

People feeling threatened by vegetarianism care less about animals

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Cows at ease. Credit: [Leszek Leszczynski](#) CC BY 2.0

New research suggests that if people perceive the rise of vegetarianism as a threat to their way of life they are more likely to care less for some animals.

Researchers from the University's School of Psychology and Brock University in Canada studied the impact of human supremacy beliefs and [vegetarianism](#) on whether people feel moral concern for [animals](#), ranging from those normally considered to be pets, such as cats and dogs, through to those reared for eating, such as pigs and cows, and wild animals.

Moral obligation towards animals varies widely as a function of how an animal is perceived, its functional role in society, and its relationship with humans. The vast majority of respondents (90 percent) felt morally obliged to show concern for the welfare and interests of dogs (a companion animal), but only 51 percent felt the same about pigs (a food animal).

The study, involving participants in the US, found that both human supremacy beliefs and a perceived vegetarianism [threat](#) are important in explaining why some people morally exclude animals.

The results demonstrated that stronger human supremacy beliefs and vegetarianism threat predicted the inclusion of fewer animals in individuals' moral circles over a reasonably large time interval.

More specifically, human supremacy beliefs predicted moral exclusion of all animal categories under investigation. That is, the stronger the dominance beliefs the more likely appealing (e.g., chimps) and unappealing (e.g., snakes) wild animals, companion animals (e.g., dogs), and food animals (e.g., pigs) would be morally excluded.

However, the effects of vegetarianism threat were more specific and only emerged for certain animal categories. Stronger vegetarianism threat predicted lesser moral inclusion of food animals, but not of companion animals and unappealing animals.

"Longitudinal Effects of Human Supremacy Beliefs and Vegetarianism Threat on Moral Exclusion (vs. Inclusion) of Animals" is published in the journal *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

More information: Ana C. Leite et al. Longitudinal effects of human supremacy beliefs and vegetarianism threat on moral exclusion (vs. inclusion) of animals, *European Journal of Social Psychology* (2018).
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