



Why do right-wing adherents engage in more animal exploitation and meat consumption?



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ABSTRACT

Despite the well-documented implications of right-wing ideological dispositions for human intergroup relations, surprisingly little is understood about the implications for human–animal relations. We investigate why right-wing ideologies – social dominance orientation (SDO) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) – positively predict attitudes toward animal exploitation and meat consumption. Two survey studies conducted in heterogeneous community samples (Study 1, $N = 260$; Study 2, $N = 489$) demonstrated that right-wing ideologies predict greater acceptance of animal exploitation and more meat consumption through two explaining mechanisms: (a) perceived threat from non-exploitative ideologies to the dominant carnist ideology (for both SDO and RWA) and (b) belief in human superiority over animals (for SDO). These findings hold after controlling for hedonistic pleasure from eating meat. Right-wing adherents do not simply consume more animals because they enjoy the taste of meat, but because doing so supports dominance ideologies and resistance to cultural change. Psychological parallels between human intergroup relations and human–animal relations are considered.

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1. Introduction

“The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were created for whites, or women for men” (Alice Walker)

Scholars have identified two primary dispositional dimensions underlying right-wing ideology (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001). Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer, 1981) pertains to the submissive dimension, and reflects cultural traditionalism, uncritical submission to authorities, and aggressiveness towards norm violators. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) is a typical indicator of the dominance dimension of ideology, and is operationalized as a generalized desire for group-based dominance and inequality among social groups (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Numerous studies have indicated that RWA and SDO are both strong and unique predictors of outgroup prejudice, and related justifications for discrimination and exploitation of outgroup members across

multiple domains, including racial and ethnic prejudice and sexism (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001; Hodson & Busseri, 2012; Roets, Van Hiel, & Dhont, 2012; Sidanius & Pratto 1999).

Despite the well-documented implications of individual differences in ideology with regard to reactions toward human outgroups, surprisingly little is understood about the implications for non-human animals. As Walker's poignant observation clarifies, many biases, including those involving non-human animals, are rooted in common ideological belief systems and show psychological parallels (see Costello & Hodson, 2010, in press; Hodson & Costello, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Plous, 2003).

Few studies have investigated relations between social-ideological orientations and exploitative attitudes and behaviors toward animals. Yet existing evidence reveals positive associations between right-wing ideologies such as RWA and SDO, on the one hand, and attitudes toward the exploitation of animals as objects for human benefit (e.g., animal testing, fur industry, rodeos), and direct behavioral expression of dominant belief systems regarding human–animal relations such as meat consumption, on the other. Indeed, those endorsing right-wing attitudes and values are more likely to support and engage in animal exploitation and to self-identify as meat-eaters (e.g., Allen, Wilson, Ng, & Dunne, 2000; Dietz, Frisch, Kalof, Stern, & Guagnano, 1995; Hyers, 2006). Likewise, right-wing adherents tend to consume more meat in daily life (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Allen & Ng, 2003; Ruby, 2012).

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To date, however, it remains unclear *why* people scoring higher (vs. lower) on right-wing social attitudes are more accepting of animal exploitation and eat more meat. We propose two psychological mechanisms potentially accounting for these relations. Building on both human intergroup and human–animal relations literatures, we argue that right-wing adherents would not be more accepting of animal exploitation or eat more meat if not for their (a) sense of threat from increasingly popular non-exploitive ideologies toward animals (i.e., veg(etari)anism); and (b) human supremacy beliefs.

1.1. Vegetarianism threat and human supremacy beliefs

Animal exploitation and meat consumption are arguably part of the dominant ideological system ‘carnism’, prescribing norms and beliefs about animal treatment (Joy, 2010). Particularly in Western countries, however, people are increasingly reducing meat consumption, becoming vegetarian, or endorsing non-exploitive ideologies toward animals (i.e., veg(etari)anism) (Ruby, 2012). This change may be experienced as a threat to traditional norms and dominant carnist ideologies. From an intergroup perspective, Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) posits that perceived outgroup threats are fundamental antecedents to negative outgroup attitudes, and can pertain to threats to dominant ingroup’s norms and values, in addition to threats to ideological, political, and economic power (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Research confirms that perceived outgroup threats challenging either the ingroup’s dominant position in society, or the ingroup’s cultural norms and beliefs, exacerbate negative outgroup attitudes and behaviors (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006; Stephan & Renfro, 2002), particularly among those who are most inclined to follow/defend mainstream social norms and dominant ideological systems; those higher in RWA or SDO (e.g., Asbrock, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2010; Costello & Hodson, 2011; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009; McFarland, 2005).

Moreover, the stronger the perceived threat, the more RWAs and SDOs feel legitimized in defending dominant cultural attitudes and norms, which becomes expressed as biased outgroup attitudes and behaviors (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Based on these findings, we argue that those higher in RWA or SDO are more likely to construe vegetarian and anti-speciesist ideologies as a threat to the dominant and traditional carnist ideology which, in turn, is expressed in greater acceptance of animal exploitation and more meat consumption. Hence, we hypothesized that perceived threats posed by vegetarianism challenging carnist ideology explain why both SDO and RWA express more accepting attitudes toward animal exploitation and consume more meat.

Second, exploiting animals and consuming meat symbolize and articulate underlying competitive-power motives to dominate over animals and support for inequality between humans and animals (Allen & Ng, 2003; Ruby, 2012; Twigg, 1983). Costello and Hodson (2010, *in press*) demonstrated that endorsing hierarchy and inequality among *human* relations, expressed in term of SDO, predicts stronger beliefs that humans are distinct from and superior to animals. Along similar lines, this social dominance perspective can be broadened to explain dominance strivings over the natural environment more generally (Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013). Consistent with Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), endorsing human supremacy beliefs can therefore represent a *legitimizing myth* preserving and justifying hierarchies between humans and animals (see also Joy, 2010). Theoretically, a “given belief... can be classified as a [legitimizing myth] if and only if it is found to have a mediational relationship between the desire for group-based social dominance on the one hand and support for [hierarchy enhancement or attenuation] on the other”

(Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 48). For instance, both broad legitimizing myths such as modern or symbolic racism (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and more specific beliefs such as outgroup dehumanization (Costello & Hodson, 2010) and cavalier humor beliefs (Hodson, Rush, & MacInnis, 2010) have been identified as mediators between SDO and expressed outgroup bias. Such legitimizing myths typically promote rejection and exploitation of low-status groups (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; see also Hodson et al., 2010; Sibley & Duckitt, 2010), in our case non-human animals. Therefore, we hypothesized that, in addition to perceived vegetarianism threat, those higher in SDO are expected to feel more entitled to exploit animals and eat meat as a result of holding greater human supremacy beliefs. Evidence of such mediation would support a legitimizing myth account of animal exploitation and consumption.

1.2. Present research

The current research integrated well-established insights from theorizing on intergroup threat and group-based dominance into a single model to investigate why right-wing adherents (i.e., those higher on SDO or RWA) are more favorable toward animal exploitation and consume more meat. Two studies tested the mediating role of ideology threat from vegetarianism and human supremacy beliefs. We expected that ideology threat would mediate the effects of both SDO and RWA, whereas human supremacy beliefs would mediate primarily SDO effects. Study 1 employed a heterogeneous sample of adults; Study 2 employed a community sample with larger sub-samples of non-omnivores, and also statistically controlled for hedonistic meat-consumption motivations.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

Respondents were 260 Dutch-speaking adults (58.5% females; 98.5% Belgians; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.53$ years, $SD = 15.74$) completing all relevant measures of a questionnaire, recruited by political and social science undergraduates from a Belgian university. The majority (69.6%) self-identified as meat eater/omnivore, 16.2% as omnivores trying to reduce meat consumption, 8.8% as semi-vegetarian (i.e., occasionally eating meat), 1.9% as pescatarian (i.e., eating (shell)-fish but no meat), 3.5% as vegetarian, and 0% as vegan.

Except for meat-consumption items, responses were given on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. Respondents completed a shortened 8-item RWA scale ($\alpha = .82$), e.g., “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn” (Altemeyer, 1981), and a shortened 8-item SDO scale ($\alpha = .80$), e.g., “Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others” (Pratto et al., 1994). Eight items assessed perceived vegetarianism threat ($\alpha = .90$), e.g., “The rise of vegetarianism poses a threat to our country’s cultural customs” (see Appendix). Human supremacy was assessed with six items ($\alpha = .89$), e.g., “The life of an animal is just not of equal value as the life of a human being” (see Appendix). Eight items of the Animal Attitude Scale measured attitudes toward animal exploitation ($\alpha = .74$), e.g., “The use of animals such as rabbits for testing the safety of cosmetics and household products is unnecessary and should be stopped” (reverse-scored) (Herzog, Betchard, & Pittman, 1991). Higher scores indicated greater acceptance of animal exploitation. Meat consumption was measured with two items ($\alpha = .66$) tapping frequency of eating (a) meat and (b) meat substitutes/vegetarian products (reversed scored); scales ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (every meal). Table 1 presents scale reliabilities, means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations.

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