Group 10 - Veganism Perceptions versus Scientific Research

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The Reference Librarian that we met with was Sue Ann Brainard.

Delete the proposal so that readers don’t confuse it with the final project.

Abstract:

The purpose of this research project is to compare scientific research on veganism with the perceptions that SUNY Geneseo students have on the subject. Using various scholarly research journals and articles, we will focus on information from scientific research along with the benefits and consequences of such a strict diet. As we begin to look more narrowly into the topic, information will be provided on details such as Vitamin D and calcium deficiencies, the ways vegans can make up for deficiencies, and values and beliefs of vegans. Additionally, we will conduct and administer a survey to Geneseo students to determine what types of preconceived notions college students have on veganism. Using the data collected and our scholarly research, we will be able to make inferences and comparisons on veganism: science versus opinion.

Article 1:


This article examines the scientific research that has been conducted regarding calcium and Vitamin D deficiencies in vegans. The article goes on to explain that vegans have lower than recommended levels of calcium and Vitamin D and as a result have lower bone mineral densities as compared with non-vegans. This may increase the risk for bone fractures or other bone related injuries.

Article 2:

Allen, Michael W., Marc Wilson, Sik Hung, and Michael Dunne. 2000 Values and Beliefs of Vegetarians and Omnivores. The Journal of Social Psychology 140: 405-422.

This article primarily focuses on the various perceptions and different opinions of veganism. Comparing values and beliefs of vegans versus omnivores, a distinct connection is found between meat consumption and symbolism of the dietary group. The research goes on to explain two main differences between the two groups: those who consume meat are more likely to feel superior and will consistently place less importance on emotions. The journal will further examine these claims.

Article 3:


This article aims at using discursive psychology to examine how participants in online discussions manage rules, facts, and accountability in ideological areas such as veganism. The article specifically focuses on the reaction and management of participants in online discussions on how they dealt with alleged health threats posed by veganism. This revealed that the participants attributed responsibility for possible deficiencies to individual choices rather than blame veganism as the cause of health problems.

Article 4:


Hirschler’s research examines a sample size of 32 vegans to better understand the personal motives behind adopting a vegan lifestyle, the difficulties that arise once having transitioned to a vegan diet, and individual vegans’ perceptions of the eating habits of omnivores. This article highlights personal accounts of some of the interviewed vegans to emphasize overarching themes or common beliefs shared by the majority of the sample size. By combining individual accounts with generalities pertaining to the group as a whole, Hirschler attempts to paint a better picture of what kinds of circumstances trigger this dramatic dietary change within particular vegans as well as the implications that often accompany a vegan lifestyle in a predominantly meat-eating society.
Abstract:

The purpose of this project is to unveil the truths of the vegan diet and compare them with the student body’s perception here at Geneseo. Throughout our research, we found that the term “vegan” is often associated with the term “vegetarian.” Even though vegans are frequently grouped with vegetarians, there are significant differences between the two diets. Unlike their vegetarian cousins who can indulge in dairy products, vegans abstain from consuming foods that contain any animal products. Staples of the vegan diet thus include fruits, vegetables, breads, rice, and pasta while the Vegan Food Pyramid also encourages vegans to consume nuts, beans, tofu, and soy products at a more moderate level. Since veganism restrains its followers due to such a limited diet, vegans can often develop health and nutrition deficiencies that are largely uncommon among omnivores. For instance, many of the scholarly articles we investigated revealed that vegans tended be at greater risk than omnivores for vitamin B12, vitamin D, and iron deficiencies. However, studies also seem to indicate that vegans boasted decreased risks of cancer and heart disease over their non-vegan counterparts.
In regards to students' perceptions of veganism, most of the students surveyed shared the common belief that a vegan diet is less healthy than both a vegetarian diet and the diet of an omnivore. Many students also expressed their knowledge of what a vegan can consume by correctly marking beans, pasta, and peanut oil on our vegan food questionnaire. However, when it came to identifying vitamin deficiencies, only a slight majority of students thought that vegans are more vitamin D deficient than those who do not abide by a vegan diet.

Introduction to the Research:

As a group, we investigated student perceptions of veganism. We wanted to know if students knew exactly what a vegan was or what a vegan ate. We were also interested in the student’s familiarity with reasons why people became vegans. Also, we wanted to know if students understood both the health benefits and some of the side effects associated with a vegan diet and lifestyle. Overall, we discovered that most students surveyed knew the basics of a vegan diet. Generally, they all knew that vegan diets excluded meat. Lastly, we questioned students on whether they believed that diets devoid of meat or animal byproducts were healthier than a diet that included the consumption of meat. Our findings indicated that more students believed that eating meat was healthier than a vegan alternative of not eating meat. We used the information gathered in our research to determine what students thought about a vegan diet and how their thoughts and perceptions compared to the scientific knowledge we gathered concerning vegan diets.

Ethnographic Methods:

The first step in gathering our data was to distinguish scientific research from that of the public’s perception. However, before we could even begin to investigate the public’s opinions on veganism, we had to first dig down and discover the apparent truths of this lifestyle. Armed with access to a series of online databases as provided by Milne Library, each group member independently researched the topic of veganism by examining a wide variety of scholarly articles. Ranging from isolated experiments to generalizations about vegan health, these peer-reviewed sources gave us a better idea of the vegan diet and lifestyle. Once each group member had successfully explored a few scholarly articles, the entire group then reconvened to collaborate on our findings. This process of comparing and contrasting the findings of our sources with that of the rest of the group’s research ultimately served as the backbone to our project as this research provided us with a sound foundation of scholarly sources.

Since each group member now had a better understanding of the vegan diet, we could then collectively create a survey based off our background knowledge of veganism. Designed to gather the general knowledge of the vegan diet, our survey functioned as the principal means of identifying SUNY Geneseo students’ perceptions of veganism. In order to reach the maximum number of individuals possible, our group sent our survey via e-mail (see link to Appendix A at the bottom of this entry) to our fellow classmates and physically distributed the survey amongst our friends, fellow club members, and people around our respective dorms. After a week of hunting down our friends and fellow classmates to fill out our survey, our group finally reassembled to tally the results. Results of Ethnographic Research:
Through ethnographic research, various opinions on veganism became clearer. The survey that was conducted helped to demonstrate what perceptions people have in comparison with what is scientifically accepted. An even number of males and females were surveyed although they differed in age, academic standing, and location on or off campus. In the survey, the vast majority of participants agreed on three things: a vegan diet is not healthier than a vegetarian diet, a vegan diet is not healthier than a meat consumer’s diet, and three foods that vegans are allowed to consume would include peanut oil, pasta, and beans. These findings demonstrate that most people are not in favor of the vegan diet because they do not believe it is any healthier than what they choose to consume currently. It also showed that participants did have knowledge of the composition of a vegan diet. However, participants disagreed in two major areas: whether vegans are more vitamin D deficient than others, and whether there are any major health benefits towards maintaining the vegan lifestyle. In this open ended question, many people expressed that less saturated fat, less trans-fat, lower cholesterol, and overall weight loss may be some advantages of the diet. Yet when asked to consider practicing the diet, consistent responses concluded that it was too limited, not realistic, and that they were already raised and dependent on a meat-consuming diet. The results indicate that although people are open to recognizing the vegan diet, it is overall too extreme and probably not worth the dedication and sacrifice it requires.

Scientific Perspective:

The scholarly and peer reviewed information we found varied. Many of the articles contained great ambiguity and did not give definitive answers to the questions they were examining. Some of the articles discussed the major deficiencies that vegans may experience while others talked about health benefits that may exist for vegans adhering to such a strict diet. However, a majority of the research found talked about the importance of vitamin supplements for vegans. Vitamins found primarily in meat and animal by-products are very important for health, specifically vitamin B12 and vitamin D. Without them, serious health complications such as osteoporosis can occur. Also, a lot of scholarly research talked about the importance of getting enough protein and iron in a vegan diet. Substitute foods often have to be eaten to ensure health. This information lined up with student perceptions because most of them believed that vegan diets were less healthy as compared to a diet that consumed meat. There were also some differences between student perceptions and the scientific data. For example, the majority of students believed both vegetarian and meat consuming diets to be much healthier than vegan diets. The majority of students even thought that a vegan diet did not have any health benefits at all. However, scholarly research was found that cited significant benefits to maintaining a vegan diet (you must cite sources for assertions like these). A healthier weight, decreased risk of heart disease, and decreased risk of cancer were all noted as having possible links to a vegan diet. These are all major health benefits that were not included in student perceptions of vegan diets. The more negative aspects of a vegan diet were the main perceptions that students had. Overall, most of the student’s perspectives on the healthiness of a vegan diet were fairly consistent with the scientific research. However, the student perspectives of veganism did not take into account some scholarly research that is available. Research shows that with proper supplements, a vegan diet is sustainable and may actually have some benefits including not only a healthier weight, but more globally impacting results such as a greater sustainability of food and environmental conservation.

After all my discussions about referencing in class and elsewhere I’m very disappointed that no one in your group seemed to notice that you must cite sources in academic research. The References Cited section is called that because the references are (or should be) cited. It is virtually impossible for me or any other reader to evaluate this entry without evidence of who said what about the vegan diet.
Conclusion:

Between scholarly research and the survey that our group conducted, we successfully uncovered the truth about what people believe veganism is and what is scientifically accepted (‘truth’ is a high standard here; perhaps say that you have uncovered useful information about what people believe etc). As we reviewed the data from our survey and compared it to our research, we realized that although the majority of people have a general understanding of the basics of veganism, most are still skeptical of the diet. Our group attributed this skepticism to a lack of confidence in its health effects. However, various peer-reviewed and scholarly articles provided us with knowledge that there are suggested advantages to veganism. If we were to further research this topic, it would be helpful to gather data from dedicated vegans who have actually reaped the benefits of the diet. This would assist with the results of our statistics. As we conducted our survey, we found that there were very few vegetarians and even less vegans on campus. Most students expressed that the campus dining halls present too difficult of a challenge to commit to such a diet. Thus, to gain a better understanding between scholarly journals and student perceptions, it would be crucial to expand our research to greater lengths. There are interesting observations here and that will be the basic of most of the grade, but the citation-free nature of the entry is a major flaw.

Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed References Cited:

these should be in alphabetical order

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