Inclusive or Elitist?: North Minneapolis as a Case Study to Examine How Plant-Based Diet Advocacy can be Respectful and Effective in the Face of Obstacles

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Abstract
The challenges facing our world are often clear to us. Unfortunately, how we can be involved in change making is often not as clear. However, compassion, when actively utilized, can be an incredible tool to create the world we want to live in. It is a common trait that serves as motivator of action.

Here I will be analyzing one active method of engaging compassion gaining popularity: purposeful plant-based eating. An increasing minority are finding plant-based eating is effective and allows them to live more gently in a way which aligns with their values. They use it to support positive change in themselves, their community, and the larger world. I have also found this diet to be a fulfilling personal choice. I am looking to dig beyond the common dialogue to more critically examine how ethical and effective the diet really is on a larger scale for significant, global change.

To do this, I will first describe this form of activism and the major reasons why it is supported. I will then examine its major criticism, which is that the diet is elitist, requiring the resources and privilege of those with a higher socioeconomic status (SES). The elitism claim says that the diet is unavailable to the majority, especially those with a low SES, and so it is not a feasible method of significant change.

Finally, I will respond to the critique with an argument based off of personal experience with the low SES populations in North Minneapolis, Minnesota and the community health projects in that area. This functions as a case study, which I will further support with literature around plant-based diets, low SES populations, and activism.

The purpose is to show the current dialogue on plant-based diets and to connect arguments together to provide a fuller, more complete, and more useful view of plant-based eating. Ultimately, I argue that the common discussions of plant-based diets both in support and in criticism are incomplete in that they do not effectively address the barriers nor the resources and abilities to overcome those barriers. Therefore in its current practice by activists, the diet is elitist. However, I show that it is not elitist by nature. There are ways to support the diet in an inclusive manner, which more completely address ways to engage even in the face of barriers. By searching beyond the common stopping points in the current dialogue, I find that plant-based diets are not only a compassionate, sustainable, and effective method for positive and significant change, but that it is a viable option for the majority of people in the United States.

Finally, I will make suggestions to supporters of the diet on more effective and respectful forms of advocacy, which can make the diet more inclusive in practice. I argue that these changes are necessary as we work to create a more compassionate, engaged, sustainable, and just society.

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Case study research refers to an in-depth, detailed study of an individual or a small group of individuals. Such studies are typically qualitative in nature, resulting in a narrative description of behavior or experience. Case study research is not used to determine cause and effect, nor is it used to discover generalizable truths or make predictions. Rather, the emphasis in case study research is placed on exploration and description of a phenomenon. A holistic approach reviews all of the data as a whole and attempts to draw conclusions based on the data in its entirety. This is an appropriate approach when the question being studied is more general in nature and the data provides an overview. Sometimes, it may be more useful to break the data into smaller pieces. Plant-Based Diet Perks. How much meat can you eat and still get the benefits of a veggie diet? There’s not enough research to give a precise amount. “Diet is a continuum,” says Robert Ostfeld, M.D., director of Preventive Cardiology and founder and director of the Cardiac Wellness Program at Montefiore Medical Center in New York. “But patients who more fully embrace a whole foods, plant-based diet have the best outcomes.” Find your semi-veg style. Plant-based meals once every seven days in the style of Meatless Monday—a campaign that encourages people to start each week with a day of vegetarian eating—are a great way to begin. You can try replacing your meat ounce-for-ounce with a faux meat such as tempeh or tofu, Palmer says.