

Researching masculinities and food protein practices: A trio of more-than-human participatory workshops

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Abstract

Whilst there is research around men and masculinities as they relate to practices of caring in the ecological crisis, less is written about methodologies that can address intersectional challenges, and ways of engagement that can support behaviour change. A process-based workshop methodology is discussed for researching the male-gendered and material performances of environmental caring related to personal food protein consumption practices. It works creatively to address relational inequalities in status both between different masculine positionalities and different food proteins. It contributes to more-than-human participatory methodologies by exploring male-gender – food protein relations, via positioning and inviting practical-engagement with foodstuff as a process for destabilising social and cultural hierarchies attached to thinking about, as well as preparing, cooking and eating, different food proteins. We argue that novel research findings can emerge around individual, collective and community responses to the ecological crisis through the careful methodological attention to masculine inequalities.

Keywords

Food, masculinities, meat reduction, protein, participatory research, workshops, inequality, more-than-human

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Introduction

Research that addresses issues around men and masculinities as they relate to practices of caring in the ecological crisis (Hultmann and Pulé, 2018; Pulé and Hultmann, 2021) is growing. Climate change discourse (Hultman and Pule, 2018; Macgregor, 2014) is recognising the ‘masculinization of environmentalism’ and its legacy when shaping policies to manage or respond to environmental challenges (Paulson, 2019). This can be read in part as the feminisation of behavioural engagement (‘care-taking’) in tackling climate change (Momsen, 2000) and the gendered construction of certain behaviours, such as ethical consumerism (Cairns et al., 2013; Hall, 2011) as more environmentally friendly than others (Adams and Gruen, 2014). Using behavioural interventions as a core policy approach to tackling changes in food practices (Atkins and Mitchie, 2015; Dibleby, 2021) too often avoids the complex intersectional challenges that are barriers to behaviour change. Developing research methodologies that can deepen our understanding of these intersectional barriers is critical to support more targeted work in this and other areas.

There is increasing scholarly attention to plant-based or vegan food practices – diets (or just meals) that avoid all animal-based protein (meat and dairy) – shown to have a lower carbon footprint (Poore and Nemecek, 2018). Writers on the increasing availability of plant protein-based foodstuffs, as an alternative to animal protein-based foodstuffs, have raised how the shift in accompanying dietary practice carries gendered and racialised components (Giraud, 2021; Greenebaum and Dexter, 2018; Lockwood, 2021; Oliver, 2021). The participatory research methodology we discuss here supports exploring the concept of ‘interspecies intersectionalities’ (Weaver, 2019) – to understand how personal relationships of edibility between a person and food animals ‘don’t just reflect, but actively shape experiences of race, gender, sexuality, nation, species and breed’ (p.177), in the broad context of human – environmental relations. It is designed specifically to research the male-gendered and material performances of environmental caring related to personal food protein consumption practices including meat, pulses, cheese and fake-meats. We contribute to existing intersectional methodological scholarship in two ways. Firstly, in recognising and working creatively with challenges about how to address inequalities in status, especially between different masculine positionalities within the research process (Pini and Pease, 2013). Secondly, we contribute to more-than-human participatory methodologies (Bastian, 2018) in relation to the value of exploring male gender-food protein relations, via positioning and inviting creative practical-engagement with foodstuff as a pathway for destabilising social and cultural hierarchies attached to thinking about, as well as preparing, cooking and eating, different food proteins. In uniting these two strands of interest we argue that the research outcomes around individual, collective and community responses to the ecological crisis in relation to food protein practices and behaviour change, can be articulated with greater depth and nuance by careful methodological attention to masculine inequalities that connect to hierarchies around different protein foodstuffs.

In the context of climate change, mass extinction and social and economic inequalities, links between food systems, ecology and gender norms are critical to understand, but are challenging to hold connected and internally relate-able when carrying out fieldwork.

Here we outline a methodological approach for understanding how these themes connect and can be made visible in the food eating experiences of individuals, that can get articulated variously among different communities. Influenced by the legacy of working within the Connected Communities portfolio, we took a community-engaged approach (Facer et al., 2016). This paper explains the methodological intentions behind the design of research that took place in 2017, when the UK saw a reported 28% of consumers limiting or reducing meat consumption and when flexitarianism and veganism were becoming more mainstream; dietary choices that had been commonly motivated by health, weight management and animal welfare, were now also being explained as responses to the environmental crisis (Mintel Group, 2017). Called the Man Food project (<https://man-food.org>), it researched the gendered food practices related to the protein consumption practices of those identifying as men, to address and explore the increasingly disparate discourses around issues such as gender and ecology, specifically around food practices such as meat eating and meat reduction. Whilst it is recognised that gender shapes food practice we are exploring heterogeneous positions within groups of men, to understand how norms and internal hierarchies and inequalities between men, can act as barriers to behaviour change. In choosing to work specifically with men, we acknowledge the gender binary that might reinforce stereotypes, and also the limitations of the generic term 'men', which we use to describe masculine-identifying individuals. Equally, it is relatively common to frame gendered food consumption to human-animal relations (in relation to animal rights or animal welfare, for instance), but less so within the developing ecological crisis.

Carol Adams (1990) fused the oppression of animals we eat with the repression of women, both positioned as minor powers to Western, white men. Yet, for women to demonstrate power and influence, eating meat, adopting masculine traits, also carries strong cultural significance. Adams connects symbolism and language deployed across the sexualized bodies of women and meat, to point out the common absent referent of the live animal and that of the female subject. We share Probyn's (2000) criticism of Adam's work as 'a repressive hypothesis of meat' for the heteronormativity to the representation of men within this work, that bears little resemblance to more recent critical studies of masculinity that point to the heterogeneity of masculinities (Connell, 1995). Adam's thesis emerged from the era of cultural studies fascination with representation via symbolism, language and meaning, rather than more recent turn towards studying everyday practices and materialities and the plurality to the process of meaning-making. Consequently, there is an opportunity to bring non-representational (Thrift, 2008; Vannini, 2015) approaches to the study and interpretation of the complex relations between masculinity, eating animals and environmentalism. Neither Connell, nor Adams, position masculine identit(ies) in the context of eating meat and environmentalism.

Anshelm and Hultman (2014) claim there is a relationship between climate scepticism, the environment and masculinities and how it is intertwined with a declining masculinity of industrial modernity. This work is supported by significant development in methodologies for studying men through the field of critical studies of masculinities, that has brought feminist epistemological approaches to offer new nuances to the experiences and techniques of studying men in male spaces. Indeed, it was on reflection about the gender disparities of who was and who was not actively contributing to mixed-gender discussion,

in an earlier project ‘Protein Pressures’ (Hubbub, 2016), that made us curious about the potential of homosocial groups. Often, there was less contribution from men sitting around the table, or male household members were positioned within conversations as a barrier to change. Our starting place was a more-than-human participatory action research methodology we had developed previously (Roe and Buser, 2016) further developed within the Protein Pressures project (Hubbub, 2016). In this paper we discuss its further development, through specific attention to the complex relations between gender and ecology, and how that could be articulated through a creative participatory process to explain unequal responses to calls for behavioural change around protein consumption habits.

The literature review section covers three themes – ecofeminist, embodied methodology; creative participatory research; and gendering more-than-human food methodologies. The central part of the paper describes how the ‘becoming an ecological citizen’ methodology (Roe and Buser, 2016) became three workshops to take on the challenge of the intersection of ecology, gender and food protein systems in male food practices. The concluding discussion is framed around accessing subjugated knowledges and behaviour change and engagement.

Literature review

Ecofeminist, embodied methodology

Ecofeminism, which Bannerjee and Bell suggest has been given surprisingly little attention in environmental social sciences (Bannerjee and Bel, 2007: 4), strongly informed our gendered methodology. Methodologically it avoids repeating essentialist, constructivist gender stereotypes, by ‘creat[ing] analytical space for conceptualizing the diversity and particularity of experiences and perspectives as central to an understanding of power’ (Bannerjee and Bell, 2007: 13), and the interrelatedness of ways of thinking that supports patriarchy’s subjugation of women and the environment. Interpretation of the character of social and environmental interactions are conceived as dialogic, or mutually constituting, where ideas can interplay ‘across gender, class, race, and caste; that focus on women’s and men’s experiences equally’ (6). It is these qualities of research conversation we aspire to, to address constructed male and foodstuff hierarchies around protein eating practices. Relatedly, material feminism (Coole and Frost, 2010), closely informs our commitment to make foodstuffs central to our more-than-human participatory methodology. Bannerjee and Bell encourages us in how and why it is necessary to go beyond a discursive, evaluative and inherently representational dimension when approaching participants’ experience of gender, food and environmental caring.

Hearn (2013) writes, that there is ‘increasing awareness of the embodied nature of knowledge, in relation to researcher and researched. This is not to suggest determinism, less still biologism, but rather that knowledge, including that on men, is partly embodied’ (p.35). We would argue that the importance of factoring men’s embodiment into our knowledges of food and eating carries great implications for research outcomes. Equally, a more-than-human ontological approach works to embrace the excessive spilling over of any bordered sense of embodied self through the processes that the embodied eating

subject is caught up within. Thus, analytically we start with encountering in our fieldwork a male embodied eating subject who is materially and practically engaged through eating, digesting, absorption and excreting, in such a way that exceeds continually what one is. This framing addresses the gap that Van der Tuin and Dolphijn identify when arguing that ‘cultural theory in the postmodern era has been unable to fully account for the materiality of the human body, whereas it found itself surrounded by an excessive representation (thus objectification) of bodily matter in popular culture as well as cultural theory’ (van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010, 163).

Creative participatory research

Discussions about inequality in the research process have long been a subject for qualitative researchers, especially by those engaged in socially-engaged and participatory work. In the UK, a recent body of work seeks to address inequality through a participatory approach (Facer et al., 2016). Wakeford and Rodriguez (2018) have usefully mapped different participatory action research approaches, and positions, across various axes of agendas (from institutional to individuals) and knowledges (from expert to dialogic). In many of these, participants are viewed ‘as experts in their own lives’ ((Richardson, 2020) in Hall and Hiteva, 2020), an idea that is complicated in a ‘post-expert era’ (ibid, 62) in which populist politics play a strong role in the production and hierarchisation of knowledge and authority. An analysis of power relations between humans during research practices has been central, for instance in the development of feminist (Kindon et al., 2007), queer (Berlant, 2013) and decolonising approaches (Hall and Tandon, 2017; Smith 1999), especially when researching and engaging with marginalised, under-researched or under-represented communities. Freire’s work on critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000), bell hooks’ work on feminist and transformative pedagogy (Hooks, 1994, 2004), and participatory action research (Hall and Kidd, 1978; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Wakeford and Rodriguez, 2018) collectively supported us to develop a methodology where male research participants could be challenged to examine power structures and patterns of inequality associated with how they shape and are shaped by the agri-food system and various food cultures. We were committed to devising a research methodology where participants could not only be empowered to shape the direction of the research process, but also to for it become potentially transformative in terms of their personal understanding of where they sit across different axes of inequalities and hierarchies. In this way our approach belongs to scholarship like Midgeley (1994) that critiques the application of the scientific model of knowledge production within social research and instead forges a path for behaviour change that takes a socially-embedded, subjective, non-instrumentalised approach to behavioural science and interventions.

Within many participatory methodologies, creative methods have held an important role. For example Douglas’s (2018) work explores the value of participation in contemporary art, in relation to the alienating effects of capitalism and modernity. As we consider how hierarchies and inequalities can be addressed in the research process, it is perhaps particularly valuable to reflect on Douglas’s work that develops the idea of art as reciprocal creative labour (Kester 2011) where both the artist and the viewer/participant

are involved in an artwork's collaborative production. Whilst being mindful of [Bishop \(2012\)](#) and [Matarasso's \(2019\)](#) concerns that art is being potentially instrumentalised within social research methodology, and aesthetic value overlooked, nevertheless there are hybridised forms of artistic practice that enable meaningful shifts in research practice. [Jones' \(2012\)](#) work on 'performative social science', is particularly valued here as a route for connecting communities with researchers via the use of creative methods, that displaces a so-called 'audience' to be participators. Such an approach, Jones argues, challenges the binary between research and (re)presentation, and this seems pertinent to our considerations of how collaborative artistic production within the research process can undo hierarchical power relations between researcher and researched. Here it is the creative act of preparing and cooking food that is the creative aesthetic interest.

Gendering performative more-than-human food methodologies

What Jones calls 'performative social science' can be framed as research with a methodological interest in the 'what happens when..' in research contexts where studying events/practices/habits in process. [Roe and Greenhough \(2014\)](#) call this 'experimental partnering' - to understand 'habits as conditioned by (human) social and cultural relations, [to] focus instead on how habitual practices (whether those of scientific research or cattle herding) are formed with a background animated by the material and sensory (as well as cognitive) capacities of human bodies and the liveliness, affordances and recalcitrance of nonhuman agency' (54). But this participatory approach can be advanced by unsettling hierarchies between the researcher and researched, the audience and participators, the human and the nonhuman, as well as other socially and culturally embedded positionalities that can be distributed across axes of inequality and hierarchy. What this can lead to is the creation of purposeful events in the methodology that change the ontological and epistemological context to generate different ways of exploring and getting to know what is shaping what takes place. [Vannini \(2015\)](#) advocates for non-representational ethnographic studies that transcend the limits of representation, through more performative methods, breaking rules to think, feel and write differently, cultivating heterogeneity. This approach is akin to many developments within the field of more-than-human methodologies documented by [Dowling et al. \(2017\)](#). They describe the harnessing of a range of conventional qualitative techniques, but where 'sensitive and nuanced analysis' is employed to tell the story of the nonhuman interactions with humans, and also the development of innovative methodological approaches for engaging in 'new, interesting and novel ways with more-than-humans, to find ways to decentre human control of research processes and embracing the messy-ness of entangled worlds' (ibid: 3). 'What happens when' we prepare, cook and eat food is one sub-field that has expanded its understanding through performative, more-than-human social science methodologies.

The social science study of food, in particular food consumption practices including the preparation, cooking and eating of food ([Colebrooke and Miele 2017](#); [Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999 \[2014\]](#); [Mol, 2021](#); [Roe, 2006](#)) have used performance methodologies to study how the materialities of foodstuff afford different human performances around food preparation, cooking, eating and tasting. We value the work of [Probyn \(2000\)](#), [Longhurst](#)

et al. (2009), and specifically, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008) who suggest that ‘examining the visceral experience of food has the potential to inform geography about more general (non-food) ways in which internal bodily processes affect the formation of political subjectivities’ (462). More recent studies have approached this through participatory arts in food research (Flint et al., 2016; Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017); research participants have been invited to engage in how changes to the food system might take place and asked them to reflect on that process – here, techniques such as group mind maps, visual methods, collaborative learning have all featured in a way to complement mixed-method academic research. There is less scholarship on how the more-than-human geographies of foodstuffs themselves generate hierarchies and the methodologically value of destabilising them, within a research process.

Whilst it is recognized that if we are to reduce meat consumption habits and respond to the evidence that livestock production is a major contributor to climate change, we need to deepen understanding of the societal and cultural challenges of making this shift (Godfray, 2018). ‘[I]ndividual actions are influenced by societal norms and the structure of the food system within which individuals are embedded’ (ibid 2018:6). There are few examples of projects which challenge societal and cultural gendered norms as knowledge-hierarchies, to address the climate crisis around food transformation. For example studies of vegetarianism in the past have often treated them as an ethical curiosity in a world dominated by meat-eating cultures: how did they develop a disgust for meat? (Hamilton, 2006a) and how does being vegetarian map onto a broader ethical position about violence, death and the animal (Hamilton, 2006b)? In the contemporary moment, there is critical urgency for research to interrogate pathways to reducing meat consumption (De Bakker and Dagevos 2012; Hartmann and Siegrist, 2017; Schösler et al., 2012) that is sensitive to how protein foodstuffs themselves are relationally hierarchized and materially express inequalities variously across different individuals.

We contribute here by exploring and explaining how we approached methodological challenges around ecology and food that is especially sensitive to intra-masculine research spaces, where only men are being studied within a focused group of shared interests. But we acknowledge and are sensitive in this methodology of the need within intra-masculine research spaces, to address different masculine positionalities within the research process – researcher and researched, and between research participants. We intend to contribute to critical studies of men and masculinity (CSMM) and methodologies (Pini and Pease, 2013) and how they might be developed to understand and to transform behaviours related to food protein consumption practices. Marginalised masculine identities are under-represented and under-researched in food consumption studies. Through participation in active domestic food practices – the preparing and cooking of food together – the boundaries of gendered work and leisure become blurred (following Szabo, 2013). Our material and participatory ways of working are also working to bring forth what Ungerson describes as caring *for* (‘the practical tasks of care’) what they eat, as a route to caring *about* (‘the affective relations of care’) (Ungerson, 2006: 277) the relational and ecological connections of foodstuffs. Adams suggests that ‘Many of the arguments that separate caring into deserving/undeserving or now/later or first those like us/then those unlike us, constitutes a politics of the dismissive’. (Adams, 2014: 16).

Working with food through a gendered lens, and drawing from an ecofeminist ethics of care, we were faced with exploring and cultivating ecological relations as a way of ‘overcoming the politics of the dismissive’ (Ibid: 16).

How can creative participatory more-than-human food research address hierarchies experienced around food, ecology and gender? How, as researchers, do we situate ourselves and co-produce research within the intersecting inequalities and heterogeneous expertise that we study, acknowledging our research expertise and our research institution agency?

Assembling and devising participatory workshops

Our starting place was a more-than-human participatory action research methodology we had developed (Roe and Buser, 2016) and applied in the Protein Pressures project (Hubbub, 2016). We have named it ‘becoming an ecological citizen’, it is a process-based methodological intervention directed to the ‘embodied, more-than-human who is learning to care, to be affected through intra-actions, in diverse forms with humans and non-humans’ (Roe and Buser, 2016: 8). It affords connections between human and non-human agents through embodied engagements rather than purely intellectual ones by (i) facilitating sensory experiences with materialities from, or related to, objects of interest; and (ii) creating a space where people can *perform*, or relate differently to, the object of interest. The boxes 1, 2 and 3 below outline the key conceptual and physical components of the methodology (further information available on the Man Food website).

Box 1. What are the conceptual components of the ‘becoming an ecological citizen’ methodology?

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Practices rather than identities – focus is on what we *do* over what we *are*.

Performances – the facilitated space is one in which all participants (researchers, respondents and facilitators) can explore ways of *becoming different* in relation to a subject (e.g. as ethical agents in the production of food rather than as consumers, or as co-habitants with bathroom bacterial communities rather than warring enemies).

Positionalities – the roles of participants (researchers, respondents and facilitators) are unstable, dialogic and can undermine the social hierarchies within which they operate.

Materialities – matter and our sensory experience of it is key to engaging with a subject in different ways.

Entanglements – we try to cultivate an ecological (rather than anthropocentric, human-focussed, hierarchical) awareness of the entanglements of human and nonhuman lives.

Juxtapositions – the presence of different elements, materials and knowledges enable a participant to assemble their own understanding of a subject (rather than receiving a singular ‘message’).

Box 2: What are the physical components of the ‘becoming an ecological citizen’ methodology?

What are the physical components of the ‘becoming an ecological citizen’ methodology?

Space – the scale is domestic, and activities usually set up around a kitchen-size table, with 6–10 chairs. Initial ambiguity about the nature of what is happening is to be expected – confusion can become intrigue.

Creative materials – these should be relevant to the activity and subject (e.g. cooking ingredients and utensils, paper table cloth to write on).

Researchers as facilitators – they are friendly, informal, open to listening to and learning from participants. Their demeanour is non-didactic.

Knowledge exchange – while researchers have some expertise, there is an attempt to present it as personal experience rather than as privileged information or truth. It’s offered with a similar value to expertise or knowledge presented by participants, for example a researcher knows about food from studying it but a participant knows about it from daily food practices, and both are valid. This can be difficult, but that is ok.

Convivial conversation – open dialogue is key to the methodology, so conversations might tack between ‘the topic’, personal anecdotes, tangents, irrelevancies, etc. Every conversation will be different and be shaped by all of those involved.

Opportunities to record – paper tablecloths are provided for both researchers and participants to take notes, mind map thoughts or conversation, or to write things they may not have the chance to say aloud. (Auto)ethnographic notes and photography might be written up afterwards. Conversation might be recorded and transcribed.

Box 3: How do we know if a session worked?

How do we know if a session worked?

Did all participants (researchers, respondents and facilitators) come to think about the subject in a different way to which they thought about it at the beginning?

Were things created?

Was there conviviality and a sense of entanglement (between participants, nonhuman worlds, etc.)?

Does it feel like there are elements that participants will remember?

The project team were one female academic cultural geographer and one male artist-academic geographer (the authors of this paper); two Co-Is from a food aid charity and a

city farm that were Community Partners on the project, involved in its co-design and delivery; a community researcher from the city farm; three project artists-in-residence (two choreographers and a sound artist); a total of 24 men as participants. Bridges (2013) identifies potential challenges being a masculine researcher researching men when discussing navigating a least masculine role. Across the pair of researchers there was sufficient flexibility to use their positionalities in various ways to juxtapose different knowledges and experiences where relevant. At the core of the project were a series of cooking, eating and talking workshops with groups of men at city farms and community centres, where we explored issues around food and environmental caring through a series of creative activities and semi-structured group discussions. The three artists attended some of these workshops and produced an audio walk ‘All the men we saw today’ ((Young et al., 2017), <https://soundcloud.com/jamie-mccarthy-1/and-all-the-men-we-saw-today-complete-audio-walk?in=jamie-mccarthy-1/sets/and-all-the-men-we-saw-today-a>) which we will not be discussing here. In this section we specifically discuss how the methodology was adapted to be sensitive to the complex relations between masculinities and ecology, and how that could be confronted through the participatory and creative process to explain unequal responses to calls for behavioural change around protein consumption habits.

Following Steier, Brown and Mesquita da Silva (Steier et al., 2015) we worked with practices and values of action research expressed in the structure of a World Café format. ‘Foregrounding participation encourages a focus on the communication process as we build a collaborative learning agenda with our co-researchers’ (p.1). The World Café is ‘a simple yet powerful conversational process that helps groups of all sizes to engage in constructive dialogue, to build personal relationships, and to foster collaborative learning’ (Tan and Brown, 2005).

The workshops were held at two city farms and a community centre and were facilitated by members of the research team (primarily the academic researchers, along with the community researcher and artists-in-residence), supported by a professional cook who guided participants in preparing food and/or cooking food which was served up and eaten together. In this way all participants got involved in aspects of food preparation, cooking and eating together. Workshop sessions lasted around 2 hours each. During the workshops, participants mostly sat around a large table covered in paper tablecloths, on which they were invited to write (also see Steier et al., 2015).

We drew on action research studies like Nilson et al. (2015) in devising cooking and eating together activities as practical-engagement is known to support ‘facilitating lifestyle change, enabled engagements, encourages community ownership and influences community action’ (p.1). Creating a food event is supported by Lupton (1994) and her work on recognising the symbolic and social nature of food events that can create memories and meanings around food, and to place the handling of food stuffs as central and not disconnected from research conversation on food proteins. We found making available a diverse range of food proteins did important work in destabilising social and cultural hierarchies attached to different foodstuffs, that were articulated through preparing, cooking and eating them, and underlined our commitment to a more-than-human ontology and epistemological framework. Participants were invited to creatively employ

foodstuffs whether through topping a pizza, through to acts of cooking, whilst talking about the different ecological lives of animals, fish, insects and plants, as well as the agency of meats, pulses, fish and tofu and novel foodstuffs like quorn in how they were received and/or rejected as food, by different eaters, and on what grounds.

Research participants were given an opportunity to perform critical conversations around food in such a way that ecological power relations and gendered identity practices became reflexive and potentially transformative. (Parasecoli, 2005), following Judith Butler's work on gender performativity, suggests that 'male subjects cannot perform activities related to the preparation of food without affecting their masculine traits and the inscription of these in a cultural order that is deeply gendered'. (28) Moreover, and echoing Butler (1990, 1993), he argues that these activities, 'highly regulated and ritualized, are likely to be incorporated in the very body of the individual' (28). With this at the centre of our methodological concerns, our aim in the workshops was to create a space in which men could *perform* different masculine inscriptions on food, in a homosocial environment. This was outside of the bantered space of the pub, the rugby team or the BBQ, and of what (Gorman-Murray, 2008) calls 'hetero-masculine domesticities' of familial relationships – relationships that were mourned by many of the men in receipt of food aid.

We were sensitive to potentially different hierarchies and inequalities between normative male statuses as we curated the groups. Each group came as strangers, for those attending all three sessions they developed a rapport and connection with each other as they shared their experiences. The first group self-identified as 'green men' ($n = 9$, of which 8 remained as a core group), whose shared and overlapping practices included vegetarianism, organic growing and Green Party membership – at a city farm in central Bristol. These men were all white European and ranged in age from 20s to 60s. The second community self-identified as 'exercise men'; this was smaller ($n = 4$, all of whom remained for the course of workshops) and ranged in age from mid 20s to early 50s. Three were white British and one was British Somali. One of these men was vegan and a personal trainer, the other three lived active lives but were keen to improve their fitness and nutrition, often through cycling. Whilst there was some similarity with a minority of the 'green men', in other ways this group were quite different in their orientation and familiarity with vegetarianism or reasoning for veganism orientating around bodily fitness. Participants in the 'green men' (GM) and 'exercise men' (EM) groups were recruited from leaflets distributed in city farms and community centres as well as through advertising on social media. Participants in the third group were recruited with the help of the food aid charity (a partner on the project), via leaflets at its weekly food distribution sessions. This final community ($n = 11$, of which 9 remained as a core group) was made up of clients of a food aid charity. They ranged in age from mid 20s to early 60s, the majority were white British plus two were black African. The food-aid men (FAM) were invited to participate because previous research (Roe and Buser, 2016) found that of those in receipt of emergency food aid, a quarter of 63 respondents to a questionnaire survey expressed an interest in learning how to shop for food that was better for the environment. This encouraged the research team to not presume that challenges around accessing food meant they could not engage ethically in food practices. The research went through institutional



Figure 1. Food scaled as more or less manly. In the foreground pork pies, baked beans and in the background, lettuce and soya milk.

ethical review, participants signed consent forms and the FAM were given a £10 shopping voucher for each workshop attended (total=2). The GM and EM were given a £20 shopping voucher at the end (total 3, each).

Three workshops: What is protein? Body stories and My Food Life

Workshop 1, created a creative, playful and reflective conversation space around the idea of ‘*What is protein?*’. This addressed both plant and animal-based protein and how we make raw materials into edible protein. Participants made pizza dough and personally topped their own pizza and then ate together. Conversation was initiated by drawing a long line with the numbers 1 through to 10 evenly spaced along it on the paper tablecloth. Then participants were invited to position food stuffs that were randomly scattered on the central table, along this 1 to 10 scale in terms of ‘manliness’ (1 being not very manly, 10 being very manly). Participants not only placed the physical objects (e.g. steak, chocolate, salad, potatoes, instant noodles, a pie, a tin of baked beans, a fresh chilli) along the scale, but marked their positions by drawing on the paper table cloth, and added notes and questions (Figure 1). This technique develops on from food perceptions and requests for free-listing food items (Libertino et al., 2012) towards the scaling of foodstuffs (Fox et al., 2021) yet adding a gendered angle. As a creative conversational activity, it sparked critical and reflective discussions about food and gender.

To illustrate these four conversation extracts are from workshop one at the food aid centre:

FoodAidMen1: Because obviously most men, well [pies]- a quick snack for us, isn't it? So the easiest- the quicker option is easier and easier.

FoodAidMen2: Pies. They've got to be fairly high up on the list.

FoodAidMen3: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

FoodAidMen4: Yes.

Researcher2: So that's number 10.

FoodAidMen5: Salad and chocolate are quite low down for, like, more feminine.

FoodAidMen6: Noodles. Noodles is a man thing, isn't it?

FoodAidMen7: Definitely the burgers. Pork pies, I eat. Looking at the pork pies I can-

FoodAidMen8: (Laughter)

Researcher1: Ah. Ah.

FoodAidMen7: But I've got to have English mustard with those.

FoodAidMen8: Yes, definitely.

FoodAidMen9: Yes. You've got to have that mustard.

FoodAidMen8: Or pickle. Pickle is good.

Researcher1: Bit of Branston pickle.

FoodAidMen10: – all of this stuff is just ingredients. It's not like you'd just go, oh, yes, I'm going to have four burgers cooked for my dinner or a tin of pilchards; you've got to put them together to, like, make a meal—wouldn't you?— [...] So it depends how you use it and what else it's going with. I mean, salad, if you had it with a steak, you know, is that less manly? It depends what you have it with, really.

The following conversation begins to unpack some of the complexity and contradiction of different knowledges, and we can see how the scaling approach enabled them to critique different discourses around sustainable diets and food systems:

GreenMen1: I'm not so sure about the food miles, I mean going back to what we said [...]

GreenMen2: I think that's, to my mind that's what I'm thinking when I'm always thinking about, um, environmentally food, what is my food eating?



Figure 2. Illustration of a Body map in progress.

GreenMen1: okay, mm-hmm

GreenMen2: and so, I mean, we're going from kind of water and sunlight and fertiliser to another animal

GreenMen3: I agree

GreenMen2: another food source

GreenMen1: I would even put it, I would put definitely all the meat further down then, from then up the food chain, the food chain thing, lower down the food chain.

Workshop 2 was called '*Body Stories*' and focused on participants reflecting on how different proteins felt in the body, firstly in terms of texture and taste, then mastication and swallowing, then the feelings and sensations of digestion, and finally imaginations about where different foodstuffs ended up in their body – bigger/stronger arm or leg muscles, a bigger tummy etc. A large body was drawn and this drawing became a map on which we documented conversations locating experiences of protein in different parts of the body (Figure 2). This technique is known as 'body-mapping' (Bruckner, 2018; Gastaldo et al., 2012, 2018). Body mapping is 'the process of creating body-maps using drawing, painting or other art-base techniques to visually represent aspects of people's lives, their bodies and the world they live in' (Gastaldo et al., 2012: 5). In this session a mixture of animal and plant-based proteins were prepared and cooked drawing on south-east Asian culinary culture.

The body stories touched on sensitive topics, especially within the food aid group.

FoodAidMen1: Well, I know I'm not eating properly because I feel like just walking up the road is an effort. Do you know what I mean? I feel really drained.

Researcher2: Yes.

FoodAidMen1: I haven't got energy. And as for not eating properly—you know what I mean?—not eating right, not eating, like, breakfast, like, in the morning. Because like I say, when you're a single man, you don't look after yourself like you should do. Not all men but I don't. (Laughter)

Not eating breakfast was characterised as normal behaviour for a single man. This 'not looking after yourself' was articulated through describing body experiences of what it felt if one did not eat sufficiently, contrasting to other stories of intentional eating to sculpt their body in some way. The absence of the voice of a mother, daughter or sister's voice chiding was noticeable in the research space. It was conveyed as an acceptable masculine behaviour to not be pre-occupied by caring for the self. The homosociality of the groups afforded different conversations around care, and to openly speak of not caring for the self because of absent familial or life-partner relations. What are the implications for environmentally caring practices? This leads us to the third workshop.

Session 3 '*My Food Life*' enabled participants to map along a time-line their food practices in the past, present and the future changes they could envisage (Figure 3). This time-line was more like a life-line from birth to old age, and invited participants to plot life-events when their food practices had changed (e.g. when they moved to a different country or a partner experienced health issues, the start or end of a relationship, or leaving home) or how they might change in future (e.g. when the production of proteins available changes, or changes to their life-situation). This technique draws on the value and benefits of 'life story' research (Harrison, 2009) and specifically in relation to people's food and eating practices (Wills, 2012) working with it in the context of food life stories to support the process of sense-making within a narrative method that can challenge the formal atmosphere of interviews (Keats, 2009). We were sensitive to how this session was a more challenging topic to discuss for those participants in receipt of emergency food aid, and thus were careful to be attentive to how different participants were, or were not, engaging. In this session a vegan chilli was prepared, cooked and eaten by those attending.

Paper tablecloths became a visual documentation of each of the participatory workshops, supplemented also with ethnographic notes, photography and audio recordings. Additionally, some 'green men' and 'exercise men' shared photo food diaries and recipes between sessions via a WhatsApp group, but most of the engagement was undertaken face-to-face. After the project ended, eight participants (plus two of their friends) from across the groups and three staff from project partners attended a follow-up group meal at a vegan Caribbean restaurant, and a further eight attended a group cooking session set up independently of the project. This ongoing engagement demonstrates the rapport and sense of shared interests established in the intra-masculine workshops. Men can often feel in competition with each other according to Bridges (2013), the research space was

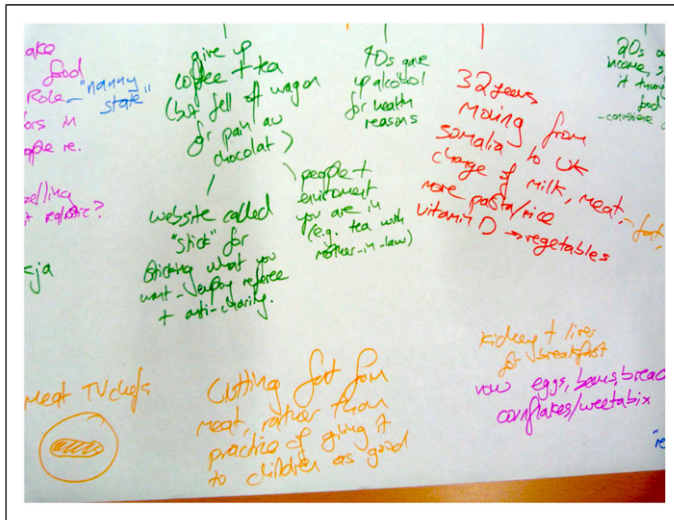


Figure 3. Paper Tablecloths documenting My Food Life conversation.

designed so men should not feel as though they had to prove anything either to the researchers or to each other, but this did not mean avoiding challenging each other's views. For example these men discuss the implicitly male 'hunter gatherer' behaviour and the foods hunted or gathered as more 'natural' than food that is the output of agriculture.

ExerciseMen1: I think the diets that we have today it's pretty unnatural compared to what we actually evolved for, you know just like we evolved over millions of years and I mean the agricultural revolution was only 10,000 years ago, prior to that we just hunter gatherers weren't we.

ExerciseMen2: More gatherers than hunters, I think. It was quite rare that people actually ate a large amount of meat.

ExerciseMen1: Really? But if you went back a longer period of time wouldn't man go out you know hunt and kill animals and bring them back.

ExerciseMen2: Yes, just not hugely regularly.

ExerciseMen1: Right, I suppose it's quite a lot of work isn't it.

ExerciseMen2: There's a bit danger obviously as well in terms of what you're hunting.

This narrative speaks to imaginaries of a better masculine age when food and food-provisioning behaviours were more in tune with male bodily needs, with the counterpoint

that there is an underlying sentiment that the contemporary food system is not sympathetic to ‘naturally-evolved’ bodily masculinities.

Together, across these workshops we reflected on the social construction of gender as associated to types of protein and responses to environmental caring, produced and critiqued knowledges that presented a disconnect with the embodied experience of food. This took place not just in discursive terms (as it might in ethical consumption discourses of ‘better’, premium, food), but *live* as participants are chopping, stirring, tasting foodstuffs and trying to connect them to the realities of global food production and environmental crisis. As such, the equitable space of the dinner table (where we break bread with *companions*) became a more equitable space for research and engagement. It facilitated opportunities for less-hierarchical performances than those produced through traditional scientific models of research or of clichéd male spaces, alongside acknowledging the complex and entangled power relations in which we exist, with other humans and nonhumans; essentialist representation of a masculinity (and humanity) were challenged. A range of different masculinities come to the fore, as the opposition between masculine and feminine was not the default point of polarising. Above we heard about male relations to other humans as a differentiating factor (e.g. single men) and also how the relations between foodstuffs forms part of how and when food items can be deemed manly (e.g. steak and salad). In an age of environmental crises, engaging with and undertaking such becoming through performance seems crucial for us as researchers and as ecological citizens.

Concluding discussion

Accessing subjugated knowledges

As a participatory research project, Man Food challenged us (the researchers) to facilitate a wider *us* (all of the humans in the project) considering the possibility of becoming an *ecological us* (agents connected to a much bigger system of nonhuman beings and affects). In Beacham’s words, “‘being-in-common’ within the world in this way is therefore as much a “praxis” as it is a call for inventive and generative organisation’ (Beacham, 2018:544). Following this emphasis on praxis, the agency of knowledges and practices of everyone was as important as the development of research findings and engagement activities around food systems, practices and ecology. It therefore mattered how researchers or participants felt empowered to speak up about their experiences or what they felt they knew or knew how to do or not do. Multiple knowledges exist as ‘subjugated knowledges [...] naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity’ (Foucault and Ewald, 2003: 7) – facilitating in a way that supported these kinds of knowledges to enter discussion was a central intention. Through this we aimed to unsettle the assumed prevalence of academic expertise. In practice, the workshops brought challenges in meeting our intention of a non-hierarchical participatory methodology that always valued subjugated knowledges.

Firstly, as researchers, we felt the pedagogic impulse of university public engagement and the political aim of affecting behaviour change. Therefore, we found ourselves at

times in a default position of *telling*, such as defining the objectives of the project and of explaining its frame, at the same time as trying to position ourselves as equals to the participants. Secondly, at other times, as researchers we responded to queries about how the agri-food system operated -perhaps describing aspects of the meat supply chain, or the practices that supported higher animal welfare and organic food labelling on a product. These insertions of academic knowledge were carefully considered in terms of the tone and length to which these insights were delivered. Roe, who had widely researched these topics, was happy to address questions when asked or raised but did not want to take up too much space in the conversation, or to suggest this was the most valued knowledge at the table. Yet equally, thirdly, at other times it was easier to respond as equals to the participants, sharing experiences and attempting to offer it with the same value that the men offered bits of theirs'. Some of this would be things that we had read, but it could also be anecdotes about our home lives, things we had picked up in the media, etc., as illustrated

Researcher1: I mean, I'm a vegetarian, my partner has, he will eat mostly vegetarian, but he wants to eat meat.

GreenMen1: I'd much rather get my meat, we do get meat from a supermarket sometimes, from the butcher's up there.

Researcher1: So we have a three and a half year old and a nine, ten month old, and he just goes on about how he loves meat, despite the fact that I'm sure that, at nursery, he only has vegetarian diets. He's only having vegetarian stuff at nursery. I've insisted that with both of my sons. He's just got this thing about meat. And they obviously give him some

GreenMen1: It's like a microcosm of the, of the pressure isn't it

Researcher1: Yeah, and he obviously likes the taste of it all.

The participatory approach within the workshops had varied results across workshop participants. We did notice differences. The 'green men' –mostly educated, liberal and cosmopolitan – their knowledges were often not subjugated. They were erudite, informed and most of these men spoke from a position where they claimed agency over, and through, their food practices. A Green Men participant brought in knowledge from mainstream media, that informed the direction of the conversation (and bridged consumer knowledge with that of a participant who worked as a fish monger):

GreenMen1: You know, you were talking about salmon farming earlier, and now I can't remember my facts but there was some reportage in the media recently about plastics you know, in the oceans

GreenMen2: yeah, plastic, plastics, plastics and PCBs

GreenMen1: and plastics are in our fish now, and we're eating plastic? That's pretty, that's pretty bloody horrendous

Researcher1: Mm, it is

GreenMen1: I can buy twenty, thirty, 9 out of 10 ocean birds will have plastic inside them. So fish, fish is a gone, is a done deal. Um, you find, um, microplastics and, they found microplastics in fish in the Arctic Circle

GreenMen2: so you know, putting that another way we're eating our own garbage aren't we so?

Other men looked to TV chefs as informative influences connecting food practices with environmental caring:

FoodAidMen1: I like River Cottage.

FoodAidMen2: Yes.

Researcher1: Oh right. River Cottage.

FoodAidMen1: I like his ethos. You know? Kind of sustainable. Sustainable living.

What the Food Aid men did not tend to do, was ask we researchers for information, therefore most of our interaction with them was in the third form described above. Whereas the presentation of some academic knowledge was sought out by the other groups, the food aid men did not ever ask for additional knowledge or information about the agri-food system. We researchers were curious about how their personal situation might help explain this pattern, and what this meant across the complex worlds of formal and informal education, instructing behaviour and affecting behaviour, misinformation/disinformation and its relation to contemporary politics. We wondered whether their experience of formal education affected this, as we learnt through discussion of the diversity of life experiences they held. Or perhaps an internal dynamic amongst the group shaped the content of the conversation? What was apparent in this group was that despite presumptions that 'ethical consumerism' would be unobtainable for this group, conversation did explore how their existing practices (such as thriftiness and low meat diets) which would be applauded in the context of discourses around sustainable eating and were valuable experiences when managing a need to change one's food behaviour, which therefore legitimised their 'subjugated knowledges'.

The interplay of subjugated knowledges led us to reflect on questions of populism, and on the reality of the sense (as articulated by Michael Gove in 2016, the year preceding the project) that 'this country has had enough of experts' (Mance, 2016). Our role as 'experts', was under question. There is a paradox in our applying our academic expertise to elicit the expertise of other participants' knowledges, but it is a paradox that does not undermine our project. During the period that the project took place (Feb 2017–April 2018), the UK saw a rise of both left- and right-wing populism, and it is arguable that this was played out

not just through mainstream politics, but in the ways in which individuals came to know, do and feel about things like food, gender and environmental caring (Hultmann and Pulé, 2018), whether through climate change denial discourse or documentary films like *Cowspiracy* (Andersen and Kuhn, 2014).

Engagement and Behaviour change

Our interaction with these men was brief, perhaps too brief to have measurable impact on many of them. Our objectives followed what Facer et al. call a ‘remaking identities’ model of inter-personal relationship that ‘explicitly sets out to build the capacity of project participants to not only understand but to take on each others’ knowledge and expertise’ (68). We approached this to destabilise pre-existing hierarchies of knowledge and expertise and to unsettle the notion of fixed identities, in working with *becoming* (Guattari, 2005) rather than *being* an ecological citizen. A participant from a workshop reflected on the workshop process itself, and on how his practices have been informed by the workshops:

ExerciseMen1: I think that tonight’s event has been really good in the sense I’ve enjoyed it and I’ve had a good chat and also seen how to make pizza, and I think I’ll probably have a go at that now. You know maybe that’s where the future lies in terms of trying to get, trying to incentivise people to organise events like this so that people can [get] first-hand experience of how you can have tasty food that’s good for you and all that sort of stuff, and you know be very community orientated as well. I think the government wants communities to develop and be more connected.”

Another exchange from the same workshop shows group reflection on the process of participating in the workshops and recognising the value of practical group discussions about food as a catalyst for increased understanding and in developing agency for behaviour change.

ExerciseMen1: Yes. We were talking about this before you arrived, actually. About, you know, you go online and you can find any article to support any point of view whatsoever and you’re never really quite sure what to believe. And I think the important thing is to change people’s behaviours, you’ve either got to change- you know, they’ve got to be with people who call that change behaviour. So, you know, surround- if you want to turn a person vegetarian, surround them with vegetarians. You know? Because they’ll succumb, won’t they?

A similar topic of conversation within the food aid men group, on processes of public engagement and behaviour change, presented a more disenchanted tone about environmental care and meddling with figures to present results wanted.

FoodAidMen4: but I think I understand half of what you're saying, but I think that most people don't actually really care about the environment until it impacts on what their actions and their daily lives are.

FoodAidMen5: No, I agree with that

FoodAidMen4: so we can talk about a lot, and we can rejig the figures until you achieve the result you want

While for the Green Men the remaking of identities was perhaps a subtle shift, or indeed a reinforcement of already 'good' ethical ecological citizen behaviour, for the food aid men the change was more of a challenge. Logistics of the workshops meant that this was the only series that did not begin with a walk around a city farm, meaning that the nonhumans (food animals) with whom we wanted to connect with were absent. This methodological omission meant that scrutiny of inequalities of agency was focussed on the humans involved, rather than on the interspecies hierarchies that we had hoped to explore.

However, conversations among the food aid men did unpack some of the materiality of food items, as a way into connecting participants' experience of eating food to broader issues around food systems and inequalities of access and nutrition to different types of food:

Researcher1: Like, if you're going to eat your chicken breasts.

FoodAidMen2: Oh I eat chicken, proper whole chicken breasts, no problem.

Researcher1: Yes. But there's a whole chicken there, isn't there? Where are all the other bits going to go? That's the question.

Researcher2: Yes, yes, yes.

FoodAidMen3: That's the key. When it says it's a chicken burger it doesn't necessarily mean it's the chicken breast burger.

Researcher2: No.

FoodAidMen3: It could be-

Researcher1: It could mean everything – yes.

FoodAidMen3: It could be the eyeballs and the earlobes and I don't know.

FoodAidMen2: Offal. (Laughter)

To conclude, the transcripts evidence that we did foster a space where men could acknowledge shared interests or experiences and they valued sharing their thoughts and feelings about what they cooked and ate, and asking questions if they so wished. The workshops created at the best of times a space of ‘horizontal homosociality’ (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014), assemblages of non-hierarchical being-together in which men could perform different relational masculinities through food, which could incorporate activities of caring *for*, *about* and *with* the environment, however at times, not surprisingly, this faltered at various points in the workshop, but was never lost entirely. We have made steps towards arguing for the value of creating methodological, more-than-human participatory spaces to support more equitable research that studies masculinities in relation to food and ecological practices. However, the request to care differently, to care anew about each other as we are connected through community and ecologies that bind us through food practices, faces barriers that we here have linked to wider global social problems of dismissive politics about the plight of those less powerful found and articulated through the heterogeneity of masculinities.

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