

Vegans are high-maintenance?

A peek into stereotypes of vegan romantic partners

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Introduction

In 2016, about 3.4% of individuals in the U.S indicated that they never ate meat with their meals, and half of these individuals considered themselves vegan (The Vegetarian Resource Group, 2016). Veganism is a diet which excludes products which are wholly or partially derived from animals such as meat, eggs and dairy (The Vegan Society, 2018).

One reason why people are resistant to adopting a vegan diet is that following this diet is stigmatizing and carries distinct stereotypes (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019).

Although research on these stereotypes is growing, the research on the nature of these stereotypes within the context of romantic relationships is very limited (Aloni, Geers, Coleman, & Milano, 2018; Rosenfield, 2018).

This study utilized a qualitative approach to better understand the content of people's stereotypes of vegans within the context of dating.

Methods

154 undergraduates from WCSU completed the study through an online survey for psychology course credit, extra credit, or entry into a lottery for a chance to win a \$15 gift card to Amazon.

Participants responded to two open-ended questions concerning their expectations of vegans in general and within the context of dating.

Questionnaires

Question 1: Stereotypes of people committed to a vegan diet (i.e., "vegan stereotype"):

"Please write below what you think people expect those on a vegan diet to be like. We are not necessarily interested in your personal beliefs but rather what you think people expect of those on a vegan diet to be like in general and how they are expected to behave."

Questions 2: Expectation from a vegan date (i.e., "vegan date"):

"Imagine going on a first date with an individual who discloses adhering to a vegan diet. Please use the space below to describe the type of behaviors you could expect from this individual."

Coding of Open-Ended Responses:

Coding of open-ended responses was completed in several stages. First, two coders conducted a thematic content analysis in which all open-ended responses were read and potential themes were extracted from the data. Second, each open-ended response was coded for as many phrases as applied. Each phrase could only be coded into one theme (1=presence, 0=absent). Finally, any discrepancies were resolved by the two coders and the primary investigator using a majority vote. Within this final stage, some conceptually related themes were combined to formulate broader themes.

Results

High-maintenance Theme	n (%) (Vegan stereotype)	K (Vegan stereotype)	n (%) (Vegan Date)	K (Vegan Date)
High-maintenance	37 (24.0)	0.87	72 (46.8)	0.83
<i>Picky/Cautious</i>	16 (10.4)	0.89	56 (36.4)	0.94
<i>Selfish/Entitled</i>	20 (13.0)	0.91	11 (7.1)	0.95
<i>Demanding</i>	3 (1.9)	0.74	16 (10.4)	0.63

Positive Themes	n (%) (Vegan stereotype)	K (Vegan stereotype)	n (%) (Vegan Date)	K (Vegan Date)
Concern for others	61 (39.6)	0.89	19 (12.3)	0.85
<i>Animal Lover</i>	38 (24.7)	0.87	11 (7.1)	0.83
<i>Environmentalist</i>	23 (14.9)	0.95	3 (1.9)	0.85
<i>Pro-social/ Humanitarian</i>	17 (11.0)	0.82	7 (4.5)	0.76
Healthy	41 (26.6)	0.88	11 (7.1)	0.94

Negative Themes	n (%) (Vegan stereotype)	K (Vegan stereotype)	n (%) (Vegan Date)	K (Vegan Date)
Judgmental	34 (22.1)	0.79	56 (36.4)	0.85
Negative affect	5 (3.2)	0.59	19 (12.3)	0.91
Malnourished	23 (14.9)	0.84	1 (0.6)	---
Ridiculed diet or person	16 (10.4)	0.61	8 (5.2)	0.76

Neutral Themes	n (%) (Vegan stereotype)	K (Vegan stereotype)	n (%) (Vegan Date)	K (Vegan Date)
Diet Centrality	38 (24.7)	0.68	43 (27.9)	0.82
<i>Extreme attitude/ devotion</i>	22 (14.3)	0.66	16 (10.4)	0.74
<i>Talks about the diet</i>	17 (11.0)	0.76	28 (18.2)	0.92
Unconventional/ Hippie	27 (17.5)	0.85	4 (2.6)	0.66
Limited food options	6 (3.9)	0.48	18 (11.7)	0.71

Note: N = 154, coded by two independent coders

Conclusions

Vegans were most often described as high-maintenance. While we found high-maintenance and its sub-themes of picky/cautious, selfish/entitled, and demanding to be the most prevalent, participants also described vegans with several positive and negative characteristics such as "concerned for others", "healthy", "judgmental" and "devoted to the diet".

Our study delineates the content of the vegan stereotype in general and within the context of dating. A better understanding of this stereotype is needed in order to devise ways to change people's attitudes and work on stereotype reduction strategies. Ultimately, this understanding can enable researchers, practitioners, marketers, and even policy makers to consider social and psychological aspects of veganism as they work towards promoting more healthful and sustainable eating patterns.

References

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