Prospectus

Omnivore Meat-Eating Justifications as Predictors of Relationship Closeness with Vegans and Vegetarians

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**Problem Statement**

The process of becoming vegetarian not only brings to the surface the identity associated with one’s eating values, but it also shines a light on the influence of varied dietary choices on social relationships (Lindquist, 2013). The literature suggests that some individuals view vegetarian and vegan diets unfavorably, and that those who choose to adhere to vegetarian or vegan diets often experience negative social consequences (e.g., Ruby, Alvarenga, Rozin, Kirby, Richer, & Rutsztein, 2016). Several studies have found that vegans and vegetarians experience negative comments and reactions from family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers, and in some cases a reduction or ending of social contact with family and/or friends (Beverland, Wahl, & de Groot, 2015; Lindquist, 2013; MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Twine, 2014).

Vegetarians and vegans are viewed more negatively by omnivores than are individuals who have other dietary restrictions, and those who chose the diet for moral rather than health reasons are viewed even more negatively (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Individuals who choose restrictive diets such as gluten free when there is no medical need were also found to be viewed more negatively than those who adhere to dietary restrictions based for medical needs (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). The authors conclude that omnivores view non-normative diets more negatively when they are for social justice reasons rather than health reasons (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015).

Lindquist (2013) illustrated that the perception of “preaching” or “judging” by vegetarians and vegans toward omnivores was not based on the actual words or behavior
of the vegetarian or vegan but rather simply due to the individual being vegetarian or vegan. In order to understand if justification beliefs impact social relationships when an individual becomes vegetarian or vegan, it may be best to examine the omnivore in the social relationship. Minson and Monin (2012) found that omnivores who had negative attitudes toward vegetarians perceived that vegetarians would make moral judgments about their eating behavior, regardless of any actual judgment. MacInnis and Hodson (2015) found that vegetarians and vegans were treated as negatively and in some cases more negatively, than similarly marginalized groups included in the study such as atheists and blacks. A commonly reported consequence was a lessening of contact from friends once their dietary choice was revealed (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015).

Those who were found to hold more negative attitudes toward vegetarians and vegans were also found to have more positive views of meat consumption (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Minson & Monin, 2012). Rothgerber (2014) suggested that derogation of vegans and vegetarians may help to alleviate the perceived moral reproach that some omnivores experience in their presence. Rothgerber’s (2012) suggested that people use various justification beliefs to illustrate why it is acceptable to consume animals. The authoritarian personality type was more prone to the authoritarian meat-eating justifications such as denial of mind (eg, animals do not think or feel), hierarchal justification (eg, humans are superior to animals), and human destiny/ fate justification (eg, animals purpose is human consumption) (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Rothgerber, 2012). The authoritarian justification styles along with the health justification styles were correlated with a greater level of consumption of beef, chicken, and pork, but not fish (Rothgerber, 2012). Those using justification beliefs such as dissociation or avoidance
were associated with a lesser consumption of beef, chicken, and pork (Rothgerber, 2012). A comparison of justification beliefs with the closeness of vegan/vegetarian relationships may help to contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of dietary choices on social relationships and specifically how social relationships are impacted when an individual becomes vegan or vegetarian.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to look at the possible connection between the beliefs supporting meat consumption that an individual holds and the closeness of relationships (frequency, diversity, strength) with friends or family members who are vegan/vegetarian. The literature suggests that there are various types of negativity that are experienced by vegetarians and vegans on a social level. Past studies illustrate that an individual becoming vegetarian or vegan can create discomfort in others. This study will examine the omnivore’s personal beliefs and reasoning regarding the consumption of meat and whether those beliefs play a role in the closeness of relationships (frequency, diversity, strength) with vegans or vegetarians.

**Significance**

This research aims to fill the gap that currently exists between recognizing that many vegetarians and vegans experience negative social consequences when their lifestyles are disclosed and the understanding that omnivores have various justification beliefs to support consuming animals. The study will examine whether or not certain beliefs toward animal consumption that are held by the omnivores can predict relationship closeness (frequency, diversity, strength) with vegan/vegetarian friends or family. Determining if there is a relationship between the justification beliefs toward
meat consumption that an individual holds and that individual’s relationship closeness with vegetarian/vegan friends and family will provide possible direction in understanding the negative consequences many vegetarians/vegans experience.

**Background**

1. Minson and Monin (2012), Twine (2014), MacInnis and Hodson (2015), and Lindquist (2013) have shown that the reactions of omnivores to vegans/vegetarians is not incumbent upon actions or words of the vegans/vegetarians. Individuals with the most positive views of meat were shown to hold the most negative views of vegetarians.

2. The Meat Eating Justification (MEJ) was created to categorically determine the beliefs an individual used to justify his or her personal support for the practice of consuming animals (Rothgerber, 2012).

3. Loughnan, Haslam, and Bastian (2010), Rothgerber (2014), and Norton (2009) support the existence of a “meat paradox” or “tacit denial” in an effort to alleviate the cognitive dissonance that can make meat eating uncomfortable when the animal to slaughter to meat connection is made.

4. MacInnis and Hodson (2015) state that omnivores view vegetarians/vegans more negatively than individuals with other restrictive diets. The authors conclude that the aspect of challenging social norms is exclusive to voluntary rather than medically necessary dietary restrictions.

5. MacDonald (2000) and Norton (2009) suggest that moral vegetarianism is created when attempts to deny and suppress the relationship between animals, slaughter, and meat fails.
6. Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, and Johnson (2015) discuss how moral hypocrisy, which had previously been shown to occur in the presence of outside judgment towards one’s actions, can occur as intrapersonal moral hypocrisy when one’s values and behaviors conflict in the absence of outside judgment.

7. Sustainability of vegetarianism has been shown to be more successful when positive social relationships exist and positive social relationships can even reduce consumption in others (Jabs, DeVine, & Sobal, 1998; Macdiarmid, et al, 2016).

**Framework**

The theory of planned behavior holds that knowledge creates three major beliefs that guide behavior. These beliefs include attitudes toward the behavior itself, beliefs regarding reference group expectations of the behavior, and beliefs regarding one’s own control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The three beliefs culminate in an individual’s intended behavior and ultimately their actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This theory is often used to explain dietary choice and adherence to diets (Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001). In the case of meat consumption the theory of planned behavior would rely on the combination of one’s attitude toward consuming animals, perception of social acceptance for or against the consumption of animals, and one’s view of his or her self-efficacy to either consume or not consume animals (Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 1999). Thus, the theory of planned behavior will be used to understand the possible relationship between meat-eating justification beliefs and quality of relationships with vegan or vegetarian friends.

**Research Questions**
RQ1 - Quantitative – Are omnivores’ justification beliefs toward meat consumption (denial, religious justification, pro-meat, avoidance, hierarchal justification, human destiny/fate, dichotomous justification, dissociation, health justification) related to closeness of relationships (frequency, diversity, strength, total score)?

H₀: Justification beliefs toward animal consumption are not significant predictors of relationship closeness between omnivore and vegan/vegetarian.

H₁: Justification beliefs toward animal consumption are significant predictors of relationship closeness, with less closeness with authoritarian justification beliefs (denial of mind, hierarchal justification, human destiny/fate justification, religious justification).

RQ2 - Quantitative – Is relationship type (friend, family) related to relationship closeness (frequency, diversity, strength, total score)?

H₀: Relationship type (friend, family) is not a significant predictor of relationship closeness between omnivore and vegan/vegetarian.

H₁: Relationship type (friend, family) is a significant predictor of relationship closeness between omnivore and vegan/vegetarian, with less closeness with friends.

RQ3 - Quantitative – Does relationship type (friend, family) influence closeness of relationships (frequency, diversity, strength, total score)?

H₀: There is no significant difference in closeness of relationships between friends and family members.

H₁: There is a significant difference in closeness of relationships between friends and family members, with less closeness with friends.
RQ4 - Quantitative – Does diet type (omnivore, vegetarian) influence closeness of relationships (frequency, diversity, strength, total score) with omnivores?

H₀: There is no significant difference in closeness of relationships between omnivores and vegans/vegetarians (before and after dietary change).

H₁: There is a significant difference in closeness of relationships between omnivores and vegans/vegetarians (before and after dietary change), with less closeness with vegans/vegetarians.

Nature of the Study

The study will be quantitative. A survey methodology will be utilized within a non-experimental design. The predictor variables for the multiple regressions will include the omnivores’ justification beliefs about meat consumption (pro-meat, denial, hierarchal justification, dichotomization, dissociation, religious justification, avoidance, health justification, and human destiny/fate justification) and the type of relationship (friend, family member) between the omnivore and the vegetarian/vegan. The criterion variable will be relationship closeness (frequency, diversity, strength, total score) between the omnivore and the vegetarian/vegan as reported by the omnivore. The independent variables for the MANOVA will include type of relationship (friend, family member) and type of diet (omnivore, vegetarian). The dependent variables for the MANOVA will be scores for closeness of relationship (frequency, diversity, strength, total). Participants must be omnivores aged 18 or older who had a preexisting relationship with a friend or family member who adopted a vegetarian or vegan diet at least six months prior to the study. The friend or family member must still be adhering to the vegetarian/vegan diet. Each participant must choose only one friend or family
member if more than one is available to choose from. The length of time that has passed since the friend or family member became vegan or vegetarian may be included if the data illustrate enough variability in the sample.

**Possible Types and Sources of Data**

A possible sample source would be Walden students who currently have a vegan or vegetarian friend or family member. Data sources would include the following.

1) The Meat Eating Justification (MEJ) scale consists of 27 items with a 9-factor structure (3 items for each subscale): (a) pro-meat, (b) denial, (c) hierarchal justification, (d) dichotomization, (e) dissociation, (f) religious justification, (g) avoidance, (h) health justification, and (i) human destiny/fate justification (Rothgerber, 2012). Responses range from *very infrequently* to *very frequently* within a 9-point Likert scale.

2) The Relationship Closeness Inventory (RCI) consists of three subscales (frequency, diversity, strength) and a total score that utilize varied formats including a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree), checklist, open-answer, and multiple-choice (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989) Scores are calculated for each of the three categories individually and a total relationship closeness score.

3) The RCI will be completed twice. The first time participants will be instructed to answer the questions in regard to the relationship with the friend or family member as it was prior to the conversion to a vegetarian diet. The second time the RCI will be administered with the instruction to answer as the relationship is today.
Possible Analytic Strategies

Research questions one and two will be analyzed using standard multiple regressions. The multiple regressions will determine the relative strength of each animal consumption justification (pro-meat, denial, hierarchal justification, dichotomization, dissociation, religious justification, avoidance, health justification, and human destiny/fate justification) and the relative strength of each relationship type (family, friend) in predicting the various aspects of closeness of the relationship (frequency, diversity, strength, total score).

Research questions three and four will be analyzed using a 2X2 mixed factorial MANOVA. The between groups independent variable will be the type of relationship (friend, family member). The within groups independent variable will be the type of diet (omnivore, vegan/vegetarian). The dependent variables will be scores for closeness of relationship (frequency, diversity, strength, total score).
References


