Group 9- Perceptions of Vegetarianism vs. Scientific Data

by?

Abstract:

The purpose of this project is to compare perception and science in regard to vegetarianism. Using an online survey, we compared public opinion to the data presented by those studies. The survey presented by our group will include questions regarding gender, age, dietary preferences, why the respondents made those decisions regarding their diet, and any concerns they might have had regarding vegetarianism. At the end of our project, (but the project is over!) we hope to have enough data to draw a correlation between scientific research and the choices made by our respondent base. We will then use that information to decide whether the general population’s perception of vegetarianism can weather scientific scrutiny. An abstract should describe the research as well as indicating its results (see assignment description). This doesn’t tell the reader anything about what you found.

The Vegetarian Eatwell Plate

Fruit and vegetables.
Fresh, frozen, juiced, canned or dried fruit and vegetables. These supply vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Alternatives to meat and fish, including eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein. Include a variety of pulses, nuts, seeds, eggs and other soya, mycoprotein and wheat proteins in the diet to ensure adequate intakes of protein, minerals and vitamins.

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar.
Although some fat is needed in the diet, eat these foods sparingly, and look out for low fat alternatives.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods.
Make these starchy foods the basis of most meals. Try to include wholemeal or whole-grain versions where possible. Avoid adding too much fat. These supply carbohydrates, fibre, protein and some vitamins.

Milk and dairy foods.
Good sources of calcium, protein and some vitamins. If avoiding dairy foods, choose fortified soya, rice or oat drinks or ensure other foods high in calcium are included.

Figure 1: The Vegetarian Eatwell Plate (Lisa Johnson Fitness 2011)

Vegetarianism Survey

Final Group Report

I'm disappointed that you did not follow the assignment instructions. I noted that you could change section headings with permission.

This project investigated the differences between the perceptions of vegetarianism versus scientific data. Vegetarianism is classified into three groups such as full, semi, and non-vegetarians. People are vegetarians for a variety of different reasons such as to lose weight, become healthier, because of their religious principles, or because of their moral principles (could use some references here). The scientific aspect deals with how vegetarianism affects your body and its chemical makeup, and how the body truly can meet the nutritional requirements needed to survive. Also, 20 students in the Geneseo population were surveyed on their opinions about vegetarianism and the perspectives associated with the health factor of vegetarianism. I guess this is your introductory section but it doesn’t do what I asked for in the assignment description.
The main ethnographic element our group chose to work with was a survey (Appendix A). Our main goal was not only to figure out the public’s perception but also what led them to think that way. This is why in our survey we did have multiple choice questions as well as open-ended questions that allowed each person to explain their thoughts, reasoning, and opinions. To keep our survey simple and related to our school we surveyed only SUNY Geneseo students although any age range was accepted as long as they attended the school. Our survey began with the basic questions identifying sex, age, and whether they live on or off campus. After the introductory questions we then asked if any of the students were vegetarians themselves which would allow us to see how vegetarians and non-vegetarians differed in answers and thought process. If any of the students were vegetarian we asked them to identify their diets as there are various types of vegetarians such as full, semi, and non-vegetarian. We also asked why they had chosen to become vegetarian. We felt that the biggest stigmas around vegetarians were related to why a person would make that choice – not necessarily the health effects such as the thought of concerns about low-protein. Although we felt health wasn’t the largest aspect stigmatized we also asked all of the students if they believed a vegetarian or non-vegetarian diet was healthier and why I don’t understand the previous sentence; reword. By allowing them to explain why versus simply a choice of an answer # allowed us to see where their thought process had begun and where it was going. Another main question we asked was if the students themselves believed there were any stigmas attached to being vegetarian and whether they believe them or not. We thought this was important to gauge what people thought was true versus what proved scientifically. Of course we also thought it was important to ask what the students thought was the main problem with a vegetarian diet in terms of possibly lacking nutrition. This was also important to simply confirm what people thought versus the scientific data and to see if it correlated or not. Ultimately our group # relied on the survey to determine our findings. We saw this topic as one that was more public related, and it is hard to find pure perception articles on the web. Through our survey we understood that we would be able to take a similar age group in a similar surrounding and better understand their perceptions of vegetarianism with a few simple questions that did not require them to be educated on the topic in any way.

The first finding that came to light was that 75% (15 of 20) of respondents to our survey were female, attributable to both Geneseo’s and our class’ gender ratio, 85% were from ages 17-19, and a predictably similar number (80%) were freshman. All but two respondents lived on campus, reflecting the overwhelming freshman majority. We received 7 (35% of all respondents) people identifying as vegetarian, as opposed to 13 who did not. All 7 identified vegetarians are female, an artifact of small sample sizes, but indicative of the larger vegetarian population’s female tilt. do you have any sources for this assertion?

Three of the vegetarian respondents reported not eating any meat, including fish. Three respondents admitted to eating fish, and the final respondent did not answer the question, as it was mandatory. When asked which diet was healthier, responses fell into three categories: non-vegetarianism (11), vegetarianism with caveats (7), and vegetarianism, full stop (2). Delving into the caveats given, reasons provided included vegetarianism required more discipline to receive essential nutrients, and more work to get the proper amount of protein, and having to avoid technically vegetarian processed foodstuffs.

Respondents were also asked for the reason they became vegetarian, and the most common response by far involved moral and ethical issues with eating meat. Some attributed these dilemmas to outside information (like Food Inc.), while others simply chalked it up to “not liking the idea” of consuming animal flesh. The other three responses were being repressed by the sight of red meat, “just trying” to gauge personal interest; and a fairly complex socio-economic explanation involving sustainability, objection to non-renewable resource wasting (e.g. while transporting meat), personal issues regarding factory farming, and an anecdotal correlation between her vegetarian diet and increased physical performance.

15 of 20 respondents reported attaching a stigma to vegetarianism – the most common of which was “hippie/very liberal”, present in 6 responses. The most common nutritional concern was protein, garnering 65% of all responses. Of the vegetarian respondents, the concerns were fairly evenly split – 3 felt Iron was the largest issue, followed with 2 for protein, one for Fats/Oils, and one reported no concern nutritionally. When taken as a whole, the information provided by our ethnographic survey can be used as an indicator of the thoughts of a small sub-section of Geneseo’s population. This could help to make inferences towards a larger population.

Neville Gregory’s (year?) research done for the New Zealand government confirmed the idea of a largely female vegetarian population just as we saw in our survey. Overall, between vegetarians and vegans, there is a 65:35 female to male ratio (Gregory year 4) please correct citation format throughout. One point of contradiction between our ethnographic data and the data used by Gregory is that the most common reason for becoming vegetarian was health concerns, not ethical reasons. This ratio is also corroborated by a recent population-based study conducted in Canada, where most vegetarians were “female… (70% of vegetarian respondents) single, of low income status, and tended to be younger” (Bedford et al. year, and direct quotes need page numbers; did anyone in your group check the American Antiquity guidelines? The assignment requires American Antiquity style and there are plenty of resources on this in the class MyCourses site) Figures in Canadian academic settings are also high, with 88% of recorded vegetarians in a study identifying as female (Greene-Finestone et al.), it seems that over all, women just eat less meat than men --a statistical basis for this assertion is found by Fessler et al, along with a negative relationship between meat eating and age (Fessler et al.).

Weight control and economic reasons were the two main responses for choosing vegetarianism by Jordanian university students (cite the study) – 39% for weight control, a health issue; 36% for economic reasons, which might be a product of the Jordanian culture, or their economy if meat prices are too high for students to afford. Animal welfare was the least popular selection given, with under 2% of students choosing this moral ground for their vegetarianism (Abloqi et al.). This is opposed to the findings in our survey, where moral and ethical reasons made up more than half of the responses. Santos et al. also found a strong preference for ethical rejection of meat in their university student survey (Santos et al.).

While our survey only netted one response where the main reason for becoming vegetarian was a dislike of red meat, the study conducted by Susan Barr and Gwen Chapman (year) show that only about 10% of vegetarians express any fondness for red meat – and only 20% feel that it has any important nutrients. This illustrates that a vegetarian’s aversion of meat might not only be a predilection towards vegetables, but active meat-avoidance behavior (Barr et al.).

Conversely, a 1998 study conducted in Australia asked nearly 1,000 non-vegetarian high-school students why they did not, or would not become vegetarian – males were twice as likely (18% versus 9%) as females to reject vegetarianism simply because they disliked vegetables. This might contribute to the distinct gender inequality in vegetarianism as well (Worsley et al). Another factor towards the female-centric trend in vegetarianism might be the “gender identity” that is becoming more and more associated with vegetarianism as a whole – something explored by Morgan Curtis and Lisa Corner (year). Their findings showed that the only positive relationship was between vegetarianism and feminism, and that otherwise “none of the other correlations reached significance” (Curtis et al.). The inequality of males to females in vegetarianism might be related to cultural pressures that men face every day: Jemal Nath found that “vegetarian and vegan men must tolerate having their masculinity questioned” - something he attributed to the [hegemony of masculine norm enforcement] that is so integral to being “manly” in western society (Nath 266).

Conducted in an interval of a year, Forestell et al. (year) surveyed 99 female vegetarians on their eating habits, personalities, proclivity towards trying new foods, and the importance of nutrients in certain kinds of food. Following the initial survey, Forestell et al. (year: page number) found those who became vegetarian as a means of weight control “became more restrictive of animal products…” as time went on. This can be seen as more evidence towards the idea that vegetarianism requires more “discipline”, a trend seen in our ethnographic results.
Instead of using an analytical perspective for the basis of his assertion of moral vegetarianism, David De Grazia uses constructions of morality to determine that “sentient animals” carry at the very least “some moral status” (148). His ethical base is rooted in the idea that cruelty begets cruelty: poor treatment of animals leads to poor treatment of humans, and so on. On this, he considers factory farming (the main source of food in America) to be so abusive towards these sentient beings, and one of the main contributors towards vegetarianism’s inherent morality. This once again echoes the majority of respondents to our survey, who cited similar moral/ethical issues as the catalyst for their vegetarianism. This is brought up as a logical conundrum by Jeff Jordan, who argues that the combined ability for people to care, and be cared for by animals sets a moral standard that carnivorous behavior betrays, and as such is on poor moral ground (Jordan).

By evaluating the nutritional content of various staple foods that are vegetarian-compatible, it has been found (Majumder I guess? I’ve discussed problems with the passive construction in class and on the assignment description) that simple lentils like yellow soybeans, kidney beans, and navy beans all carry the necessary nutrients to ensure human survival – essential to determining the healthiness of a vegetarian diet (Majumder). However, during certain key periods of life (i.e. early childhood and pregnancy), a strictly vegetarian diet can put a person at risk for deficiencies in iron, folic acid, vitamin D, and B vitamins – with the benefits of a lack of excess weight gain, and “rarely… smoking, alcohol, or drug abuse” (Dwyer).

Protein deficiency was the most commonly cited concern with a vegetarian diet, but Erica Frank and Randall White found that despite a decrease in total protein intake, vegetarian diets often met or exceeded the protein requirements set forth by the American Dietary Association, along with a decreased risk for various sorts of cancer, and lower overall mortality (Frank et al).

Overall, there are a variety of different perspectives about vegetarianism. Some say that vegetarians are hippies and very liberal, and some think that it is a healthy life style. Many of the concerns in the survey correlate with scientific data as well. For example, a lack of protein and iron is a key concern in the Geneseo population with vegetarianism and is also a main concern in the medical field today. However, there are foods such as nuts that can provide these essential nutrients. In today’s society, common perceptions of vegetarianism such as these are supported with scientific data and turn out to be accurate.

There is some good research and observation here, but I'm disappointed in the sloppiness of your structure, formatting, and referencing. The grade will be based mainly on the quality of the research, but more attention to the nuts and bolts might have made this much more impressive.

Scholarly Sources

Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed References Cited  These should not be numbered but just listed alphabetically.

1. Gregory, Neville


3. Barr, Susan I., Chapman, Gwen E.


4. Forestell, Catherine A., Spaeth, Andrea M., Kane, Stephanie A.


5. De Grazia, David.


6. Majumder, Sanat K.


7. Frank, Erica and Randall White


8. Worsley, Anthony and Grace Skrzypiec


9. Curtis, Morgan J., Corner, Lisa K.


10. Santos, M.L.S., Booth, David A.

Survey

Appendix A - Survey Questions