

Research report

Compassion and contamination. Cultural differences in vegetarianism ☆

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Highlights

- We examine the psychological associations of vegetarianism across cultural contexts.
- Primary concerns are universalism, animal and environmental welfare in the USA.
- Primary concerns are purity, pollution, authority, and tradition in India.

Abstract

A growing body of research has shown that Western vegetarians report more concern for animal welfare and environmental sustainability, and endorse more liberal values than do Western omnivores. However, despite the prevalence of Indian vegetarianism, its psychological associations and underpinnings remain largely unexamined. In Study 1, we find that Euro-American vegetarians are more concerned than omnivores with the impact of their daily food choices on the environment and animal welfare, show more concern for general animal welfare, and endorse universalistic values more, yet among Indian participants, these differences are not significant. In Study 2, we show that Indian vegetarians more strongly endorse the belief that eating meat is polluting, and show a heightened concern for the conservative ethics of Purity, Authority, and Ingroup relative to their omnivorous peers, whereas these differences are largely absent among Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans.

Keywords

Culture; Ethics/morality; Food; Meat; Values; Vegetarianism