

Denying mental qualities to animals in order to eat them

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(Medical Xpress) -- New research by Dr Brock Bastian from UQ's School of Psychology highlights the psychological processes that people engage in to reduce their discomfort over eating meat.

This paper will be published in an upcoming edition of the [Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin](#), where Dr Bastian and his co-authors show that people deny mental qualities to animals they eat.

"Many people like eating meat, but most are reluctant to harm things that have minds. Our studies show that this motivates people to deny minds to animals," Dr Bastian said.

The research demonstrates when people are confronted with the harm that their meat-eating brings to food animals they view those animals as possessing fewer mental capacities compared to when they are not reminded.

The findings also reveal that this denial of mind to food animals is especially evident when people expect to eat meat in the near future.

Dr Bastian said it shows that denying mind to animals that are used for food makes it less troublesome for people to eat them.

"Meat is central to most people's diets and a focus of culinary enjoyment, yet most people also like animals and are disturbed by harm done to them; therefore creating a 'meat paradox' - people's concern for

animal welfare conflicts with their culinary behavior.

"For this reason, people rarely enjoy thinking about where meat comes from, the processes it goes through to get to their tables, or the living qualities of the animals from which it is extracted," he said.

Dr Bastian's research argues that meat eaters go to great lengths to overcome these inconsistencies between their beliefs and behaviours.

"In our current research we focus on the processes by which people facilitate their practice of eating meat. People often mentally separate meat from animals so they can eat pork or beef without thinking about pigs or cows.

"Denying minds to animals reduces concern for their welfare, justifying the harm caused to them in the process of meat production," he added.

Meat is pleasing to the palate for many, and although the vegetarian lifestyle is increasingly popular, most people continue to make meat a central component of their diet.

"In short, our work highlights the fact that although most people do not mind eating meat, they do not like thinking of animals they eat as having possessed minds," Dr Bastian said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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