Preface

Background

In the late 1980s, when I was studying for my master's degree at East Tennessee State University, I became interested in the sociological aspects of food and eating, in general, and vegetarianism, in particular. There were few vegetarians in northeast Tennessee back then, and during the six years that I lived in Johnson City, I think I met most of them. Teaching hatha yoga and working off and on at the local health food store, I had occasion to talk with a variety of people who were looking to adopt more balanced, healthful, and energetic lifestyles.

To the people of Johnson City—a small, close-knit community marked by political conservatism and religious fundamentalism, where social gatherings often centered on meat eating—such New Age phenomena as yoga, health foods, and vegetarianism were quite threatening, and tofu (which few people had actually tried) was a four-letter word. The people I talked with informally—at yoga classes and in the health food store—often asked me questions about vegetarian nutrition (which I was not qualified to answer); vegetarian cooking (which I could offer some advice on); and how to get along with their meat-eating families, friends, and co-workers (which I could sympathize about but offer no real answers to).

By the time I moved to Tennessee, I had spent several years as a semivegetarian, eating some fish, and then an ovo-lacto-vegetarian, consuming no meat or seafood but eating some eggs and dairy products. It was not until my stay in Johnson City, however, that I began to think about the social process of becoming a vegetarian. As is true for most vegetar-

ians, my dietary and lifestyle changes had occurred over a long time, with several influences affecting my choices. As an undergraduate at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, I had explored everything that I perceived to be radical. And during this period, about three years had passed between the time I stopped eating red meat and the time I first called myself a vegetarian. My roommates and I belonged to the local food co-op in New Bedford, and for the first time, I started to think about the origins of some of what I was eating. As a lifelong animal lover, I began to find the meat on my plate disgusting. And like many new vegetarian wanna-bes, I compensated for my rejection of meat by eating more eggs and dairy products—never stopping to consider how these foods were produced.

My life experiences in Massachusetts and Tennessee led me to see vegetarianism as a socially influenced personal choice—a lifestyle. I became interested in studying the process of *how* people become vegetarians, and in the late 1980s, I decided to take on this topic as a research project. Searching the social science and humanities literature for what others had written about vegetarians, I found surprisingly little. Most of the literature consisted of history journal articles on nineteenth-century vegetarian figures and vegetarian communes such as Octagon City and Fruitlands. However, I also found historian James Whorton's *Crusaders for Fitness;* Janet Barkas's *The Vegetable Passion;* and Anne Murcott's edited collection *The Sociology of Food and Eating,* which includes British sociologist Julia Twigg's "Vegetarianism and the Meanings of Meat."[1] As I continued my research, I discovered that other sociologists, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, were studying the process of becoming a vegetarian. And I learned that nutritional scientists and dietitians—several of whom were researching characteristics common among vegetarians—had conducted more research on the social aspects of vegetarianism than had the social scientists.[2]

In my early project, I outlined a typology of "processual elements" toward becoming a vegetarian that were found among the twenty-three vegetarians I interviewed. Although I focused on the experiences of these individuals, I gradually learned that there was more to vegetarianism than food, recipes, and a few significant books such as Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* and Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*.[3] I began to subscribe to *Vegetarian Times* (a mass-marketed magazine), *Vegetarian Journal* (first published by the Baltimore Vegetarians, which later became the Vegetarian Resource Group [VRG]), and *FARM Report* (published by the Farm Animal Reform Movement [FARM]). Through *Vegetarian Journal* and *FARM Report,* I learned about the activities of vegetarian groups throughout the country and such national celebrations as the Great American Meat-Out (a national day of meatless eating). I found out that a vegetarian group in Knoxville had created a media stir when its members managed to persuade then governor Lamar Alexander to proclaim October 1 World Vegetarian Day. Following a flood of letters and phone calls from the meat industry, however, Alexander agreed to proclaim a World Beef Day and a World Poultry Day as well.

I began to realize that the vegetarian movement was much more than a group of people changing their eating habits. Masked by what seemed to be a dietary choice and lifestyle was an organizational structure and ideology that looked very much like a social movement: "a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or a group of which it is a part."[4] My rethinking of vegetarianism led to the research project on which this book is based.

In an effort to find out everything I could about the organization of vegetarian activities, I subscribed to every publication put out by (and requested additional information from) every group I came across that appeared to be a vegetarian organization or an animal rights organization that in

some way promoted vegetarianism. I narrowed the field of national vegetarian organizations to seven, and I set out to interview not only leaders of these groups but also other longtime vegetarian activists not directly associated with the organizations. To find out about local vegetarian groups, I prepared an open-ended questionnaire, which was answered by ninety-seven active groups, many of whom also sent me complimentary copies of their newsletters. In addition, I participated in local vegetarian group activities in Connecticut and New York. And between 1995 and 1999, I attended several regional and national conferences—mostly to observe but also occasionally to speak about my work in order to gain feedback. (See Appendix A for a more detailed description of my research methodology.)

During my research, I moved from an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet to a vegan diet and lifestyle (consuming and wearing no animals or animal by-products). I had tried to become a vegan several times over the years, but I had given in each time, either to hunger when I was traveling or to the use of my warm woolen coats during the winter. Before I began my research, I decided to make an effort once again to become a vegan. In part, I was motivated by my own convictions, but I also wanted to experience the daily trials and tribulations that vegans typically encounter. As a result, I stopped eating eggs and dairy products and became more attentive to "hidden" animal ingredients such as whey and casein. I gave away my wool and silk clothing; I replaced my leather shoes with footwear made of materials such as plastic, cloth, rubber, and PVC (polyvinyl chloride); and I began to contemplate whether bees suffer in the honey cultivation process.

I did not succeed completely, so when I was faced with the inevitable question from my interviewees, "Are you a vegan?" I would reply that I was "98 percent." At that time, I still consumed some products that contained animal-derived ingredients—such as the "nondairy" creamer that I put in my cof-

fee—and I did not want to risk being viewed as insincere or disingenuous. (I have since learned to take my coffee black or with soy milk or rice milk.) Usually people responded by saying that it is impossible to be *truly* vegan—that, in the course of daily life, one cannot avoid consuming or using products that contain some animal-derived ingredients. Almost any magazine or newspaper, for example, contains photographs produced with the animal-derived ingredient gelatin.

Like many social scientists who study issues close to their hearts, I chose to research the vegetarian movement because I care about its key issues; I am a sympathizer—and to some extent, a participant. And like other sympathizing sociologists, I necessarily find myself revealing in this book some of what I perceive as the movement's negative or unproductive aspects. At times I feel uncomfortable presenting criticisms, even though my interpretations have evolved out of close observation and careful reflexive thought. Still, my sympathy with the movement only strengthens my commitment to presenting a study that is useful to the movement's leaders and participants. In addition, as a sociologist, I want my work not only to contribute to an understanding of how social movements function but also, finally, to make sure that vegetarianism is placed on the map of social movements.

Plan of the Book

To understand the vegetarian movement, we need some background: Why and how do people become vegetarians? Is vegetarianism becoming more popular? Is it a fad or a trend? What are its historical roots in North America? Do health professionals view vegetarian diets as healthful or unhealthful? To give a sense of vegetarianism's place in contemporary society, Chapters 1 and 2 explore these and other questions. Although people become vegetarians for a variety of reasons, in the United States and Canada, most vegetarians are motivated by

a desire for self-improvement—a desire to be healthier and more energetic.[5] Rooted in this motivation, the North American vegetarian movement boasts historical figures such as Sylvester Graham, William Andrus Alcott, Ellen G. White, and John Harvey Kellogg, who have promoted vegetarian diets as the panacea for ills that result from an increasingly industrialized and chaotic world. Today most vegetarian organizations continue to focus on promoting the health aspects of vegetarianism, an approach that taps into popular concerns. For a variety of reasons that are explored in the early chapters of this book, however, this focus has made it difficult to generate the resources necessary for conducting large-scale campaigns or for directly confronting the meat industry.

Chapter 3 begins our look at the structure and organization of the vegetarian movement. In addition to considering the many different types of vegetarian organizations that contribute to movement activities (both throughout the United States and Canada and within local communities), this chapter considers the role of other interests—particularly the animal rights, health food, and environmental movements—in supporting vegetarian principles. Chapter 3 also looks at whether the meat industry, in its role as a countermovement, helps or hinders the efforts of the vegetarian cause.

Chapter 4 examines the idea that the vegetarian ideology plays a crucial role in how movement members choose and implement strategies for change and discusses the ways that different organizations articulate the vegetarian ideology. This chapter presents the different tenets of vegetarianism—compassion for animals, concern for the environment, and the healthful aspects of a vegetarian diet—and (as an introduction to some of the key internal issues that the vegetarian movement currently faces) considers recent challenges to the definition of the term "vegetarian."

Although, like other social movements, the vegetarian movement uses various strategies for promoting cultural and

social change, perhaps to a greater degree than some, it focuses on encouraging change among individuals. Chapter 5, which considers the strategies of the vegetarian movement in depth, highlights the fact that these strategies are based on leaders' assumptions about how personal, cultural, and social changes occur.

Chapter 6 focuses on an important strategic dilemma of the vegetarian movement: how to develop a collective identity among participants without alienating potential new recruits. Here we examine how the movement's efforts to reach a broad audience by focusing on health issues affect the ability of participants to achieve a collective identity.

The role of vegetarian organizations has included not only providing support for those who choose a vegetarian lifestyle but also working to increase the availability of vegetarian foods in grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, schools, and workplaces. Clearly, by any measure, vegetarian specialty items such as veggie dogs, veggie burgers, soy milk, and tofu have become increasingly accessible, and growing numbers of people—including nonvegetarians—have been trying and even demanding them. The sale of vegetarian foods has steadily increased since the late 1980s, with the market for these items ballooning from $138 million in 1989 to an estimated $662 million in 1999,[6] providing new money-making opportunities for food producers, distributors, and restaurateurs. In its exploration of this new market, Chapter 7 examines the potential effects on both the growth of the vegetarian movement and the public's acceptance of vegetarian diets.

The final chapter of this book assesses the current status of and the future possibilities for the vegetarian movement: Is the movement doomed to marginality? Will we see an increase in the number of vegetarians, or will we see merely an increase in the number of people who occasionally enjoy meatless meals? And what exactly would constitute success for the vegetarian movement? In addition, this chapter looks at how the

analysis herein is applicable to other social movements: What can we learn from examining the vegetarian movement? What can we ascertain about other social movements—such as the animal rights and environmental movements—that promote lifestyle change in an effort to produce cultural change? Are some strategies likely to be more successful than others? Chapter 8 brings the book to a close by considering the impact that the vegetarian movement has had on society and the relevance of this study to understanding similar causes.

In light of the fact that the North American vegetarian movement has persisted for nearly two centuries, it is surprising that it has escaped sociological analysis until now. In part, this can be explained by the fact that—on the surface—the movement seems more like an aggregate of people who are changing their eating habits than an organized effort for change. The following chapters take us beneath these surface appearances and open the way for an exploration of the movement and its cultural impact.

1 What Is Vegetarianism? And Who Are the Vegetarians?

> Is vegetarianism a social movement? To most of us, it would seem that it is, but it is also different from other social movements. It is not a social movement like civil rights or women's suffrage, because the *primary* objective of those seeking to promote vegetarianism is not political. One could certainly make political demands on the basis of vegetarianism . . . but attitudes towards food are deeper than laws or politics; they are felt literally and figuratively at the "gut level."
>
> —Keith Akers, "Out of Synch?"

What is vegetarianism? Is it a diet or a lifestyle? Is it a social movement or a bunch of people who happen to eat the same way? Is it a passing fad or a developing trend?

When meat eaters hear the term "vegetarian," they typically think of an ovo-lacto-vegetarian, someone who eats no meat, poultry, or fish but who consumes some dairy products and eggs. But there are also lacto-vegetarians, who eat dairy products but not eggs; ovo-vegetarians, who consume eggs but not dairy products; and vegans, who consume (and wear) no animal products or by-products whatsoever. And then there are those who call themselves vegetarians even though they occasionally eat meat or seafood. These definitions of vegetarianism suggest that it is simply a dietary preference that requires adherence to no particular ideology.

For many people, however, being a vegetarian means more than following a set of dietary proscriptions—it is a way of life. Although there are those who eliminate meat from their diets for economic reasons, these individuals typically return to meat eating as they gain the financial means to do so.[1] For these "hardship vegetarians," meatless eating is neither a desirable nor a completely free choice. People who become vegetarians by choice, however, typically use diet as a form of self-expression and creativity.[2] Vegetarians, for example, frequently explore new foods, shop at food co-ops and natural food stores, and peruse vegetarian cookbooks and magazines for new recipes. They often discuss their food choices with family, and friends, and, to varying degrees, they incorporate vegetarianism into their self-concepts.

Is the vegetarian movement, then, simply an aggregate of people practicing the same lifestyle? After all, vegetarians do not appear to be particularly politically active or publicly outspoken, most do not belong to any movement or organization, and national campaigns promoting vegetarianism are rare. Still, behind the appearance of arbitrary adherence to a common lifestyle exists a structured set of organizations, ideas, and related phenomena: a movement that includes local and national organizations, a body of movement literature, a set of relatively coherent arguments, and a wide range of products and services. A vegetarian ideology—vegetarianism—provides both a critique of meat eating and the vision of a vegetarian world. The vast majority of vegetarians draw from this ideology to express their personal motivations for adopting this lifestyle.[3]

Vegetarian organizations, despite their lack of public visibility, are the backbone of the vegetarian way of life: Here agendas are set, vocabulary and other symbols are defined, and information and networking services are made available. These organizations create and distribute literature about the meaning of vegetarianism and hold meetings and conferences

to celebrate vegetarian lifestyles. Vegetarian groups are central to movement activities because they generate and promote ideas about the most effective ways to achieve personal, cultural, and social change—in other words, how to be a vegetarian and how to create a vegetarian world. Although many people (including many social scientists) perceive vegetarianism as an individual phenomenon, the significance of vegetarian organizations points to its *social* dimension.

But is vegetarianism a fad or a trend? Interest groups such as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association argue that vegetarian diets are a passing fad, bound to go in and out of style like bell bottoms, new-wave music, and mood rings. Other food industry watchers have called vegetarianism one of the "top 10 trends to watch and work on," particularly among teenagers and college students, and the National Restaurant Association has identified vegetarian foods as the wave of the future.[4] The American Dietetic Association (ADA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Institute of Nutrition in Canada, and Dietitians of Canada have all given scientific legitimacy to the mainstreaming of vegetarianism by declaring well-planned vegetarian diets to be nutritious and healthful.[5] Although vegetarianism's popularity has waxed and waned—with its peaks occurring in the mid-1800s and in the 1960s and early 1970s—it has held a small but consistent following in the United States and Canada since the 1820s.

Why Do People Become Vegetarians?

People have articulated a variety of reasons for adopting vegetarian diets: personal health, concern about the treatment of farm animals (which often includes belief in animal rights), environmental issues, world hunger concerns, and disgust at the thought of consuming the flesh of a dead animal.[6] Often vegetarians, and those who study them, use a simpler dichotomy: health reasons and ethical (or moral) reasons.[7] In

North America, most people begin the path to vegetarianism for health reasons. For example, in a 1992 poll that the market research company Yankelovich, Clancy, Shulman conducted for *Vegetarian Times* magazine, 46 percent of the 601 self-described vegetarians surveyed cited health as the most important reason for becoming a vegetarian, 15 percent cited animal welfare, and 12 percent cited the influence of family and friends. Others cited ethical reasons (5 percent) and the environment (4 percent), and 18 percent checked the category "not sure/other."[8] Often, concern about dietary fat prompts the move toward vegetarianism,[9] though concern about the safety of the meat supply, the desire to lose weight, and holistic treatment plans to help prevent or improve medical conditions such as cancer and heart disease can also inspire the move.

For some people, the sources of motivation change or increase as they adopt vegetarian diets. Most commonly, a person initially becomes motivated by health issues and gradually adopts ethical reasons as well.[10] For example, as a woman in her fifties explained, she originally decided to cut down on her consumption of red meat because she was concerned about chemical contamination. Later, her work with primates led to an interest in the animal rights movement: "The process all started when I became aware of how contaminated the foods were. [I] always cared about animals, but I think it started with contamination. And the more I read about contamination, the more I realized what was being done to the animals. And I guess it was in the late 60s. So it took a good 10, 15 years before I really got primed."[11] For most, becoming a vegetarian is a gradual process that involves reading vegetarian literature, talking with other vegetarians, and defending their lifestyle to others. This social interaction facilitates the process of learning about vegetarianism.

This move from a single motivation to multiple motivations for adopting a vegetarian diet tends to strengthen the

commitment to vegetarianism. This increased commitment can, in turn, lead to social activism. Though their hierarchy of reasons can shift over time, at some point most leaders of vegetarian organizations incorporate an ethical motivation into the mix. For example, Francis Janes, a long-time EarthSave International leader, became ethically motivated after he viewed a video based on John Robbins's *Diet for a New America*.[12]

> I think if you ask today what my motivations are to live my lifestyle, health would be just a bonus now. For me, if someone told me today, if you came up to me with confirmed medical evidence that said, "Being a vegetarian has no medical or health benefits," I would say to you, "I'm so clear about the ethical and the environmental benefits of doing this that it doesn't matter." I would still follow the path. And so your whole perspective on what brought you to this path in the first place and why you do it today . . . does shift and change.[13]

Even those leaders who are initially inspired by ethical issues are likely to embrace multiple motivations along the way. For many vegetarians—and particularly for organization leaders—"being" a vegetarian is not a static state; it is a process of "becoming" through shifting personal motivations and increasing degrees of commitment.

People who become motivated by ethical issues are more likely than others to become vegans, those who abandon the consumption of all animal products and by-products. In fact, the ethical orientations of most vegetarian movement leaders—which are usually related to concerns about animal suffering and the deleterious effects of meat production on the environment—have led the vast majority to follow a vegan lifestyle. For example, Stacey Vicari, former president of EarthSave International, reports that her commitment to the elimination of animal suffering helps her to maintain her vegan lifestyle: "When I read *Diet for a New America* what influenced me the most was the animal section of the book. And

for me that's what's given me the perseverance to really stay true to a vegan diet. There are days within my vegan diet that I'll eat fatty popcorn at the movie theater or that I'll eat vegan carrot cake at a party. But I don't eat cheese, and I don't eat ice cream, and I don't eat meat, because I have strong convictions."[14] Commitment to animal welfare or rights and to the environment, which helps vegans to maintain their lifestyle (particularly in situations where deviation from social expectations draws negative reactions from others), is manifested in the willingness of vegetarian leaders to sacrifice their time, energy, and other resources in the promotion of vegetarianism.

How Do People Become Vegetarians?

Although there are some who make an abrupt change to vegetarianism, most people become vegetarians gradually. The most common path to vegetarianism is to eliminate red meat from the diet; then poultry; then seafood; and, for some, then eggs and dairy products.[15] This progression seems to reflect a commonly held set of beliefs about both the health hazards of these foods and the amount of suffering to animals that their consumption causes.[16] People who abruptly "go vegan," on the other hand, are more likely to be motivated by ethical concerns or to have experienced extreme disgust over the consumption of meat.[17]

The process of becoming a vegetarian usually involves social interaction with someone who already practices vegetarianism, often a family member or friend but sometimes merely an appealing acquaintance.[18] In one study, 63 percent of vegetarians surveyed claimed that their decision had been influenced by other vegetarians; among the same respondents, 40 percent claimed that they had influenced the decision of at least one other vegetarian.[19] Social contact can be especially motivating for those who are already predisposed to vegetari-

anism. For example, one woman in her thirties became a vegetarian after marrying an ovo-lacto-vegetarian who both inspired her and provided the support she needed. As she explains, "Well, it was [my husband who motivated me]. . . . I already had strong leanings toward [vegetarianism] to begin with and I guess I never had that extra little push to do it and also didn't quite know how to go about it. . . . And in talking with him, I realized how this was something I really wanted to do."[20] Established vegetarians provide both emotional support (empathizing with the difficulties that new vegetarians sometimes encounter) and instrumental support (offering information about how to prepare new foods and where to shop).[21]

Although many new vegetarians are strongly influenced by social interaction, some are motivated by books (and even films) that deal with vegetarian issues.[22] Prominent books such as Frances Moore Lappé's 1971 *Diet for a Small Planet,* Peter Singer's 1975 *Animal Liberation,* John Robbins's 1987 *Diet for a New America*, and Erik Marcus's 1998 *Vegan: The New Ethics of Eating,* for example, all address issues regarding hunger and animal suffering.[23] This suggests that people who are influenced more by media than by social interaction may be motivated more by ethics than by personal health concerns.

In the course of adopting vegetarianism, some people (particularly those without other vegetarian social networks) find social and instrumental support in vegetarian organizations. As vegetarian advocate Keith Akers writes, "It is hard to take a 'radical' step such as rejecting meat consumption when you are completely alone in your beliefs, when none of your family or friends are vegetarians, and others regard you as part of the lunatic fringe as a consequence of your diet."[24] Local vegetarian groups throughout the United States and Canada meet—usually monthly—to enjoy potluck meals and to share recipes and other information. Vegetarian organizations also

reinforce vegetarian norms—sometimes so strongly that they cause people to feel guilty about straying from their vegetarian diets.[25] Clearly, friends, family, acquaintances, and associations can greatly influence a person's choice to adopt and continue to follow a vegetarian lifestyle.

Who Is Most Likely to Become a Vegetarian?

Food consumption patterns are associated with social class, ethnicity, and gender. A profile of those who are most likely to decrease meat consumption and become vegetarians indicates white, middle-class females. Vegetarians share characteristics such as being less likely than the general population to participate in conventional religions and being more likely to consider themselves liberal and to practice health-conscious behaviors. It is not clear, however, whether these are predisposing characteristics that might influence a person to practice vegetarianism or merely consequences of engaging in a vegetarian lifestyle.

Vegetarianism and Socioeconomic Status

People who choose to follow vegetarian diets overwhelmingly hail from the middle class. Although the cost of a nutritionally sound meatless diet can rival the cost of a meat-based diet, people from lower-income groups rarely become vegetarians by choice. Instead, as those with lower socioeconomic status become upwardly mobile, they tend to increase food spending, with a large portion of this additional expenditure going toward the purchase of meat.[26] The capacity to purchase unlimited quantities of meat is associated with higher socioeconomic status. People from lower-income groups rarely become vegetarians before they acquire the capacity to purchase all of the meat (i.e., the status) they want.

People with higher socioeconomic status, in contrast, may adopt vegetarian diets in part to differentiate themselves from other social groups.[27] According to cultural historian Margaret Visser, "Modern people in rich societies have reached a stage of satiety, of exhaustion with 'choice,' that sometimes makes them want to have something they can reject."[28] Adopting a vegetarian diet helps to structure choices and generate satisfaction, and by providing a comfortable set of rules, it can contribute to one's self-concept. In their 1981 study of vegetarians and gourmets, sociologists Kurt Back and Margaret Glasgow conclude that although both groups typically consist of people from middle-class backgrounds, their food choices represent different self-concepts: "Gourmets try to integrate a large, fluid, cosmopolitan middle-class culture, and vegetarians define themselves negatively and create strong boundaries against the general society."[29] Vegetarians may create these strong boundaries by identifying with rules that set them apart from others. The desire to follow a structured set of norms—thus alleviating tension generated by a proliferation of choices and enhancing one's status identification as "different" from others—is most likely to occur among people from the middle and upper socioeconomic classes. These groups have less interest than those from lower-income groups in holding onto meat's generally accepted status as a representation of power, prestige, and strength.

Vegetarianism and Ethnicity

Although the relationship between ethnicity and vegetarianism is not well understood, ethnicity may play a role in the likelihood that a person will adopt this lifestyle. One survey reports that 1 percent of African Americans "never eats poultry,"[30] which suggests that no more than 1 percent is vegetarian. Given the survey's margin of error, moreover, the

actual number could be a mere fraction of a percent. There are no other surveys of the general population on record that address ethnicity with regard to vegetarianism. It is certainly possible, however—and perhaps even likely—that certain ethnic groups, particularly various Asian groups, practice vegetarianism in higher percentages than do blacks or even whites. Based on my observation at vegetarian conferences and my conversations with organization leaders, I would estimate that people of color constitute less than 5 percent of group membership and conference participants.

The predominance of white vegetarians might be explained by arguing that the relevant independent variable is socioeconomic class rather than race. Given the income discrepancy between whites and ethnic minorities (and the desirability of beef), we might expect ethnic minorities (as a social group) to value meat (and especially beef) highly. These factors suggest that as ethnic minorities at the lowest income levels (just like whites at the lowest income levels) become upwardly mobile, they are likely to consume more beef.

Group differences in income offer only a partial explanation, however. People's adherence to traditional ethnic foodways, which often include meat, may also explain why people of color are unlikely to become vegetarians. People adhere to ethnic foodways (or altered and updated versions of these foodways) in order to maintain ties with their cultural heritages,[31] and they often do so with little conscious effort. A person learns food values by "copying . . . attitudes and behaviors from those with whom [he or she] identifies."[32] Because these values become habituated through practice, many nutritional scientists and health promoters have complained that food habits are extremely resistant to change. People may even associate powerful early experiences with memories of food smells, tastes, and textures.[33] Following traditional ethnic foodways, moreover, can be more than simply a habit; it can

be a conscious decision as well. Current trends that celebrate cultural diversity and thus encourage people to explore their culinary roots may well lead them away from vegetarianism.

Vegetarianism and Gender

Surveys generally concur that close to 70 percent of all vegetarians are female[34] and that more women than men try to eat more healthfully by ceasing or reducing their consumption of red meat.[35] Historically and cross-culturally, women consume less meat than do the men in their households, especially when meat is scarce.[36] Carol Adams writes that, for men, "Meat is King": A man attains the attributes of masculinity by consuming meat, in a sort of homeopathic transfiguration in which a dead animal's former strength animates the consumer. Because vegetarian men, by definition, challenge conventional masculinity norms, they become the targets of taunts that they are not "real men."[37]

Foods often connote masculinity and femininity. For example, in many cultures, light-colored foods that have a light taste are defined as feminine, and dark-colored foods that have a heavy taste are defined as masculine.[38] Eating lightly is also commonly associated with femininity,[39] and maintaining a low-fat diet is associated with "being more attractive, intelligent, conscientious, and calm."[40] These perceptions reinforce different norms of meat consumption for men and women. However, regardless of whether women heed these food connotations, because women are typically more concerned than men about losing weight, they are more likely to diminish or eliminate heavier (usually red) meats from their diets.

Married life has deterred some women from becoming vegetarians. Some have faced spousal disapproval, rejection, and even violence.[41] As traditional household divisions of

labor persist, women—both vegetarian and nonvegetarian—remain primarily responsible for the purchase and preparation of their families' food.[42] Although women often act as gatekeepers of consumption, influencing what other family members eat, hierarchical divisions of power within the family can undermine this control. Women are most likely to purchase and prepare foods, but in some cases their husbands dictate their choices. Nicki Charles and Marilyn Kerr suggest that men in families tend to have primary control over what is consumed at home, and when men are absent, children take control. Husbands may assert their control by telling their wives what to buy, refusing to eat what they prepare, or—in the most extreme cases—reacting violently when their wives refuse to prepare what they demand. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, vegetarians are less likely than the general population to be married.[43] Some women, however—both vegetarians and nonvegetarians—eat different foods from those that they prepare for their families.

Because women are socialized to base decisions on feelings of empathy rather than on logical, analytical thinking, they may tend to be more moved by vegetarianism's ethic of compassion toward animals than are men.[44] Whereas men are socialized to make moral judgments based on an effort not to interfere with the rights of other humans, women are socialized to make judgments based on a sense of responsibility to alleviate "real and recognizable trouble" in the world.[45] Therefore, women may become concerned about animal suffering as a "real trouble," and men may become concerned about a farmer's right to raise animals for food and a hunter's right to shoot deer. And women, having experienced more oppression as a group than men, may be more amenable to an egalitarian ideology that would generate more concern for animal rights. Women, more than men, are likely to be moved by vegetarian movement messages that evoke concerns for health, empathy, and compassion.[46]