore there is continuing support...for example when they organise certain activities, you kind of feel like you are living in a normal way...” (Olivier, 30)

“...it’s encouraging that you know people who share the same views, since, for example, with your family and others you feel isolated, and they even try to encumber you, and you say to yourself “But am I the mad one? Only me?”, and you feel different from everyone else, thus it’s important to receive support from others who share the same views” (Andrea, 50)

“It makes a difference to me because I prefer spending time with people who share the same ideals and that work towards the same goals...” (Martha, 48)

Ana described how her membership in the Society was an enormous source of support for her for several years, even though now she has decreased her involvement:

“It was a pleasure [to meet other vegetarians]...first of all our views were the same...you always feel the support, because you already feel encouraged just by having a relationship with them...these persons enter your life, it’s like being in a family...”

However, Simone explains that even if she was the only vegetarian on earth, this wouldn't bother her. She explains about the commonalities and differences between the members:

“What joins us together is love for animals...and the fact that we would like everyone to be vegetarian [laughs] and that we promote vegetarianism...however, everyone is a different individual...ultimately one holds ones' same opinions and ideas, but...there are activities we enjoy doing together”.

While for Gabriel, being a member did not necessarily mean that he was fully satisfied with his relationship with them:

“It is nice to have people who share with you the same ideology...unfortunately, life is so fast, there is so much things to do...which doesn't allow that sort of...communication between these friends...”

4.8.2 Non-members

For non-members who had vegetarian friends, they explained that they received their support from them:

“...more than anything, it is a form of support...”

However, others who were the sole vegetarians in the family or did not have vegetarian friends, felt misunderstood by them:

“I wish they would understand me more...when I get sick they blame it on me being a vegetarian, which has nothing to do with it...they regarded it like I was trying to do something ridiculous, something to hurt them...” (Sophia, 22)

“[I feel misunderstood]...a lot...a lot...cause they tell me “That why God put them on earth”, a lot of these kinds of arguments... “Because you need meat”...they really get on my nerves...kind of, you eat what you like, and have fun...but I [eat] what I want...” (Maya, 23)

“No one really understands you...they try but ultimately they cannot really understand you. Sometimes I feel like it’s a waste of time talking to others [on vegetarianism]...” (Ada, 32)

4.9 Life as a vegetarian in Malta

4.9.1 Misconceptions

One participant (11) stated that there is a lot of awareness on vegetarianism today; however, all the other respondents argued that even though nowadays there is definitely more awareness on vegetarianism, individuals still have misconceptions regarding vegetarianism, as well as mistaken beliefs about what a vegetarian eats. The following excerpts exemplify this:

“...there is a lot more conscience now on vegetarianism...and most people seem to be afraid of vegetarianism because, more or less, they might try to associate it with a particular sect...[there are] people who might think that in saving the life of animals [one] might deduct from human dignity [when] in fact it increases human dignity...” (Gabriel, 52)

“Most of the time they think that you eat vegetables, tomatoes and the like...rather than not knowing what a vegetarian is, they have misconceptions about vegetarians” (Sophia, 22)

4.10 Conclusion

The excerpts throughout this chapter have achieved the purpose of portraying the findings of the present study, in particular focusing on the experiences and motives of the participants. A discussion of the above findings is forthcoming in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Chapter 5: Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the themes which transpired from the interviews and to compare and contrast these themes with those from international theory and research.

5.1 One transition with different paths

The one factor common to all respondents in this study is that each went against their cultural norms of food consumption and made the decision to ‘convert’ to vegetarianism; all individuals made the transition from a non-vegetarian lifestyle to a vegetarian one. This entailed changing deeply ingrained and established attitudes, which is rather difficult to attain (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Nonetheless, each individual account is unique, and even though society might place vegetarians in the same category, vegetarians are a highly diverse group.

5.2 The Ideology behind vegetarianism

5.2.1 An altered world view

The respondents’ accounts depict the same world but viewed in a totally different manner from that of non-vegetarians, which corresponds with notions advanced by other researchers (Lea & Worsley, 2001). It can be noted that throughout their lives, the respondents had accepted society’s view of certain types of animals as ‘food’, in contrast to animals which are viewed as conventional companion animals; an attitude which, according to Singer (2002), has its roots in childhood. Interesting to note is that incidents involving rabbits, an animal which is usually regarded and classified as both “food” and as “pet”, triggered a certain amount of reflection among some of the respondents as children. Possibly because of such a

dichotomous classification, a child might hold ambiguous views towards an animal such as a rabbit, due to the contradictory nature of the two classifications.

Due to such events, and other factors in their lives, the respondents' own consumption of animals began presenting a major source of tension and dilemma; together with a source of disagreement with the prevailing norms of society (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). As one respondent aptly expressed:

“The idea of eating meat is a glamorous way of depicting something which isn't pleasant...we raise children to love lambs, show them how beautiful the cow and the horse are, but obviously they do not translate...years have to pass for them to realise that those [animals] become a steak...”

The private dilemma was eventually resolved by converting to vegetarianism, a diet which excludes the usage of animals for food. In the majority of the cases, this resolution was taken after a prolonged period of reflection, a finding which corresponds with other research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992).

5.2.2 Reflection on patterns of eating

Vegetarians are characterised by their intense reflection about their consumption patterns and what their lifestyle symbolises. As former meat-eaters, they had taken the consumption of animals for granted, had seldom thought about what they were actually consuming and rarely ever questioned it. Ralston (1995, as cited in Worsley, 2000) defines a continuum of consumption patterns; in which at one end is the individual as a passive consumer, while at the other end is an active, analytical and conscientious consumer. The majority of respondents in this study may be viewed as shifting towards the former extremity as meat-eaters and shifting towards the latter extremity as present vegetarians. Likewise, Worsley (2000) argues that individuals do not reflect much about the food they consume, but that at certain points in their

lives, individuals become disquieted about their food consumption. In the present study, it seems that this was a characteristic pattern for the majority of the respondents.

Such a choice, brought about by a change in attitude, ultimately resulted in a change in behaviour. Some respondents argued that they have incorporated vegetarianism in their life to the extent that they cannot envisage reverting to their previous meat-eating lifestyle, which is in agreement with other findings (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992, 1993; McDonald, 2000). The respondents have construed a world of their own through learning and adaptation of their food patterns; in the process constructing a world which is more peaceful and healthier; resulting in a more fulfilling life.

5.3 Influences on the conversion process

5.3.1 Childhood experiences

Five respondents mentioned what they regarded as childhood traumatic experiences as influencing factors. Nearly all mentioned incidents which involved the rearing and the slaughter of animals at home by the father or both parents. Witnessing the killing of animals is consistent with other studies (Amato & Partridge, 1989, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; McDonald, 2000). However, one respondent mentioned an incident involving a childhood pet, a dog, "*that was put down*". Childhood pet ownership as a basis for vegetarianism has also been documented in other research (Janda & Trocchia, 2001).

One respondent reported that she witnessed the slaughter regularly, while another respondent reported that he witnessed the slaughter by accident twice. Another respondent did not actually view the killing but says that she still remembers "*their [the rabbits'] screams and*

the blood on the floor”. As children, the respondents may have repressed these traumatic memories, only to recall them later on in their lives. Particular experiences might have contributed to the reawakening of these images; in fact two respondents mentioned documentaries on television documenting the slaughter of animals, experiences which might have triggered the distress and trauma they had endured as children.

Significant to note is that all five participants became vegetarians for their love for animals and concern for animal welfare. Also intriguing to note is that some respondents had siblings who went through the same experiences but the latter did not become vegetarians. Thus, such experiences only provide a partial picture of the composite process of becoming vegetarian.

5.3.2 Experiences leading directly to the conversion

Consequently, other influences played a direct part in the process, the main one being information about vegetarianism presented in diverse ways, such as the explicit medium of television, typically in the form of documentaries, reading books and leaflets and talking with vegetarian friends, also documented in other research (Amato & Partridge, 1989, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; McDonald, 2000). Adams (2002) argues that in a dominantly meat-eating culture, reading is usually the sole means by which vegetarianism is portrayed in a positive way; however, Adams argues that nowadays, individuals come across the concept of vegetarianism more through dialogue with vegetarians. In fact, other influences included membership in a yoga society, an experience at a vegetarian camp and a vegetarian teacher at school, all forms of interaction with other vegetarians.

The above illustrates that in the majority² of the cases, individuals learn what vegetarianism is before deciding to become vegetarian. In fact, most theorists agree that attitudes are learnt (Baron & Byrne, 2000). A point worth mentioning is that the respondents decided to believe in the accuracy of the information obtained; otherwise they probably would not have even considered becoming a vegetarian. In fact, McDonald (2002) argues that the success of such information lies in the reader perceiving such information as being true. Therefore, a lot of information sources were instrumental for the respondents to perceive their society's use of animals in a different manner. What was the norm for society became questioned, dissected and analysed by these respondents, who ultimately found that particular motivation to convert.

Other sources served as influencing factors for others. For one respondent, one of several deciding influences was moving into a different household after marriage; this documented in another study (Craig & Truswell, 1988, as cited in Worley, 2000) in which it was shown that frequently, the beginning of marital life is marked by a change in eating patterns.

Several respondents mentioned teenage rebelliousness as playing a part in their conversion. For one participant, the challenge in becoming vegetarian, which meant rejecting a food eaten everyday at home, was the primary motive mentioned. This finding is in line with what Kenyon & Barker (1998) view as “discarding family values” (pg. 197) when adolescents reject meat. Another respondent mentioned “teenage life” as a deciding factor; he decided to “*take a decision against all odds, against everyone*”, which might be interpreted as rebelling against what is considered as acceptable in society and in the process constructing an idyllic world, a finding which corresponds to the notion advanced by Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story (2001).

² One respondent actually wanted to eliminate animal foods from his diet even before he knew about the existence of vegetarianism. In fact he thought he was the only one so, until he saw an advertisement in the newspaper regarding the founding of The Vegetarian Society in Malta.

5.4 Motivations

The following generic types of motives were revealed following analysis of the transcript data:

(a) ***Ethical***, which in this dissertation comprises of:

(1) Animal concern, and

(2) Ecological concern intertwined with starvation in poor countries;

(b) ***Health***,

(c) ***Gustatory*** and

(d) ***Challenge***.

5.4.1 Multiple motives

As was expected, the majority of respondents reported one primary motive for having converted to vegetarianism, and one or more secondary motives underlying the main one, which transpired later on. This has been documented in research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; MacNair, 1998) and is in agreement with Allport's (1961, as cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1985) theory that behaviour is driven by various separate motives. It is argued that multiple reasoning strengthens the argument for vegetarianism, since seeking additional assurances that the practice is a sound one is conceivably decisive to the continuation of such a practice (MacNair, 1998). In fact, only two respondents mentioned a single motive for their conversion, with no secondary motives emerging later on.

Moreover, only one respondent could not identify one sole, primary motive but several motives functioning in a simultaneous manner, and this incapability to identify a single motive has been documented in research (Amato & Partridge, 1989, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997) albeit in which the majority of the respondents identified multiple motives, in contrast

with the above findings, in which the majority of respondents initially reported one primary motive or only a single motive for switching to a vegetarian diet.

5.4.2 Ethical vegetarianism

As was expected, ethical vegetarianism emerged as a central motivation in this study; all respondents regarded it either as a primary motive or a secondary motive or else the only motive for change in behaviour. Ethical vegetarianism as defined in this study incorporates both concern for animals and ecological concerns, both documented in several other studies (Cooper, Wise & Mann, 1985; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Janda and Trocchia, 2001; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Santos & Booth, 1996; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998).

Concern for animals transpires in the respondents' distress by the cruelty of rearing animals for the ultimate purpose of slaughtering them for food, and the suffering that animals go through throughout their miserable life. This indicates a high level of empathy; a compassion towards all animals, and with this the ability to question the distinction society makes between different kinds of animals, possibly signifying a certain openness and flexibility in reasoning. According to McDonald (2000), openness might be related to an orientation to learn, and as already discussed, gaining knowledge formed an integral part in learning on vegetarianism for the participants in this study.

What is fascinating is that these respondents developed a sensitivity common to all animals, and not just towards animals that in society are regarded as 'companion animals'. As one respondent expressed herself:

“After [I decided not to eat rabbit anymore] I realised that it didn't make sense not to eat certain animals and then to actually eat others [animals]”.

Certain authors (Fiddes, 1991 & Whitehead, 2000, as cited in Fessler & Navarrete, 2003) argue that animals residing in intimate association with humans, such as companion animals, are often identified with these individuals such that consuming them is associated to either cannibalism or else animality. Vegetarians take this one step further: while before they made a distinction between animals that were reared for food and conventional companion animals, with time this distinction may have grown more and more vague, and was ultimately fragmented.

In the present study it seems that in essence, the notion behind ethical vegetarianism rests on the belief that when an individual consumes meat, one is partaking in the suffering and pain inflicted on the animals, while believing that one has no right to take a life which is not theirs; and/or the devastating effect of the earth's resources and the propagation of food shortage in poor countries. As the respondents learned about these issues, and believed them, it became a dilemma for them to continue consuming meat, and they ultimately resolved this dilemma by converting to a vegetarian lifestyle.

5.4.3 Health motives

The respondents who converted to vegetarianism on health grounds generally regarded meat as unhealthy, as something not fit for consumption and which harms the body, a finding which corresponds to the *anti-meat theme* advanced by Beardsworth & Keil (1992). The respondents perceived the vegetarian diet as healthy, when it is adequately planned and balanced in terms of nutrient intake. Even those respondents for whom health motives transpired later on considered the vegetarian diet as healthy and more nutritious with added benefits. What is interesting to note is that the respondents who became vegetarian on health grounds all passed

through a gradual elimination, from red meat (such as beef) to white meat (such as chicken and fish) to none at all, since they held the belief that red meat is the unhealthiest type.

It should be noted that when the respondents mentioned health motives, they regarded a vegetarian diet not only healthy from the physical point of view, but also both from a psychological and a spiritual perspective. In fact, certain respondents appeared to hold certain beliefs regarding the consequence of consuming meat, such as the idea that the aggression with which the animal is slaughtered will transpire in humans if they eat the animal's flesh and that the body, as a vegetarian, is now clean and rid of impurities. One respondent also mentioned that his wife, also a vegetarian, perceives a refrigerator as being '*polluted*' if there is meat in it. Such 'magical thinking' has been documented (Lindeman & Stark, 1999; Twigg, 1979, as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1992).

Psychologically, some respondents commented on how satisfied and at peace they felt when they converted to vegetarianism, as their guilt disappeared, as exemplified by Gabriel:

“Ethically I feel more correct...I feel more alive...[vegetarianism] makes me [feel] more comfortable...makes my life ethically easier, my conscience easier...and also makes me happier”.

Such a reduction or elimination of guilt has also been reported in other research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; McDonald, 2000)

5.4.4 Gustatory motives

Gustatory motives as primary motives were mentioned by only two respondents; one respondent mentioned that she never liked the taste of meat, a finding which corresponds to other research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Janda & Trocchia, 2001). Another respondent

argued that nowadays, the quality of meat has decreased, and thus both taste and texture of meat are no longer considered satisfying to consume.

It should be noted that even though the majority of respondents did not mention gustatory reasons as motives for becoming vegetarian, they argued that they do not miss eating meat, and have no desire whatsoever to eat meat. In fact, some respondents mentioned that they loathe the smell of cooked meat and also the sight of meat, findings which are consistent with other studies (Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Kenyon & Barker, 1998).

5.4.5 Challenge motives

One respondent argued that not eating meat in a household where meat-eating still takes place everyday, was very challenging at the age of 15, and cited this challenge as her primary motive. She commented that her parents saw this as something frivolous, and the more they got furious, the more she enjoyed it. Rejecting the family eating patterns, in a way, entails rejecting the values and common rituals which are fundamental to the identity of the family (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Kenyon & Barker, 1998) thus this could have been a manifestation of the characteristic rebellion teenagers at that age experience; a way of forming their own identity, which is distinct from that of the family.

5.4.6 Weight control motives

In this study, no reference was made by the respondents regarding weight control and dieting. However, the nature of the interview questions was not for the intention to assess the individual's diet per se. Therefore, if there were weight control motives for adopting a vegetarian diet, this was up to the respondents to discuss it, as was for the other motives.

Nonetheless, since weight control might be considered a delicate issue for some individuals, it cannot be excluded that some respondents might not have wanted to mention this motive, even more so since the data collection method was not anonymous.

5.5 Present motivations to remain a vegetarian

Four categories of motives were revealed regarding what motivates different respondents to remain vegetarian after several years elapsed from their moment of conversion:

- (a) Their *sole* motivation for conversion;
- (b) Their *primary* motivation;
- (c) Their *primary* motivation coupled with *secondary* motives and/or other factors;
- (d) *Diverse* motives from the ones which motivated them initially.

Therefore, as can be seen, for some respondents their sole motivation for conversion did not change even after several years, while similarly, others still regarded their primary motivation as their principal focus. For other respondents primary and secondary motives were after time judged of nearly equal or of equal significance, and all motives were thus taken into consideration. The latter finding is in line with other research (Stiles, 1998) which validates that people who convert to vegetarianism might be motivated by several reasons, yet, eventually are likely to integrate other motives.

However, for other respondents, their motives for vegetarianism evolved and changed into entirely different ones, and this finding is in agreement to that claimed by Amato and Partridge (1989 as cited in Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), and Beardsworth & Keil (1992) who document that motives have a propensity to evolve as time passes. These respondents tended to view

vegetarianism in a holistic manner in the sense that they do not think anymore about why they chose a vegetarian lifestyle, but view it more in terms of their present life, implying that what ultimately matters is that they feel satisfied with a lifestyle they have become accustomed to.

5.6 Different types of conversion processes

As already stated, in this particular research the conversion process from a vegetarian to a non-vegetarian lifestyle was characterised by three distinct types of changes, discussed hereunder. It can be noted that these types may be viewed on a continuum, a gradual change on one extreme and a sudden change at the other extreme. What all three processes have in common is the end result: that of reducing cognitive dissonance in a direct manner by changing behaviour which was inconsistent with newly formed attitudes (Baron & Byrne, 2000) that evolved with time or in a sudden manner.

5.6.1 Progressive change

Gradual change both in terms of attitude and behaviour: The majority of respondents displayed a conversion characterised by a gradual attitude change, prior to taking the decision to convert to vegetarianism, and concurrently characterised by a decrease in the respondents' consumption of meat from the behavioural aspect, this enabling the respondents to learn and adapt to the new diet and lifestyle from both a psychological and a physical aspect. This type of conversion is analogous to the first type of conversion outlined by Beardsworth & Keil (1992), who argue that the individual's notions develop and change during this time.

5.6.2 Progressive/revolutionary change

Gradual in terms of attitude but characterised by a sudden turning point in behaviour: Four respondents displayed this pattern, a conversion depicted by a gradual progression in terms of attitude and learning about vegetarianism, which in some cases even took years, without any behavioural change. This was thereafter characterised by a sharp and abrupt decision to finally convert, this usually induced by a particular incident. This has similarly been documented by McDonald (2000), who argues that prospective vegetarians might come into contact with animal cruelty but they do not immediately respond to it. Instead learning takes place over a period of time, before the decision is ultimately taken.

5.6.3 Revolutionary change

Sudden change both in terms of attitude and behaviour: Two respondents exhibited this pattern, a conversion characterised by an abrupt jolt into a different reality, with a positive feeling that there is no other right decision but to convert to vegetarianism, this done in an instantaneous manner, also typically subsequent to a particular experience. Such an abrupt method has also been documented in other studies (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; MacNair, 1998; McDonald, 2000).

5.7 The meaning attributed to meat after the conversion

As expected, for the majority of respondents meat acquired an extremely strong negative connotation, expressed by strong adjectives like ‘murder’ and sometimes even perceived as analogous to human flesh. This is consistent with other studies (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Kenyon & Barker, 1998), which document similar descriptions of meat. A practice considered normal and pleasurable in the past, is currently perceived in a totally different way, in that it

became a source of revulsion and in certain instances as an ‘utterly cruel’ act. These findings are in line with other studies (Fessler, Arguello, Mekdara & Macias, 2003; Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997) which report that disgust is an outcome of adopting a vegetarian diet. Findings (Allen, Wilson, Ng & Dunne, 2000) suggest that “vegetarians have the will to ‘reconnect’ meat to living animals” (pg. 416), and such disgust and revulsion may be elicited by the awareness that a piece of meat is actually a dead animal which was primarily an alive being (Adams, 2002), whereas before, this association may have either been disregarded or else not acknowledged.

5.8 Relationships with others

5.8.1 Past and present situation compared

Since a substantial part of the respondents have been vegetarian for several years, they described that in the beginning, when vegetarianism was at its very first roots in Malta, the situation was very different from today. A number of respondents expressed how at first even their closest relatives and friends could not understand the reasons behind their choice, some even to this day. For these vegetarians, this was a great disappointment, characterised by a sense of isolation. Taking into consideration that these individuals decided to make a major life change, it was very difficult for them to do so without support from significant others.

However, when comparing the former situation to the present one, the respondents emphasised that non-vegetarians are more accepting of the vegetarian lifestyle nowadays; a finding which corresponds to other research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). However, it should be noted that a number of respondents are married and their immediate family is vegetarian so for these vegetarians it is a very different situation than for those who are the sole vegetarians in their

family. The latter vegetarians expressed irritation, and sometimes even exasperation, at the inability of their significant others to really understand them. Such tensions have been documented in other research (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Janda & Trocchia, 2001, Lea, 2001). Adams (2002) advances the notion that most vegetarians do not perceive the difficulties which preclude others from considering their arguments, a probable reason being that their personal conversion to vegetarianism directs them into thinking that others can also be converted.

5.8.2 Maltese society

The majority of respondents agreed that the Maltese as a people are becoming more aware of vegetarianism; nonetheless, the respondents still encounter several misconceptions about vegetarianism by meat-eaters, such as confounding vegetarianism with different religions; perceiving the vegetarian diet to comprise of only vegetables and thus severely limited and restricted; perceiving a vegetarian diet to be unhealthy; perceiving certain foods such as fish, chicken and snails to be suitable for vegetarians. Respondents also encountered beliefs that a vegetarian diet is nutritionally unbalanced and boring, a finding which is in agreement to that claimed by Povey, Wellens & Conner (2001).

5.9 Vegetarian networks

5.9.1 Types of networks

Contrary to the hypothesis, no major differences were found between group 1 (members) and group 2 (non-members) in terms of feelings of isolation. However, this might be due to the fact that among some of the non-members, those who had vegetarian relatives or friends

derived the needed support from these groups, which might be considered primary groups (Forsyth, 1999).

Thus, it may be argued that these respondents had a sort of network, albeit not an organised, complex, public network such as The Vegetarian Society, which may thus be referred to as a secondary group, but a private one composed of friends, acquaintances and family members. Therefore, the majority of respondents sought the reassurance and support by seeking and developing friendships with others considered similar to them, a finding which corresponds to other research (McDonald, 2000), This might have contributed to the respondents' increase in self-acceptance (Baron & Byron, 2000).

5.9.2 Comparison of networks

Nevertheless, some differences transpire when a comparison is made between the public and the private network. While the private network was seen exclusively as a means of support, the organised network was, apart from a great source of support, also seen as an opportunity to meet individuals who, to a certain extent, share the same ideology and objectives, and who thus work towards common goals; a chance to discuss and share different viewpoints and also an opportunity to share activities and feel part of a society, and not part of a minority. All these are exemplified in the respondents' conception of the Society as a "*greater family*" and as "*a kind of subculture*".

Thus, in essence, the public network fulfilled the following functions: belonging, intimacy, generativity, support and exploration (Forsyth, 1996 as cited in Forsyth, 1999), while both networks satisfied psychological and social needs, such as a sense of belonging, and also the provision and sharing of knowledge (Baron & Byrne, 2000).

5.9.3 Social loneliness

Nevertheless, those respondents who belonged to neither the public network nor a private one felt misunderstood by significant others; they expressed frustration and anger at the interference by non-vegetarians, and revealed a desire to be understood more by them. These feelings may imply a kind of social loneliness (Forsyth, 1999) in the sense that the only networks these respondents had, which consisted of non-vegetarians, not only did not provide the interaction they needed, but actually did not provide the necessary support.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter reported a discussion of the findings of the present study. In the next chapter, there is a review of the most salient findings, the general implications of the study, the strengths and limitations of the study, suggestions for improvement and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this final chapter is to analyse the most significant findings of the present study, relating in particular to the motives, experiences, influences, and processes which transpired from the findings. The need for more education on vegetarianism is also discussed. The strengths and limitations of the methodology chosen are also reported, along with how future research can be improved. Lastly, potential avenues for further research are considered.

6.1 Review of the most salient findings

6.1.1 Hypotheses in relation to the findings

In reviewing the initial hypotheses, it may be concluded that:

With regards to ***multiple motives***, the majority of participants did report one primary motive for having become vegetarian and one or more other secondary motive/s which transpired later on. The motives which transpired were ***ethical, health, gustatory*** and ***challenge*** motives. ***Ethical vegetarianism*** was the prevalent motive in this study, with all respondents reporting this motive in one form or another i.e. either concern for animal welfare or concern for ecological and world-hunger issues.

With reference to ***relationships***, the majority of respondents encountered a lot of tension with others when they first became vegetarian; however, as time passed, the respondents argued that today there is less tension and more acceptance of their lifestyle. Nonetheless, nearly all respondents agreed that Maltese society still holds misconceptions about vegetarianism and vegetarians.

Participants who held membership in the Vegetarian Society, i.e. the public network, found the organisation a great source of support, especially when they first became vegetarian. Participants who did not belong to this public network but belonged to their own private network of vegetarians derived their needed support from the latter. Participants who belonged to neither network described a lack of support, especially from their family.

Vis-à-vis the *meaning of meat*, nearly all respondents reported a change in the way they perceive meat after the conversion. Whereas as non-vegetarians they had taken meat consumption for granted, after becoming vegetarian they currently perceive meat as a source of disgust and revulsion, with ‘murder’ used commonly in the respondents’ descriptions of meat, this emphasising the moral undertones of such a choice.

6.1.2 Other findings

Various types of experiences were found to have affected the respondents in their decision to become vegetarian. Traumatic experiences in childhood during which the respondents witnessed the slaughter of animals were unexpectedly often reported as an influencing factor. This is a novel finding and has not been reported in Anglo-American or Australian literature. This finding might be culturally influenced, possibly due to the fact that in the past, and for some even nowadays, it was considered a normal practice to rear or buy animals and kill them, instead of buying meat.

Experiences such as the above could be considered as a factor in the respondent’s acceptance to information regarding vegetarianism from the ethical viewpoint. What may be considered as direct influences for the respondents were documentaries, books, leaflets, discussions with

vegetarian friends, participation in yoga classes, an experience at a vegetarian camp, a vegetarian teacher at school, moving into a different household, and teenage rebellion.

Four categories of motives emerged regarding what motivates respondents to remain vegetarian after several years elapsed from their moment of conversion: (a) Their *sole* motivation for conversion; (b) Their *primary* motivation; (c) Their *primary* motivation coupled with *secondary* motives and/or other factors; (d) *Diverse* motives from the ones which motivated them initially.

Regarding the conversion process, three types of *processes* transpired from this study:

- (a) *Progressive change*: Gradual change both in terms of attitude and behaviour;
- (b) *Progressive/revolutionary change*: Gradual change in terms of attitude but characterised by a sudden turning point in behaviour;
- (c) *Revolutionary change*: Sudden change both in terms of attitude and behaviour.

6.2 General implications

The present study has provided an in-depth examination of some of the reasons behind vegetarianism in the Maltese culture and the particular consequences of such a choice, in the hope of illustrating and explaining that such a choice entails several issues, and that vegetarianism should not be considered as a ‘fad’ diet, but as a lifestyle which incorporates the implications discussed throughout this dissertation, particularly with regards to ethics and health.

The findings show that even though there is a higher level of awareness and knowledge about vegetarianism, Maltese society still holds a number of misconceptions regarding vegetarianism and vegetarians. Therefore, there is a need for more education and knowledge about vegetarianism in Maltese society, which might be attained by delegating accurate information to educational agencies such as schools and health care facilities, such as pharmacies, clinics and hospitals. Increasing education might result in increasing tolerance towards vegetarianism and may also result in a higher level of awareness of the issues surrounding vegetarianism.

6.3 Strengths and limitations of the study

The strength of this study rests on the use of the methodology chosen; the semi-structured interview was the best method to investigate the experiences of the respondents. This method enabled a rich collection of data which would have been difficult to obtain by use of questionnaires. Clarifications could be made during the interview, therefore obtaining very accurate data, while other issues which the respondents mentioned were elaborated on, in the process discovering novel themes.

Nonetheless, the main weakness of the study also rests on the type of methodology chosen, due to the fact that no generalisations can be made from a sample of only 13 participants. Another limitation which might be due to the “snowball” sampling method is that the majority of participants had a high level of educational attainment, either holding a university degree or else presently reading for a degree at university. This makes the sample unrepresentative of the Maltese population since respondents with a lower educational level may have been inadvertently omitted from the sample. Another limitation regards the fact that as a researcher, I had a researcher’s bias since I am also a vegetarian.

6.4 Suggestions for improvement

In view of the limitations discussed above, various suggestions can be made for prospective research. Other qualitative studies could employ focus groups, in conjunction with individual interviews, in an attempt to attain a clearer and more composite picture of the attitudes and behaviours of vegetarians. With regards to the sample, future studies could try to obtain a representative sample of the population by using quantitative methods.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

Several potential avenues for forthcoming research have evolved from the present study:

- (a) Research on adolescent vegetarians, since other research documents differences between adult and adolescent vegetarianism (Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1997; Perry, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001).
- (b) Qualitative research on non-vegetarians to investigate their dietary choices for comparison with the sample of vegetarians in this study.
- (c) There are individuals who may hold positive attitudes towards vegetarianism and would like to become vegetarian but do not. Research could investigate such a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour in relation to factors such as situational constraints (Baron & Byrne, 2000).
- (d) Research on vegetarians who subsequently make a further transition and become vegans.
- (e) There are vegetarians who convert back to a meat-eating diet. Research could investigate the causes and factors in reverting to their past behaviour.

6.6 Conclusion

This dissertation has shown that vegetarians are motivated by a primary motivation but that with time, other motives transpire, this confirming that multiple motives do drive behaviour. Nonetheless, motivation for such change in both attitude and behaviour should not be considered in a vacuum, but as part of a complex process which incorporates other determinants such as cultural context, childhood experiences, and other direct sources of influence.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Participant group 1 (members)

Background information

1. *Can you state your age and occupation please?*
2. *How long have you been a vegetarian?*
3. *What is your definition of 'being vegetarian'?*
4. *What does the food you eat represent to you?*
5. *Was it your choice to become vegetarian? And how much of your decision was influenced by peers/family and society in general?*

Family and Friends

6. *Are any of your family members or friends vegetarians? How does this make you feel?*
7. *Do you talk to other people e.g. family and friends, about being vegetarian? If yes what do you tell them and what is their reaction?*
8. *How do people's reactions influence you and your decisions?*

The moment of conversion

9. *Do you remember the moment you decided to become a vegetarian? Was it an overnight change or was it a gradual change? What did you feel?*
10. *Did you have any particular experiences which made you decide to become a vegetarian? If yes, can you mention some of these experiences?*

11. *Can you pinpoint the main reason why you chose to become a vegetarian at that particular time?*
12. *What motivates you to remain a vegetarian?*

After the conversion

13. *How would you have described 'meat' before you became a vegetarian? And how would you describe 'meat' now? Does it have the same or different meaning?*
14. *You were a non-vegetarian for several years. What does it feel like being a vegetarian?*
15. *Did becoming a vegetarian generalise to other behaviours in your life?*

On membership

16. *How long have you held membership in the Vegetarian Society of Malta and what is your position in the Society?*
17. *What does it mean for you to have a network of social relations who share your same beliefs and ideologies?*

Various questions

18. *Have you ever had any problems related to healthy eating since you became a vegetarian?*
19. *Do you follow any religion? If yes, how do you go about combining the two beliefs?*

On Maltese Society

20. *Do you think that the typical Maltese person knows what 'a vegetarian' is?*
21. *How would you describe life as a vegetarian in Malta? For example, when out socialising, eating out or being invited to dinner, or when grocery shopping?*

Conclusion

22. *To conclude would you like to add anything else?*

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Participant group 2 (non-members)

Background information

1. *Can you state your age and occupation please?*
2. *How long have you been a vegetarian?*
3. *What is your definition of 'being vegetarian'?*
4. *What does the food you eat represent to you?*
5. *Was it your choice to become vegetarian? And how much of your decision was influenced by peers/family and society in general?*

Family and Friends

6. *Are any of your family members or friends vegetarians? How does this make you feel?*
7. *Do you talk to other people e.g. family and friends, about being vegetarian? If yes what do you tell them and what is their reaction?*
8. *How do people's reactions influence you and your decisions?*
9. *Do you feel that others understand/ misunderstand you and your beliefs? How does this make you feel?*

The moment of conversion

10. *Do you remember the moment you decided to become a vegetarian? Was it an overnight change or was it a gradual change? What did you feel?*

11. *Did you have any particular experiences which made you decide to become a vegetarian? If yes, can you mention some of these experiences?*
12. *Can you pinpoint the main reason why you chose to become a vegetarian at that particular time?*
13. *What motivates you to remain a vegetarian?*

After the conversion to vegetarianism

14. *How would you have described 'meat' before you became a vegetarian? And how would you describe 'meat' now? Does it have the same or different meaning?*
15. *You were a non-vegetarian for several years. What does it feel like being a vegetarian?*
16. *Did becoming a vegetarian generalise to other behaviours in your life?*

Various questions

17. *Have you ever had any problems related to healthy eating since you became a vegetarian?*
18. *Do you follow any religion? If yes, how do you go about combining the two beliefs?*

On Maltese Society

19. *Do you think that the typical Maltese person knows what 'a vegetarian' is?*
20. *How would you describe life as a vegetarian in Malta? For example, when out socialising, eating out or being invited to dinner, or when grocery shopping?*

Conclusion

21. *To conclude would you like to add anything else?*

Appendix C

Letter to the chairperson of “The Vegetarian Society of Malta”

To whom it may concern,

I am a fourth year Psychology (Honours) student at the University of Malta and as part of the course requirements I am carrying out a thesis. The subject I have chosen regards the motivations for the conversion to vegetarianism in Malta. The main aim of this study is to research why Maltese individuals are motivated to become vegetarians and also what motivates them to remain vegetarians.

I have contacted you since to carry out this research study I need to conduct interviews with seven members of the Vegetarian Society of Malta, preferably equal numbers of both sexes and also of varying ages, from 18yrs over.

Your help would be greatly appreciated. This research will further the understanding of vegetarianism in Malta even more so since limited research has been conducted here.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance,

Yours truly,

Christine Garzia

B.Psy (Hons.) 4th Yr.

Appendix D

Consent form

I, _____ understand that I am voluntarily taking part in this research and that what I say is, and will be kept, confidential. I acknowledge that I will be assigned an alias to protect my anonymity. I give consent to the researcher to record the interview and transcribe it for research purposes and also acknowledge that the tape will be destroyed after use.
