



Eating on Campus: Vegan, Vegetarian, and Omnivore Stereotyping

Sheanna Burgess, Paige Carpenter, and Theresa Henshaw

Sponsored by Dr. Charlene Christie

Abstract

The research on food consumption stereotypes has demonstrated that a plethora of negative preconceived notions exist about vegans and vegetarians. However, the literature review associated meat-consumption with positive attributes. Our current study aimed at the college student's perspective on vegan, vegetarian, and omnivore lifestyles. In a two part study, we investigated the stigma attached to food consumption on campus.

Introduction

7.5 million Americans are vegetarians, with 1 million identifying as vegan (Humane Research Council, 2010). Out of 397 articles using keywords describing “vegans,” 74.3% were categorized as negative (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Some examples found throughout our literary analysis include: vegans as ridiculous, oversensitive, or hostile, and the vegan lifestyle as hard to accomplish or a fad. Attitudes toward vegetarians were found to be generally positive, possibly because the sample consisted mostly of female, college students with the use of the Attitudes Toward Vegetarians Scale (ATVS) (Chin, Fisak & Sims, 2002). This corresponds with another study where vegetarian men were perceived as less masculine than omnivore men (Ruby & Heine, 2011). We did not find an in-depth analysis of attitudes toward omnivores.

Previous studies have explored the motivations behind the decision to become vegetarian or vegan, and have explored their well-being (Chin et al, 2002). However, these studies failed to explore how other members of society view this decision.

Most of the research found pertaining to vegetarian and vegan stereotyping was qualitative with little to no quantitative data. The purpose of our study was to analyze how SUNY Oneonta students characterize vegans, vegetarians, and omnivores in a quantitative manner. Based on our literature review, we hypothesized that vegans and vegetarians will receive more negative characteristics in comparison to omnivores.

Methods

Participants

A convenience sample was used for this study. Participants were recruited throughout the SUNY Oneonta campus. Available participants consisted of SUNY Oneonta college students aged 18 years or older. Out of 61 participants, we omitted 12 due to lack of clear response. The range of participant's age was 17-27. 34.7% of participants were male and 65.3% were female. The majority of our sample were Caucasian (93.9%) with only two participants identifying as vegetarian and one identifying as vegan.

Procedure

Before the survey was administered, participants were asked to read and agree to the informed consent page before beginning the survey. Each participant answered the 12 survey questions individually. When they were finished, they were debriefed through a typed document. We created this survey to act as a pre-test to the second part of our study. This paper survey asked for the listing of characteristics surrounding the terms “vegan,” “vegetarian,” and “omnivore/carnivore.” We also inquired about their consumption of meat, family and friends who refrained from consuming meat, and which group they identified with. There was also a demographics section including gender, age, ethnicity, hometown, major, and where they live now (on/off campus).

Results

Vegan Characteristics

Out of the 49 surveys used for this study, the most common characteristics/terms listed include: healthy, hippie, less food choices, lacking protein, animal rights activists, thin, weak, lacking nutrients, organic, and strict. Generally, there were more negative characteristics listed than positive characteristics.

Vegetarian Characteristics

Out of the 49 surveys used for this study, the most common characteristics/terms listed include: healthy, lacking protein, hipster, veggie/salad eaters, less hipster than vegans, animal lovers, thoughtful, insane/crazy/freaks, weak, and unhealthy. Overall, the characteristics listed for vegetarians were both equally positive and negative.

Omnivore/Carnivore Characteristics

Out of the 49 surveys used for this study, the most common characteristics/terms listed include: high cholesterol/less healthy, hunter/predator, ignorant, normal/typical, meat-lover, masculine, protein-rich, animal killer, meat-eater, and eats anything. Generally, the characteristics listed for omnivores/carnivores were negative.

Consumption of meat

6.12% of participants refrained from consuming meat. 20.41% of participants consumed meat 1-3 times a week. 34.69% of participants consumed meat 4-6 times a week and 38.78% of participants consumed meat 7 + times a week.

Family Members/Friends

22.45% of students do not have a family member or friend that refrains from consuming animal products and 77.55% have a couple of family members of friends that refrain from consuming animal products.

Discussion

Our current study is the first part of a two-part critical analysis using self-report methods. The results indicate that there are stereotypes within a college setting with regard to vegans, vegetarians, and omnivore/carnivores. These stereotypes were subjectively rated for their positive/negative attributes. Our results did not completely correlate with our hypothesis. Characteristics of vegans and omnivores/carnivores were viewed as mostly negative, whereas, the overall characteristics of vegetarians were more neutral. Since most of our participants identified as omnivore/carnivore, it was intriguing to find that omnivores/carnivores were viewed the most negatively.

In closing, it is important to acknowledge the difference between carnivores and omnivores. Participants might have listed characteristics of carnivorous animals that are not human. In the second part of the study, we have addressed this issue and eliminated the term “carnivore.” Also, we used paper as a medium for our survey which did not allow us to obtain our desired sample size. Our study was also lacking in variety of participants identifying as vegan or vegetarian. We will be using Survey Monkey for the second part of our survey, which is online and will hopefully expand our sample size. The research that we are currently working on is examining the positive/negative attributes of each characteristic and how much they agree/disagree with each based on this presented study.

References

- Barnes-Holmes, D., Murtagh, L., Barnes-Holmes, Y., & Stewart, I. (2010). Using the Implicit Association Test and the Implicit Relational Assessment procedure to measure attitudes toward meat and vegetables in vegetarians and meat-eaters. *The Psychological Record*, 60, 287-306.
- Boek, S, Bianco-Simeral, S., Chan, K., & Goto, K. (2012). Gender and race are significant determinants of students' food choices on a college campus. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 44(4), 372-378. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2011.12.007
- Chin, M. G., Fisak, B., & Sims, V. K. (2002). Development of the Attitudes Toward Vegetarians Scale. *Anthrozoös*, 15(4), 332-343.
- Cole, M., & Morgan, K. (2011). Vegaphobia: Derogatory discourses of veganism and the reproduction of speciesism in UK national newspapers. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 62(1), 134-153. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01348.x
- Greenebaum, J. B. (2012). Managing impressions: “Face-saving” strategies of vegetarians and vegans. *Humanity & Society*, 36(4), 309-325. doi:10.1177/10160597612458898
- Ruby, M. B., & Heine, S. J. (2011). Meat, morals, and masculinity. *Appetite*, 56, 447-451. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2011.01.018