

## Vegaphobia as a Form of Discrimination

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### ABSTRACT

Vegaphobia is considered to be any derogatory description of vegans, or any form of discrimination faced by vegans. The discrimination experienced can be direct or indirect. Individuals who prefer a plant-based diet experience or perceive discrimination. This study examines the concept of vegaphobia and attitudes towards anti-vegans and discriminatory behaviors against vegans based on the literature. Individuals who adopt a vegan diet claim that they are subjected to discrimination in different dimensions, ranging from being forced to consume animal products to constantly being made to explain themselves or not being able to find suitable foods for themselves. On the other hand, it is also necessary to mention the accusatory language used by vegans against non-vegans. In this study, the types of discrimination faced and felt by vegans and the positioning of non-vegans in this debate will be evaluated in the context of the concepts of vegaphobia and discrimination.

**Keywords:** *Vegan, Discrimination, Vegaphobia, Vegetarian.*

**JEL Classification:** *J71, K11.*

## Bir Ayrımcılık Türü Olarak Vegafobi

### ÖZET

Vegafobi, veganlara yönelik küçük düşürücü tanımlar ya da veganların karşılaştığı her tür ayrımcılık olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Deneyimlenen ayrımcılık doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak gerçekleşebilir. Bitkisel beslenme biçimini tercih eden bireyler ayrımcılığı deneyimlemekte ya da algılamaktadır. Bu çalışma vegafobi kavramının ne olduğunu ortaya koyarak vegan karşıtlığına yönelik tutumları, veganlara yöneltilen ayrımcı davranışları literatüre dayanarak incelemektedir. Vegan beslenme tarzını benimseyen bireyler, hayvansal ürünleri tüketmeleri için zorlanmalarından başlayarak sürekli kendilerini açıklama yapmak zorunda hissettirilmelerine ya da kendilerine uygun yiyecekler bulamamalarına kadar farklı boyutlarda olumsuz tutum ya da davranışa maruz kalmaktadır. Öte yandan, vegan bireylerin vegan olmayan kişilere yönelik gerçekleştirdikleri suçlayıcı bir dilden de bahsetmek gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmada, veganların karşılaştıkları ve hissettikleri ayrımcılık türleriyle vegan olmayan kişilerin bu tartışmada konumlanışları vegafobi ve ayrımcılık kavramları bağlamında değerlendirilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Ayrımcılık, Vegafobi, Vegan, Vegetaryen.*

**JEL Sınıflandırması:** *J71, K11.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Although societies have consumed meat to meet their basic needs throughout history, with the development of industry, meat production has exceeded the rate of population growth since the 1960s (Milfont, Satherley, Osborne, Wilson, & Sibley, 2021, p. 1). Meat has been a source of human nutrition for more than two and a half million years. This has been associated with the expansion of the human brain and increased sociality (Pobiner, 2016, p. 113). Today, as in the past, meat dishes are considered a special treat. However, there are people who avoid eating meat for various reasons such as religion, health, philosophy, and culture.

With the emergence of environmental and animal rights movements in the 1960s and 70s, there was a rise in vegetarianism (Vandermoere, Geerts, De Backer, Erreygers, & Van Doorslaer, 2019). However, it is believed that vegetarianism is not a modern phenomenon and that plant-based diets have a more central and older position in the human diet than meat. For example, Ancient Greece and India have a long history of vegetarianism. Buddha and Pythagoras, who were important figures in these regions, believed that killing for food was wrong (Spencer, 2016, p. xi).

Veganism is a concept used by Donald Watson in 1944 to describe a lifestyle that voluntarily avoids from animal products and has a philosophy of non-violence (Gregson, Piazza, & Boyd, 2022, p. 1). Vegans are often considered together with vegetarians who do not eat meat. However, vegans differ from vegetarians in that they do not eat other animal products such as milk, egg, honey and do not use any products derived from animals. In fact, it is not possible to talk about a single type of vegetarianism. For example, those who consume only dairy products are defined as lacto-vegetarians, those who consume only eggs as ovo-vegetarians and vegetarians who eat fish as pescatarians (Nezlek, & Forestell, 2020, p. 45). Veganism is often regarded as an extreme, more restrictive form of vegetarianism (Wright, 2015, p. 90). In fact, the main factor that distinguishes vegetarians from vegans is the ethical differences in their perspectives on life, rather than differences in dietary patterns (Stepaniak, 2000, p. 21; McDonald, 2000, p. 3). According to McDonald, becoming a vegan requires opposition to the normative ideology of speciesism, leading to a significant change in lifestyle (2000, p. 3). Moreover, the philosophy of veganism is based on animal rights and the rejection of cruelty to and exploitation of animals in the industrial production of animals (Judge & Wilson, 2018). This philosophy is based on the suffering of animals in the industrial production process and the exploitation of the reproductive process of female animals (Adams, 2013, p. 41, 44). Following the change in the diet, there is a transformation that is reflected in other areas (Tekten Aksumeli, & Besirli, 2019, p. 230).

Although still in the minority, the number of people choosing a vegan lifestyle is growing (Horta, 2018, p. 360). Individuals who adopt a vegan lifestyle represent 1% of the world population (Vegan Food Market, 2022). Plant-based diets have seen a rapid increase in Western countries in recent years. In Portugal, the number of vegetarians increased by

400% between 2007 and 2017, while in the US the number of vegetarians has reached ten million in the last 15 years (Milfont, et al., 2021). Although veganism as a concept belongs to the West, plant-based nutrition is not unique to the West (Wright, 2015, p. 2). According to 2023 data, 24% of people living in India, the country with the highest number of vegetarians in the world, are vegetarian, followed by Mexico with 19% (World Population Review, 2023). The data reveals the importance of religion and culture on nutrition. While the high vegetarian diet in India is based on religious reasons, in Mexico it is culturally and historically shaped.

The number of vegans and vegetarians in Turkey is not available from TUIK statistics. This is because TUIK has not conducted any studies to determine this number. However, according to the Turkey Nutrition Survey conducted by Sia insight, a private research organization, in 2020, 0.25% of the population in Turkey is vegan and 3.45% is vegetarian (Erus, 2021).

There are studies on veganism or vegetarianism separately. Since veganism is a lifestyle that usually starts with vegetarianism, combined studies are also conducted (McDonald, 2000; Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023, p. 88). Studies on veganism are mostly done in a way to include both concepts by using the concept of veg\*n, since the spelling of the words in English starts the same (vegetarians-vegans). In this study also, the term veg\*ns is used when vegans and vegetarians are mentioned together.

The reasons why individuals choose a vegan lifestyle vary. The vegan lifestyle is adopted with the idea that plant-based nutrition protects the environment, to eat healthier, or mostly to protect the rights of animals (Menzies, Ruby, & Dar-Nimrod, 2023). Adopting a vegan lifestyle can happen suddenly or gradually over a period (Tekten Aksumeli, & Besirli, 2019). The preference for a plant-based diet is generally not only a nutritional phenomenon. There is a lifestyle, philosophy, and beliefs behind preferences other than stopping animal food intake for health reasons.

The dietary preferences of vegans are more central to their identity (Rosenfeld, 2019; Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 2; Bagci, & Olgun, 2019, p. 143; Tekten Aksumeli, & Besirli, 2019). Although vegans are considered a subgroup of vegetarians, vegans define themselves as completely different from vegetarians (Rosenfeld, 2019, p. 40). Veganism is constructed as a counter-cultural identity in Turkey (Yilmaz, & Polat, 2023, p. 51).

With the increasing interest in the vegan lifestyle, it is thought that anti-vegan feelings have become more prominent (Dhont, & Stoeber, 2020, p. 27; Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 2). This may become a significant problem. This article provides a systematic overview of the current sociological literature on vegaphobia. This study explores the concept of vegaphobia and examines attitudes towards anti-veganism and discriminatory behaviors against vegans based on the literature. It tries to reveal what is behind such behaviors. It also examines to what extent the fact that vegans develop a more critical attitude towards people who do not avoid from animal products compared to vegetarians (Rosenfeld, 2019; Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 2.) affects their exposure to vegaphobic behaviors.

## **2. WHAT IS VEGAPHOBIA?**

Vegaphobia is a variety of negative attitudes and behaviors directly or indirectly encountered by individuals who prefer a vegan lifestyle. It is manifested in different forms, ranging from the denigration of the philosophy on which the vegan lifestyle is based, to humiliating expressions or negative feelings, thoughts and behaviors developed towards vegans. In some sociological and social psychological studies, the concept of vegaphobia has been used to include negative attitudes and thoughts towards not only vegans but also vegetarians (Vandermoere, et al., 2019, p. 13). According to Patella, vegaphobia refers to hatred against veg\*ns, which manifests itself in stigmatizing, ridiculing or devaluing behaviors and attitudes, especially in relation to anti-species ideologies (2020, p. 105). Studies conducted in different countries show that meat-eaters have negative attitudes towards veg\*ans (Michel, et al., 2021; Cole, & Morgan, 2011; Minson, & Monin, 2012; (De Groeve, & Rosenfeld, 2022; MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017; Markowski, & Roxburgh, 2019; Bagci, et al., 2022). Various studies have shown that vegans have to struggle with attitudes and behaviors such as stereotyping, mocking, ridiculing, humiliating, labeling, marginalizing, force-feeding meat products or making vegans suffer by talking about animals while eating meat around them (Minson, & Monin, 2012; MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017; Markowski, & Roxburgh, 2019; Michel, et al., 2021; Veen, et al., 2023; Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023). There are many studies show that there are many situations where vegans are treated worse than non-vegans or are worse off for structural reasons (Horta, 2018).

Noting that there are very limited studies on anti-vegan groups, Gregson, et al. (2022) tried to understand the beliefs and goals of anti-vegan groups by analyzing the comments of anti-vegan users on social media. Social media has a structure that supports antisocial behaviors, including cyberbullying and the spread of hate speech. Anti-vegan groups legitimize their hate speech against vegans with the support they receive from within the group with the comfort created by the anonymity of the cyber world. The shift from the first-person singular to the first-person plural in the messages sent by anti-vegan groups reveals conformity to the group. In other words, an individual uses the plural person as the subject in the statements he/she writes alone (Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 9). This means collectivization of emotions. It also leads to the emergence of in-group favoritism.

While the behaviors caused by vegaphobia are mostly experienced in the online world, they can also occur in face-to-face relationships in daily life. Due to the structure of the virtual world, the anonymity of the identities, the invisibility of the victim and the instantaneity of the sending are seen as important factors in the online occurrence (Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 2.; Mishna, McLuckie, Saini, 2009, p. 107).

Vegans believe that patriarchy is a gender system inherent in human and animal relations, and therefore food contributes to gender construction (Adams, 2013, p. 37). The belief that vegans are against the established order, the arrogant attitudes of vegans towards meat-eaters, the militant behavior of some vegans (Gregson et al., 2022, p. 9), and the perception that vegans have judgmental and hostile attitudes towards meat-eaters (Cole & Morgan,

2011) are motivations that have emerged in these studies on vegaphobia. In a study conducted to understand to what extent the behavior or attitudes of veg\*ns influence vegaphobic behavior or attitudes, omnivores were asked what they think about veg\*ns. In the first phase of the study, omnivores were asked directly what they thought about veg\*ns, in the second phase they were asked what how veg\*ns think about themselves (meat eaters) and then it is asked what they thought about veg\*ns. The study found that the belief that veg\*ns have a moral contempt for omnivores and consider themselves superior is widespread among omnivores. The study found that negative perceptions of veg\*ns were lower when omnivores were not asked what they thought of vegans than when they were. This result was interpreted as an immediate defensive reaction caused by a critical approach (Minson, & Monin, 2012).

While meat-eaters have negative feelings and thoughts towards vegans or/and vegetarians, in some cases to the extent of vegaphobia, some vegans or/and vegetarians exhibit extreme behaviors such as not having close contact with meat-eaters (Vandermoere, et al., 2019, p. 4).

### **3. DISCRIMINATION: TREATING IN THE SAME WAY OR SEGREGATION**

The question of whether the problems faced by vegans can be considered as discrimination is difficult to answer due to the complexity of the concept of discrimination and the lack of a clear consensus on the concept. Since treating people in the same situation differently will contribute to creating inequality and reinforcing inequalities, treating people in different situations in the same way is simply defined as discrimination (Gul, & Karan, 2011, p. 13).

Discrimination is divided into direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated to the detriment of others in a similar situation. Indirect discrimination occurs when individuals in different situations are treated equally (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). There is no apparent discrimination in indirect discrimination but a certain person or group is negatively affected by the action (Kılınc, 2021, p. 29). Therefore, indirect discrimination can be mentioned if the individual becomes disadvantaged due to the action he encounters.

The visibility of vegaphobia due to discrimination against vegans can occur directly or indirectly. Vegaphobia is directly visible in negative comments and attitudes towards individuals or groups who adopt a vegan lifestyle. It can be said that vegans are subjected to indirect discrimination because they cannot access their food preferences in all conditions and places they want (Parkinson, Twine & Griffin, 2019). Since equal treatment is also a form of discrimination, serving vegans a meal that appeals to the general public, rather than the type of food they prefer, supports the claim that they are discriminated against.

Considering the evaluations of vegans that they face discrimination in the invitations they attend, in the restaurants and school cafeterias they go to, when there is no food suitable for their preferences (Castro, 2023, p. 58; Parkinson, Twine & Griffin, 2019), it can be considered that they are discriminated against in terms of not meeting their basic nutritional needs. On the other hand, the fact that vegans do not have a menu suitable for them in commercial cafes or restaurants or at special events should not be considered discrimination in the same context. If an invitee goes hungry at an invitation, he/she attends, this situation can be considered as a "shame" of the inviter in the simplest terms. On the other hand, the fact that a restaurant/cafe, which is a commercial enterprise, does not offer vegan food can be interpreted as a lack of supply when there is not much demand in the context of profit and loss calculations. Although veg\*ns consider the difficulties they experience in meeting their basic needs as discrimination, the profit-oriented approach of commercial enterprises and the low visibility of veg\*ns lead to situations where the supply is not offered for the demand that arises. In this case, the discrimination is countered by the freedom of business decision-making. In the context of cafeterias and canteens in schools and workplaces other than commercial establishments, it can be argued that veg\*ns face discrimination when their rights are not respected. The fact that vegans cannot find suitable food for themselves in hospitals, prisons and school cafeterias reveals discrimination (Parkinson, Twine & Griffin, 2019, p. 11). Various campaigns are being carried out to combat this discrimination. For example, in 2022, in cooperation with the Vegan Association, more than 4000 university students participated in a petition for vegan menus in university cafeterias, and as a result, vegan menus were introduced in many universities where the demands were taken into account, but almost the same number of universities rejected the demands (Erdem, 2023). However, it is stated that the visibility of the difficulties faced by vegans has an indirect effect on vegaphobia as it increases sensitivity to veganism and implicitly sends a message to avoid veganism (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 722).

### **3.1. The Profile of Vegaphobic Persons**

In order to understand whether there are similarities in the general profile of those who exhibit a certain type of behavior, studies on the subject give us a general perspective. Many choices in life are not independent of social and cultural structures. Bourdieu (2014) mentions that social classes affect the way of eating and food preferences as they are determinants of lifestyle (542). Similarly, dietary preferences are determined by various variables such as social environment, education, culture and religion. Individuals' food preferences are directly related to their psychological and social identities (Pabian, Ouvrein, van Royen, Folkvord, Poels, Vandebosch, De Backer, 2023, p. 408). As a result of these variables, it is seen that certain preferences are more effective on similar profiles. Just as individuals' social environments and cultures determine and influence their preferences, their preferences also influence their social environments. For example, Twine's study reveals the social environment of vegan individuals changes over time (Twine, 2014). There is a transition from a social environment where they had to constantly explain their veganism and where they were insisted on eating animal products without

being understood, to an environment where vegans exist (Twine, 2014). Social environment affects the way of thinking as well as the way of eating. Studies show that vegaphobia is quite low when there are one or more vegetarians in the social environment (Vandermoere, et al., 2019, p. 5). According to studies claiming the opposite, having a person who prefers a vegetarian diet in the family may cause conflicts within the family (Jabs, Devine & Sobal, 1998; Roth, 2005). The reason for this is that veg\*ns who go beyond the food traditions that the family cares about disrupt the family structure (Vandermoere, et al., 2019, p. 6).

Studies investigating the basic characteristics and social environments of meat eaters, veg\*ns and vegaphobes have revealed that vegaphobes are mostly older, male, have a low level of education and eat meat almost every day. It is thought that this difference associated with age may be due to the generation gap (Vandermoere, et al., 2019, p. 11; Judge, & Wilson, 2019, p. 175).

MacInnis and Hodson state that people with very strong right-wing ideological views develop more negative attitudes towards veg\*ns (2017, p. 723). Since the dominant culture is based on meat-eating, the concern to preserve values sometimes leads omnivores to stigmatize veg\*ns and sometimes develop negative attitudes and behaviors. A plant-based lifestyle is seen as a threat to culture, traditions and values.

Anti-vegans are divided into 1) *traditionalists against disruptors* and 2) *reactants against judgmental and critical people*.

### **3.1.1. Traditionalists Against Disruptors**

Traditionalists versus disruptors are influenced by the food hierarchy. There is a hierarchy of foods, with meat at the top of the hierarchy (Sobal, 2005). The centrality of meat consumption and its status as a high-status food, as well as the gender attributed to food, leads to opposition to veganism.

According to Chan and Zlatevska (2019), meat consumption has historically been associated with an indicator of power and is now recognized as an indicator of social status. Meat consumption is thought to compensate for a perceived lack of social status (p. 257). Vegaphobics are people with lower economic status and the rejection of meat, which they see as a compensation for the lack they feel in their social status, reveals vegaphobic behaviors. At the same time, veg\*ns who deviate from the dominant meat-eating culture in society are seen and reacted to as people who try to disrupt the social order. Deviant veg\*ns are seen as a subcultural group and marginalized (Boyle, 2011, p. 314; Veen, et al., 2023, p. 55). It is thought that people generally view veg\*ns negatively because they disrupt social traditions related to food (Markowski, & Roxburgh, 2019, p. 1; Cole, & Morgan, 2011). In particular, veganism is considered a symbolic threat to cultural traditions (Judge, & Wilson, 2019, p. 171). A survey conducted in 21 countries reveals that 86 % of people consume meat (Buchholz, 2023). The meat consumption in the world increased in the last few decades (Parlasca & Qaim, 2022). When we look at the rates of those who consume

meat and those who prefer a vegetable-based diet in the world, the fact that the number of veg\*ns is very low shows that the dominant culture has a omnivorous diet and norms are formed within these standards.

Considering that there is a hierarchy of foods in the order of meat, fish and vegetables, it is reasonable to associate meat at the top with status. On a day when you have prepared beans, steak and rice for dinner, when you are asked in a phone call "what's for dinner?" your answer will usually be steak. This is one of the indicators that meat is seen as superior to other foods on the menu. Since meat is a food with high social status, many men want to show their social status by eating meat (Sobal, 2005, p. 146). Historically, the position of men in the process of obtaining meat and the high status attributed to meat makes it understandable that vegan opponents are mostly men.

The gender of food is more culturally constructed. Meat and hamburgers are considered masculine foods, while salads, yogurt, fruit and chocolate are considered feminine foods. Therefore, many vegetarian men are marginalized (Sobal, 2005, p. 137, 141). In some primitive societies, women were forbidden to eat meat, while in others it was the property of the man and women's eating was subject to the man's permission (Adams, 2013). Since meat is metaphorically associated with masculinity, veg\*n men tend to be perceived as less masculine than omnivorous men (Judge, & Wilson, 2019, p. 171).

The fact that dominant cultural norms favor omnivorous diets makes veg\*ns a powerful threat to the status quo. As predicted by intergroup threat theory, a threat arises when the beliefs and values of an outgroup are perceived to conflict with those of the ingroup (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 722). When vegetarianism is considered as a norm violation, a subculture with an alternative value system emerges. In this case, vegetarian is seen as deviant in a sense (Boyle, 2011, p. 314). Therefore, a reactivity emerges around the protection of traditional cultural values. Omnivores feel threatened by the presence of veg\*ns who are seen as "deviants" who disrupt social traditions (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 45). On the other hand, since members of minority groups form stronger social identities, in-group favoritism is higher among veg\*ns (Bagci, Rosenfeld, & Uslu, 2022, p. 1240).

### **3.1.1. Reactants Against Judgemental and Critical People**

Not all people who prefer a plant-based diet experience the same level of vegaphobia. Studies show that vegans are exposed to more vegaphobic behaviors than vegetarians. Since veganism is not only a diet but also a philosophy of life, vegans aim to raise awareness and educate the society. The main goal of vegans is to educate both themselves and others (Stepaniak, 2000; McDonald, 2000, p. 18). They want to educate people to understand veganism and animal rights (Başol, 2023, p. 73). The idea that there is a match between the oppression of women and animal exploitation in the male-dominated social order reveals the perspectives of feminist vegans (Adams, 2013). However, these education goals of vegans sometimes disturb omnivores. It can be said that vegans have a more critical approach due to these goals. Therefore, vegans face reactive attitudes and behaviors. The prevalence of the joke "How do you know if someone is vegan, don't worry, he/she will



tell you!" on social media or the fact that many vegans have encountered this joke explains the position of vegans in the eyes of omnivores (Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023, p. 50). Sometimes the concept of hypersensitivity is used to legitimize direct attacks on vegans (Cole, & Morgan, 2011, p. 146). Since extremism in anything has negative connotations, the hypersensitivity of vegans also reveals critical behaviors, attitudes and prejudices in various dimensions.

Omnivores do not want to be criticized and subjected to moral evaluations because of their dietary preferences (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 52). In the same study, the fact that those who prefer a plant-based diet present themselves as more virtuous people because of their choice also draws the reaction of omnivores. In a study, it was revealed that not only omnivores but also vegetarians have negative feelings about vegans and veganism for reasons such as trying to attract attention or seeing themselves as morally superior (Markowski, & Roxburgh, 2019, p. 5). Because of the importance vegans place on education and change, their efforts to educate and raise awareness about animal rights and the relationship between patriarchy and cruelty to animals by revealing themselves and their identities cause omnivores to feel that their choices are not respected and criticized.

Vegans who choose the vegan lifestyle because of animal rights and the position of animals in the industry, and who want to explain to society what veganism is about in order to eliminate cruelty to animals, are criticized and subjected to derogatory attitudes by omnivores because they are constantly criticized by vegans. Meat eaters criticize vegans for their militancy and arrogant attitudes. Vegaphobic attitudes and behaviors are directed against those who prefer a plant-based diet for animal rights rather than for health, religious or cultural reasons (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 733). In other words, in Boyle's (2011) distinction between total vegans and diet vegans, total vegans are exposed to reactive behaviors.

Due to the importance that vegans attach to public awareness and education, their efforts to explain veganism are often considered excessive and this attitude is criticized and reacted against. According to Gregson, et al. (2022), this harms the progress of the vegan movement. Even people who do not like eating meat have negative feelings towards this militant veganism. Militant vegans face opposition to veganism because they are seen as aggressive and rigid (Gregson, et al., 2022, p. 10).

When criticizing vegan food, omnivores often focus on the lack of taste and the unhealthy nature of a diet free of animal products (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 51). Omnivores view veg\*ns more negatively when veg\*ns' motivations are related to social justice rather than health (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 733). Omnivores who find veg\*nism exaggerated consider the issue of food waste to be more important (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 51).

On the other hand, vegans state that even when they do not display a critical approach, people around them claim that vegans judge them and make them feel guilty (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 52).

#### **4. THE VISIBILITY OF VEGAPHOBIA**

There are various studies revealing that vegaphobia is realized or perceived in different forms and dimensions (Buttny, & Kinefuchi, 2020; Boyle, 2011; Cole & Morgan, 2011; Delmestri, 2018; MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017; Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023; Veen, et al., 2023; Wright, 2015). It is possible to categorize experienced or perceived vegaphobia as direct and indirect vegaphobia. While direct vegaphobia refers to negative attitudes and behaviors directed at those who prefer veg\*n diets and to which they are directly exposed due to their identity and preferences, indirect vegaphobia refers to a situation in which the needs of those who prefer veg\*n diets are ignored and disregarded. Vegaphobia can be seen in different dimensions in individual and public spheres.

Disruption of social relations in the individual sphere is reported as one of the ways vegaphobia is experienced. In a study conducted by MacInnis, and Hodson, a quarter of vegan participants revealed that a friend reduced contact with them after they disclosed their veganism (2017, p. 735). One of the strategies developed by vegans to avoid labeling and discussion in their relationships is not to disclose that they are vegan unless necessary, which is also among the results of the study on vegaphobia in Turkey. Veganism is seen as socially challenging rather than practical (Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023, p. 9). Veg\*ns feel obliged to justify and rationalize their behavior to others when asked why they do not eat meat (Boyle, 2011, p. 319). Moreover, vegans are often accused of choosing veganism for attention (Uzbay-Ulgen, 2023, p. 44).

The presence of negative expressions, prejudices and labeling against vegans on social media and in the media, the scarcity or difficult accessibility of vegan product options point to the visibility of vegaphobia in the public sphere.

Veganism is often portrayed negatively in mainstream media (Wright, 2015, p. 90). Mainstream media functions as an ideological apparatus to maintain the dominance of meat-eating (Buttny, & Kinefuchi, 2020, p. 566). Cole and Morgan (2011), in their study in which they critically analyzed the discourses on veganism in newspapers in the United Kingdom in 2007, concluded that the discourses in newspapers were vegaphobic. Of the 397 newspaper articles they analyzed, 295, or about 74%, contain negative evaluations about vegans or veganism (Cole, & Morgan, 2011, p. 138). Among the news and comments, they classified as positive, negative and neutral discourses, they claim that even the positive or neutral ones are marginalizing and alienating because they do not address what veganism actually is. In the newspapers they analyzed, hostile expressions such as militant vegan or terrorist vegan were used about vegans. In the investigation of a vegan couple whose baby died due to malnutrition, despite the prosecutor's opinion that the cause of the baby's death was not vegan diet, the newspaper articles were published with the headlines "Vegan Killers", "Vegan diet killed the baby". According to Cole and Morgan, the fact that when the baby of a carnivorous family died for the same reason, news such as "the child of a carnivorous family died" was not published reveals the existence of an anti-vegan bias in the mainstream media (Cole, & Morgan, 2011, p. 146-7). Even neutral

newspaper articles that reveal that vegans have difficulty finding suitable food for themselves are criticized for having a distancing effect from veganism for the non-vegan reader and reinforcing asceticism of veg\*n diets (Cole, & Morgan, 2011, pp. 147-8).

Several studies exploring reactions to veg\*ns reveal various stigmatizations of veg\*ns. When these stigmas are compared to stigmas against other marginalized groups, veg\*ns are more likely to be stigmatized (Delmestri, 2018; MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 726). Since MacInnis, & Hodson's study included both veg\*ns and omnivores, it provides the first social psychological evidence of source and target bias against veg\*ns, according to the authors. Accordingly, omnivores view vegans more negatively than vegetarians and male veg\*ns more negatively than female veg\*ns (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 721). According to the findings of the same study, veg\*ns are viewed on par with immigrants, asexuals and atheists, but significantly more negatively than blacks. Vegetarians are evaluated on par with homosexuals, while vegans are evaluated more negatively than homosexuals. Only drug addicts are evaluated more negatively than veg\*ns. This negative evaluation is not at the level of discrimination, but at the level of attitude. This is because omnivores did not exhibit a lower level of attitude towards veg\*ns in relation to recruitment compared to other groups (MacInnis, & Hodson, 2017, p. 726). In other words, although veg\*ns are evaluated more negatively than migrants in this study conducted in the USA, they are preferred more than migrants in recruitment.

Although vegan individuals use substitute products (soaked chickpea juice instead of eggs, milk obtained from coconut, almond, etc. products instead of milk) with the transition to a plant-based lifestyle, they consider the difficulty they experience due to the difficulty or higher cost of obtaining these products as a form of discrimination, and they think that they are discriminated against due to the lack of vegan products in the cafeterias of workplaces or schools (Tekten Aksumeli, & Besirli, 2019, p. 233). In Turkey, 76% of vegans complain about the limited product options (Erus, 2021). When vegans go out, they mostly prepare their meals from home, which both causes them to spend labor and prevents them from making use of their time in different ways (Škof, 2019, s. 32; Tekten Aksumeli, & Besirli, 2019, p. 235). In this case, although direct discrimination is not visible, indirect discrimination is mentioned.

Another situation considered as indirect discrimination is the state policies that vegans are forced to support with their taxes against their will. Vegans admit that they are discriminated against on the grounds that they are forced to contribute to animal exploitation when state support is provided in areas such as animal breeding (Horta, 2018, p. 359).

One of the results of Rosenfeld's study reveals that vegans believe that other people evaluate them negatively because of their diet (Rosenfeld, 2019, p. 43). Another study shows that although the attitudes of those who prefer a plant-based diet towards omnivores are not negative, they are less positive than the attitudes of omnivores towards veg\*ns (Pabian, et al., 2023, p. 415).

On the other hand, some studies suggest that vegaphobia is on the decline. A recent study conducted in the Netherlands suggests that the trajectory of vegaphobia is changing (Veen, et al., 2023, p. 45). The results of the study that omnivores and veg\*ns do not have negative attitudes towards each other do not seem to be in line with the results of previous studies, but are in line with studies showing that prejudices decrease in the presence of different types of diets in their social environment (Pabian, et al., 2023, p. 415). Another study reveals that participants have positive attitudes towards vegetarians and attribute positive personal characteristics to vegetarians (Patel, & Buckland, 2021, p. 9). Even if omnivores have positive feelings towards veg\*ns, they may have developed a paradox towards vegan advocates. That is, vegan advocates may be admired for their morality and commitment to what they believe in, but despised for their arrogance and over-commitment (De Groeve, & Rosenfeld, 2022, p. 11).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Social interaction and the social environment determine and influence many aspects of the individual, from the way they think to the way they eat. Food is not only related to nutrition but also to socio-cultural structure. Religion, culture and way of thinking determine individuals' food preferences. Human nutrition is predominantly based on an omnivorous diet. However, although at a much lower rate compared to omnivorous diets, there has recently been an increase in the proportion of people who prefer plant-based diets all over the world. Plant-based diets also vary within themselves. Vegetarianism, veganism, flexitarianism, lacto/ovo vegetarianism and pescetarianism are different dimensions of plant-based diets.

Meat has an important place not only in Turkish culture but all over the world. Meat dishes are the main guest of the meals served on feasts, invitations and special occasions. There is a hierarchy among foods and meat dishes are at the top of this hierarchy. People who eliminate all or some animal products from their daily lives for religious, philosophical, cultural, health, etc. reasons reject this hierarchy. Yet, people who exclude meat from their daily diet (except for health reasons or religious and cultural reasons) and prefer a vegetable-based diet may be seen as disruptors who break with tradition. The desire to preserve traditional values can lead to the development of negative attitudes and the labeling of veg\*ns as out-group members. As a result, veg\*ns may face negative perceptions and prejudicial treatment. Among those who choose a plant-based diet, especially veganism, there is a desire not only to change their lifestyle, but also to explain to others the necessity of this lifestyle due to the industrialization of animal production and the harm caused to animals in the process of obtaining animal products. The philosophy of veganism is based on educating themselves and others. It is therefore criticized by omnivores for being too critical and didactic.

Studies show that vegans in particular, but not all plant-based diets, are subjected to much more vegaphobic treatment and attitudes. Vegans are perceived as more extreme by omnivores than vegetarians. Likewise, vegans are more likely to perceive discrimination.

Mocking, labeling, stereotyping, ridicule, humiliation are some of the negative attitudes and behaviors faced by vegans and vegetarians. Omnivores do not like it when those who prefer a vegan or vegetarian diet criticize them for their dietary preferences and see themselves as better people for not consuming animal products. Omnivores, like veg\*ns, want their personal preferences to be respected. On the other hand, veg\*ns feel that omnivores often get defensive when veg\*ns talk about their diet. While didactic attitudes of those who prefer a plant-based diet are viewed negatively by omnivores, sometimes just knowing that they don't eat meat makes them feel criticized. This feeling of being criticized causes them to immediately develop defensive reactions. As a result, they may direct these reactions at veg\*ns.

In the background of omnivores' reactive and critical attitudes towards vegans, sometimes vegans' arrogant and moralistic stances and their reactive and critical attitudes take place. Various studies have also shown that vegans have negative attitudes towards omnivores. It is interesting to note that vegans have much more negative attitudes towards flexitarians who adopt a flexible diet. Explained as a form of vegetarianism, flexitarianism is sometimes preferred in cases of b12, zinc and iron deficiency that the body needs due to veganism, and sometimes to support environmental ethical preferences. Vegans are more likely to react against flexitarians than omnivores. More flexitarians than omnivores face negative attitudes from vegans because they are morally inconsistent.

Vegaphobia can be reduced by making veganism more visible. This visibility would help by removing the not-so-common hesitation of veg\*ns to disclose their dietary changes. Studies have shown that vegaphobia is less likely to occur among those who have vegetarians in their family or social circle.

The claim that vegaphobia increases with the increase in the visibility of veganism and the idea that vegaphobia can be reduced by making veganism visible are of course contradictory. However, at this point, it can be said that if a balance can be established between them, vegaphobia will decrease. It would be more effective in reducing vegaphobia if vegans highlight their own needs or the discrimination, they face without being didactic and critical, and gain visibility in this way. If they do this, that is, if they change their style, it can be thought that the arguments of vegaphobes will disappear and therefore vegaphobia will decrease. Although the occurrence of vegaphobia occurs in different dimensions ranging from the relationship between meat and status to the fact that non-meat eaters are out of the norm, the critical attitude that vegans develop towards meat eaters due to their emphasis on animal rights and the growth of the meat industry attracts more reaction. This is evidenced by the fact that omnivores have higher levels of vegaphobia when asked what vegans think about themselves. Vegans, who are in the struggle for animal rights rather than fighting discrimination against vegans, cause vegaphobia to increase when they include veganism in the struggle for animal rights. If the struggle for animal rights and the struggle for vegan rights are separated from each other, negative attitudes towards vegans will decrease.

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