

Gender, power, and meat consumption: Vegetarian political identity in a cross-national survey

Abstract:

Individuals voluntarily restricting their consumption of meat for health, moral, or environmental reasons are a significant (6 to 30 million in the U.S.) and distinct social category deserving scientific study. Nearly universally across cultures and societies, meat is symbolically tied to wealth, power, political coalitions, and dominance (Patton, 2005; Spencer, 2004), and consistent with this association, vegetarians in the U.S. hold social and political attitudes consistent with low authoritarianism and low social dominance orientation-even after controlling for their reliably liberal political views (Allen, et al., 2000; Allen & Baines, 2002; Rozendal, 2007). Ethically or morally motivated vegetarianism is a political identity that women adopt at nearly double the rate of men (Kalof, et al., 1999), and this may be related to the way in which masculinity and other gender roles are also nearly universally involved and expressed through the rituals of meat production, preparation, and consumption (Adams, 2000; Dahlberg, 1981; Fiddes, 1992). The current study replicates many of these quasi-experimental findings in data gathered in 20 other nations by the International Social Survey Program supporting several hypotheses generated after a previous analysis of U.S. General Social Survey data (Rozendal, 2007). Discussion focuses on preliminary statements of a social and political psychology of vegetarianism and proposes survey and experimental studies to test hypotheses derived from the provisional theory.