



Short Communication

What's your beef with vegetarians? Predicting anti-vegetarian prejudice from pro-beef attitudes across cultures



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ABSTRACT

Contrary to other forms of prejudice (e.g., racism), explicit expressions of anti-vegetarian/vegan prejudice are common. But this bias has only recently received empirical attention, with very little cross-cultural evidence. Some theoretical approaches (e.g., Social Identity Theory) focus on social factors in understanding intergroup relations, but there is growing recognition that individual differences may also be crucial in understanding group processes. Here we hypothesize that the degree to which an individual enjoys (likes/desires/consumes) beef may be systematically related to prejudice towards non-meat eaters. Using data from the U.S.A, France, Brazil, and Argentina ($N = 1695$) we find that pro-beef attitudes are a robust predictor of anti-vegetarian prejudice across cultures ($\beta = 0.47$), with a particularly strong association in the USA ($\beta = 0.65$), where 43% of anti-vegetarian attitudes are explained by individual differences in beef enjoyment. This work contributes a cross-cultural comparison of anti-vegetarian prejudice and its predictors to the rapidly expanding literature on bias towards this growing social group.

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"Vegetarians, and the Hezbollah-like splinter faction, the vegans, are a persistent irritant to any chef worth a damn... Vegetarians are the enemy of everything good and decent in the human spirit, an affront to all I stand for, the pure enjoyment of food."

[Anthony Bourdain, TV food commentator ("Vegans vs. Anthony Bourdain", n.d.)]

1. Introduction

Whereas people often avoid open expressions of prejudices towards racial outgroups (e.g., Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002), the same is not true regarding prejudices towards vegetarians/vegans (v*gans), a group estimated to be as large other studied social groups (e.g. gays/lesbians, Muslims) and is growing ("Table: Muslim Population", 2011; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Young-Powell & Gil, 2015). In addition to anecdotal expressions of bias, as per the Anthony Bourdain quotation, v*gans are commonly associated with negatively valenced terms (e.g., up-tight, crazy; Minson & Monin, 2012), evaluated as negatively (or more negatively) than other commonly studied targets of prejudice (e.g. Blacks, homosexuals), and discriminated against in hiring decisions and social relationships (MacInnis & Hodson, in press).

Indeed, it is widely recognized that people show a preference for their own groups over outgroups. Social Identity Theory (SIT), for instance, posits that group membership is part of an individual's identity, and that people are motivated to view their group as distinct from, and more positive than, other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This bias most commonly results in ingroup favoritism, differentially showing preference in evaluations regarding, or outcomes allocated to, one's own group at the expense of another (Brewer, 1979).

In addition to group membership and an emphasis on differential social categorization however, there is growing consensus that individual differences are relevant, if not crucial, in predicting outgroup attitudes. Meta-analytic research shows that individual differences in political ideology, fundamentalism, and threat (among others) are meaningfully associated with prejudice, often with correlations in the 0.40–0.50 range (see Hodson & Dhont, 2015). We predict that individual differences in pro-meat attitudes are systematically related to anti-vegetarian prejudice, such that those who enjoy beef more (vs. less) will express greater prejudice towards vegetarians. This is consistent with preliminary evidence from a Belgian sample, which shows that greater liking of the taste/look/smell of meat was positively associated with vegetarian culture threat (Dhont & Hodson, 2014, Study 2). However, that study did not directly examine attitudes towards vegetarians, leaving a gap in our understanding of the relation between attitudes towards meat and anti-vegetarian prejudice.

Particularly lacking is a cross-cultural comparison of anti-vegetarian prejudice. That is, any relation between pro-meat attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice may depend on the centrality of meat in the

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broader cultural context (e.g. social or economic relevance of meat in one's culture). Ruby et al. (2016) provide valuable insights on this topic by assessing variables regarding pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice in different countries (USA, France, Brazil, and Argentina). Focusing on specific, lower-level scales, Ruby and colleagues found relations between specific beef variables (e.g., desire beef) and particular anti-vegetarian variables (e.g., resist dating) in the 0.20 range (<5% of variance explained). We postulate that capturing the common or shared variance among the various beef enjoyment items as a latent variable, and setting that latent factor to predict a latent variable capturing the common/shared variance among the anti-vegetarian items, could reveal substantial relations between *beef enjoyment* and *anti-vegetarian prejudice* as conceptual constructs. Such findings would be consistent with past findings that higher-order (i.e., latent) relations are stronger than those between the lower-level components in domains such as subjective well-being (MacInnis, Busseri, Choma, & Hodson, 2013), and generalized authoritarianism and prejudice (Hodson, MacInnis, & Busseri, 2017). We will then statistically compare the strength of these relations between countries to determine if the strength of beef enjoyment as a predictor of anti-vegetarian prejudice varies across contexts.

2. Method

We used correlations and descriptive statistics reported in Ruby et al. (2016) to examine the relation between pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice (as latent factors) in each country separately, as well as averaged across countries. We then examine whether the relation between beef enjoyment and anti-vegetarian prejudice differs between countries.

2.1. Participants

The full sample comprised 1695 university students from Argentina ($n = 304$, 84% women, $M_{age} = 23.6$, $SD_{age} = 2.89$), Brazil ($n = 583$, 62% women, $M_{age} = 21.3$, $SD_{age} = 2.46$), France ($n = 441$, 62% women, $M_{age} = 21.6$, $SD_{age} = 1.46$) and the USA ($n = 367$, 65% women, $M_{age} = 21.5$, $SD_{age} = 3.21$). Most participants identified as meat-eaters (approximately 95–98% across samples). For recruitment procedures, see Ruby et al. (2016).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Beef valence

Participants wrote down the first three words that came to mind when thinking of beef. Then they assigned each word with a positive, negative or neutral value (+1, -1, or 0 respectively). These values were summed into an index.

2.2.2. Beef liking

Participants indicated their liking of beef on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 100 (one of your most favorite foods in the world).

2.2.3. Beef desire

Participants indicated how often they desired beef so strongly that they go out of their way to obtain it, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (almost daily).

2.2.4. Beef consumption

Participants indicated the number of times they eat beef per month.

2.2.5. Admire vegetarians

Participants indicated agreement with the statement "I admire vegetarians" on a scale ranging from -3 (disagree strongly) to +3 (agree strongly).

2.2.6. Bothered by vegetarians

Participants indicated agreement with the statement "Vegetarians bother me" on a scale ranging from -3 (disagree strongly) to +3 (agree strongly).

2.2.7. Not date vegetarians

Participants indicated agreement with the statement "I would prefer to date a vegetarian" on a scale ranging from -3 (disagree strongly) to +3 (agree strongly). This measure was reverse-coded such that higher scores reflect stronger greater desire to not date a vegetarian.¹

3. Results

First we tested whether pro-beef attitudes predict anti-vegetarian prejudice in each country separately. We used maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS v24.0 (Arbuckle, 2006) to analyze the relations based on the correlations, means and standard deviations provided by Ruby et al. (2016).² Note that Ruby et al. reported correlations for each country after partialling out the effect of gender, a reasonable step given sex differences observed in attitudes towards vegetarians/vegans (MacInnis & Hodson, in press). First we specified a latent beef enjoyment factor with four indicators: beef valence, beef liking, beef desire, and beef consumption. We also specified a latent anti-vegetarian prejudice factor with three indicators: admire vegetarians (reverse-coded), bothered by vegetarians, and not date vegetarians. Latent factors are computed to reflect the variance that is common or shared among indicators. Loadings on both latent factors were freely estimated. Parameter estimates and significance tests were based on bias-corrected estimates derived from 1000 bootstrap samples (see Shrout & Bolger, 2002). To ensure that pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice represent two distinct factors, rather than one underlying construct, we assessed model fit statistics for both one-factor and two-factor model solutions. The results suggest the viability of a two-factor (vs. one-factor) model solution (see Supplemental Table 1). Moreover, in the full sample strong loadings on the pro-beef attitude (0.46–0.95) and on the anti-vegetarian (0.55–0.74) factors suggest adequate construct validity. We then set the latent beef enjoyment factor to predict the latent anti-vegetarian factor.

In each country there was a significant positive relation between latent pro-beef attitudes and latent anti-vegetarian prejudice. Table 1 shows the standardized effects, their 95% confidence intervals, and proportion of variance in anti-vegetarian prejudice explained by pro-beef attitudes. Fig. 1 illustrates the association between pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice in the American sample.

Additionally, we used a random effects approach to compute a meta-analytic average for the relation between pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice across all four countries (see Goh, Hall, & Rosenthal, 2016). All associations were Fisher's z-transformed for analysis and converted back to regression coefficients for presentation (Sibley, 2008). Across the four countries, pro-beef attitudes were significantly positively associated with anti-vegetarian prejudice ($\beta_{mean} = 0.466$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.308, 0.599]). Results were largely the same using a fixed effects approach ($\beta_{mean} = 0.460$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.421, 0.497]).

3.1. Comparing associations between countries

Using multiple groups' analyses, we tested whether the relation between pro-beef attitudes and anti-vegetarian prejudice differed between countries. For each possible pair of countries, model fit of an unconstrained (baseline) model was compared a constrained model in

¹ Reverse-coding was not described by Ruby et al. (2016) but was confirmed via personal communication.

² AMOS works from raw data or from such a matrix as provided by the correlations, means and standard deviations (Kline, 2011).

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