

## **Introduction**

Research has found that the number of self-identified vegans in the United States has increased 600% from 2014 to 2017 (Forgrieve, 2018). Additionally, sales of plant-based alternatives (e.g. milks, eggs, cheese, meat, etc.) has grown 17% from 2017 to 2018, whereas, overall food sales rose only 2% (Plant Based Foods Association, 2018). These findings suggest that plant-based alternatives are on the rise, and individuals who may not identify as vegan or vegetarians may be buying and enjoying these products as well. This increase in plant-based alternatives may be attributed to recent environmental advocates, celebrities' diets, or an interest in personal health. Four years ago, when I became a vegetarian the plant-based movement did not have as many products available nor celebrity-backing.

During the earlier years of my vegetarian diet, I experienced pressure to go back to eating meat and just submit to 'the status quo' from family members and friends. Pomerantz (2018) defines this as **conformity**, "changes in an individual's behavior to correspond to the behavior of a group of other people" (p. 445). I continued to resist the pressure to conform, and as the years have gone on, I have actually modified my diet further. I switched to a lacto-vegetarian (eating dairy products, but no egg or meat products) about two years ago, and within the last year, I have transitioned into eating primarily vegan (with the occasional dairy product). Looking back, I am surprised at the amount of negative comments I received from friends and family alike for simply changing my dietary preferences. I choose this article because I was interested in learning more about general attitudes towards vegetarians and vegans, to see if this is a common experience for plant-based individuals. Pomerantz (2018) defines **attitudes** as "a viewpoint, often influenced by both thoughts and emotions, that affects a person's responses to people, things, or situations" (p. 439).

### **Purpose**

Judge and Wilson (2018) noticed that there was a lack of research on psychological foundations of attitudes towards vegans and vegetarians. In particular, Judge and Wilson (2018) wanted to investigate using a Dual-Process Model (DPM) of ideology and prejudice with Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA – a perspective that the world is dangerous place and emphasizes protection from threats) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO – a perspective that the world is a competitive jungle and emphasizes maintaining in-group dominance). The study proposed three hypotheses: 1) attitudes towards vegetarians will be more positive than attitudes towards vegans; 2) male non-vegetarians will express less positive attitudes towards both vegetarians and vegans than female non-vegetarians; and 3) RWA and SDO will predict increasing negative attitudes towards vegetarians and vegans.

### **Method**

For this experimental study, 1,326 individuals, aged 16 to 87, were recruited from newspaper and online advertising in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The sample was 66% female and 34% male. The median level of education was one or more years of study at a university or technical school. Participants completed an online survey on SurveyMonkey that contained 36 questions. These questions came from 5 different scales – right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, dangerous worldview, competitive-jungle worldview, and either attitudes towards vegetarians or attitudes towards vegans. Prior to taking the survey, the participants were randomly assigned to either the survey that included questions from the attitudes towards vegetarian scales or the attitudes towards vegans scales. Following completion of the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time.

### **Results**

Results were analyzed after the survey closed and found that all of the hypotheses were correct. Surprisingly, attitudes towards both vegetarians and vegans were towards the positive end of the scale. However, attitudes towards vegetarians were significantly more positive than attitudes towards vegans. Additionally, male non-vegetarians expressed significantly less positive attitude towards vegetarians and vegans than female. Finally, RWA and SDO were accurate in predicting increased negative attitudes towards vegetarians and vegans. The researchers (2018) went on to discuss this final finding and suggested that this may be because vegetarians and vegans are a perceived threat to social and cultural norms, as well as they reject the notion of human dominance over animals.

Some limitations to the study were that the sample size was primarily female, took place only in New Zealand, the education level of participants is higher than the general population, participants being reluctant to express negative attitudes in research, and the participants may have not been familiar with the differences between individuals who identify as ‘vegetarian’ or ‘vegan’. Suggestions for future research include using longitudinal data, or experimentally manipulating the degree to which vegetarians and vegans are threatening the human-animal hierarchy, the economy (e.g. as plant-based factories and farms rise, will this threaten the financial longevity of animal farms that have been the ‘backbone’ of midwestern American life, etc.), or cultural traditions.

### **Conclusions**

Reading this article and chapter 13 has greatly expanded my knowledge on attitudes towards vegetarians and vegans. I was surprised to learn that the overall attitudes towards vegetarians and vegans were more on the positive end of the scale. Judge and Wilson (2018) note that this may be due to vegetarians and vegans being a form of “positive deviance due to

associations with virtuousness or improved health” (p. 169). This gives me a small sense of hope – perhaps my experience with receiving such negative comments and stigma for switching my diet is a somewhat unique experience. I am interested in looking into more research to find if any similar studies are conducted in the United States, or if any future studies look at negative attitudes between vegetarians and vegans.

## References

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