



Research report

Differences between health and ethical vegetarians. Strength of conviction, nutrition knowledge, dietary restriction, and duration of adherence [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Little research has been published concerning the differences between health oriented and ethically oriented vegetarians. The present study compared differences in conviction, nutrition knowledge, dietary restriction, and duration of adherence to vegetarianism between the two groups. Subjects completed an online survey and were grouped by original reason for becoming vegetarian ($n = 292$, 58 health, 234 ethical), and current reason for remaining vegetarian ($n = 281$, 49 health, 232 ethical). Whether grouped by current or original motivation, ethical vegetarians scored higher on the conviction instrument than health vegetarians and exhibited somewhat greater dietary restriction (significant when grouped by current motivation) and had been vegetarian for longer (significant when grouped by original motivation). Nutrition knowledge did not differ between the two groups. The results suggest that ethical vegetarians could experience stronger feelings of conviction and consume fewer animal products than health vegetarians, and may remain vegetarian longer. More research is necessary to understand how vegetarians' eating behaviors are influenced by their motivational profiles.

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Introduction

Vegetarians define themselves by what they do not consume, differentiating themselves by rejecting a widespread social norm (Back & Glasgow, 1981). The practice of vegetarianism shares themes with religion and may be described as “quasi-religious” (Hamilton, 2000). It is estimated that 6–8 million (3%) US adults follow a vegetarian diet and that one-quarter to one-third of vegetarians are vegan (The Vegetarian Resource Group, 2009; Vegetarian Times, 2008). Most US vegetarians are young, female, concerned with animal welfare and/or health, and have been vegetarian for more than 10 years (Vegetarian Times, 2008).

For the present study, subjects who abstained from meat, poultry, and fish/seafood were considered “vegetarian.” Participants who also abstained from eggs, dairy, and honey were considered “vegan.” Those who abstained from all but honey were considered “vegan except for honey.” All vegans are vegetarians but not all

vegetarians are vegan. “Vegetarian(s)” is used collectively throughout this study and includes vegans.

A typical finding of qualitative studies on vegetarianism is that there are two primary motivations for the diet: ethical concerns and health considerations (Fox & Ward, 2008; Jabs, Devine, & Sobal, 1998; Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997). The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between health and ethical vegetarians by comparing conviction, nutrition knowledge, dietary restriction, and years as vegetarian between the two groups. Since ethical motivations have been found to be more effective than health motivations for implementing dietary change (Ogden, Karim, Choudry, & Brown, 2007), and previous literature suggests that ethical vegetarians show greater dietary restriction than health vegetarians (Rozin et al., 1997; Ruby, 2012), it was hypothesized that ethical vegetarians would score higher on all areas of the questionnaire.

Methods

Recruitment

Online social media marketing and paid advertising were used to recruit subjects. Unique advertisements were created for Face-

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book and Google, and links were published to online communities concerning vegetarianism.

The Facebook advertisement (ad) targeted English speaking users who lived in the United States, were at least 18 years old, whose Facebook “Likes and Interests” included “vegetarian,” “vegetarianism,” “vegan,” or “veganism.” The estimated reach was 211,000 people. The ad received 370,105 impressions and 553 clicks, a Click-Through Rate (CTR) of 0.149%, with an average cost per click (CPC) of \$0.27. The Facebook ad ran from March 31, 2011 to May 1, 2011 and was responsible for 388 survey responses. In addition to paid advertising, a post was made to the Wall of a popular Facebook Community page for vegetarianism on Friday, April 1, 2011. The page had approximately 130,000 international

followers and has since been taken down. Six survey responses were gathered through the posted link.

A Google AdWords campaign was created, targeting English speaking computer and tablet users in the United States. The ad ran from April 1 to May 1, 2011, appearing above search results for keywords related to vegetarianism, and was also placed on websites thought to be relevant to the target population. Search results accounted for 13,908 impressions and 25 clicks (0.18% CTR, \$0.43 Average CPC), Managed Placements accounted for 719 impressions and zero clicks. The Google ad was responsible for six survey responses.

VeggieBoards (VB) is an online community for vegetarians with over 48,000 members and 2.8 million posts (at time of study;

Table 1
Characteristics by initial (original) reason for becoming vegetarian.

	Ethical		Health		Other		All	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Age</i>								
18–19	35	15.0	6	10.3	8	40.0	49	15.7
20–29	99	42.3	28	48.3	7	35.0	134	42.9
30–39	34	14.5	9	15.5	2	10.0	45	14.4
40–49	41	17.5	7	12.1	1	5.0	49	15.7
50–59	21	9.0	4	6.9	1	5.0	26	8.3
60–69	4	1.7	4	6.9	1	5.0	9	2.9
70 or older	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	234	100	58	100	20	100	312	100
<i>Sex/gender</i>								
Male	34	14.5	11	19.0	3	15.0	48	15.4
Female	200	85.5	47	81.0	17	85.0	264	84.6
Mean years vegetarian	10.0		5.9		11.7		9.3	
<i>Education</i>								
<High school	2	0.9	2	3.4	0	0.0	4	1.3
High school or equivalent	23	9.8	5	8.6	2	10.0	30	9.6
Some college	79	33.8	20	34.5	10	50.0	109	34.9
Associate's	22	9.4	9	15.5	2	10.0	33	10.6
Bachelor's	54	23.1	12	20.7	5	25.0	71	22.8
Graduate study	23	9.8	5	8.6	0	0.0	28	9.0
Graduate degree	31	13.2	5	8.6	1	5.0	37	11.9
	234	100	58	100	20	100	312	100
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>								
African American	3	1.3	2	3.4	0	0.0	5	1.6
Native American	3	1.3	1	1.7	0	0.0	4	1.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1.3	1	1.7	1	5.0	5	1.6
Hispanic	7	3.0	5	8.6	1	5.0	13	4.2
White/Caucasian	206	88.0	47	81.0	17	85.0	270	86.5
Other/decline to answer	12	5.1	2	3.4	1	5.0	15	4.8
	234	100	58	100	20	100	312	100
<i>Household gross annual income</i>								
<\$25,000	66	28.2	12	20.7	9	45.0	87	27.9
\$25,000–\$49,999	66	28.2	22	37.9	2	10.0	90	28.8
\$50,000–\$74,999	46	19.7	6	10.3	6	30.0	58	18.6
\$75,000–\$99,999	24	10.3	9	15.5	1	5.0	34	10.9
\$100,000 or more	32	13.7	9	15.5	2	10.0	43	13.8
	234	100	58	100	20	100	312	100
<i>Diet</i>								
Vegetarian	109	46.6	29	50.0	16	80.0	154	49.4
Vegan (Total)	125	53.4	29	50.0	4	20.0	158	50.6
<i>Vegan (never consume honey)</i>	93	39.7	16	27.6	2	10.0	111	35.6
<i>Vegan (may consume honey)</i>	32	13.7	13	22.4	2	10.0	47	15.1

Italicized cells indicate values for vegan subtypes.

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