

Comparison of Vegetarians and Non-Vegetarians on Pet Attitude and Empathy

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Past research found that positive attitudes toward animals are positively correlated with human-directed empathy. One of the most common reasons for becoming a vegetarian is to avoid cruelty toward animals. Based on the above literature, we hypothesized that vegetarians, especially moral vegetarians, would show higher human-directed empathy and more positive attitudes toward pets and other animals than non-vegetarians. Seventy-two vegetarians and 67 non-vegetarians participated in the study. Pet attitudes were measured using the modified Pet Attitude Scale (PAS-M), and human-directed empathy was measured with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which has four subscales. Vegetarian males had significantly higher empathy and significantly more positive attitudes toward pets compared with non-vegetarian males; however, there was no differences among females. There were no differences between moral vegetarians and non-moral vegetarians on human-directed empathy and attitude toward pets. Empathy toward humans and attitudes toward pets were positively correlated for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. We conceptualized the dietary choice of a vegetarian as a lifestyle that can be explained by their political thinking, personality, and personal value systems.