

Man Food: Exploring Men's Opportunities for 'Becoming an Ecological Citizen' through Protein-related Food Practices.

Project Summary:

Modern food production has a big impact on the environment – including greenhouse gas emissions, water usage, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the development of antimicrobial resistance (superbugs). Livestock farming is resource intensive, the world population is rising, and so is animal-based protein consumption. Responding to this situation, Man Food was created in Bristol between 2017 and 2018, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities Programme. The project was led by researchers Dr Emma Roe and Dr Paul Hurley at the University of Southampton, in collaboration with community partners Windmill Hill City Farm and The Matthew Tree Project, and with project artists-in-residence Joanna Young, Kip Johnson and Jamie McCarthy.

Methodology

Man Food came out of a series of related research projects, exploring food security from different perspectives. Specifically, it built on research from *Protein Pressures* (2016) which explored motivations for meat consumption and reduction, through a methodology we call 'becoming an ecological citizen'. This methodology involved participatory methods that emphasised materiality and different active relations with foodstuffs. The aim was to develop "**the becoming of the ecological citizen through the embodied, more-than-human learning to care, to be affected through intra-actions, in diverse forms with humans and non-humans.**" (Roe & Buser 2016: 8)

Central to the methodology was **embodied, material experience** (doing things with our hands) and **discursive practices** around food (hearing everybody's experiences, not just the researchers' "expertise"). The research fostered what Hammarén and Johannson have called horizontal homosociality (2014) and an ecological connection to the nonhuman world. We recruited volunteer participants (n. 25) to three self-selecting groups: 'Green Men', 'Exercise Men', and men who were clients of an emergency food aid charity. Each group (n. 4-10 men) met three times, in workshops themed as follows:

- 1) '**What is Protein?**' (e.g. as an animal, a plant, a food ingredient, a cooked meal);
- 2) '**How do different proteins feel in your body?**' (e.g. chewy, tasty, strong, full, flatulent, etc.);
- 3) '**My food life**' (e.g. personal food life-journeys, past and future, changes, obstacles)

Participants and researchers cooked meals containing plant- and animal-based protein together, and recorded conversations using audio as well as through drawings and notes on paper tablecloths.

Key Findings

- Eating animals has been a key feature of the history of human civilisation. It is a demonstration of the categorical distinction between Society and Nature (plants and animals) because we can eat them. The relationship between non-human nature and humans has never solely been about mastering and possessing it, but also eating it. Derrida (1991) points to how 'Carnivorous virility' has been constitutive of human civilization to date; within high income countries the daily consumption of meat has become the norm, and in low and middle income countries it is a consumption pattern that many individuals aspire to.
- There are specific cultural issues around gendered food practices and environmental caring, and there is a need to explore more-than-human worlds of masculinity. We worked with food through this gendered lens, and drew from an ecofeminist ethics of care. Creative (cooking as well as artistic), material and participatory ways of working brought forth what Ungerson describes as caring for ("the practical tasks of care") and caring about ("the affective relations of care") (2006, 277). Activating domestic food practices – blurring the boundaries of gendered work and leisure – via practical tasks of caring for (other men), could lead to ways of caring about (non-human worlds).
- We found that vegetarian and flexitarian men at various times experienced a sense of embarrassment, shame or conflict-avoidance in relation to their choice to not eat meat. This occurred in homosocial situations, as well as with family members. Participants expressed hope for a future where being male and not eating meat could be more accepted, even by those for whom having contact with actual vegetarians was new and who initially expressed negative opinions about vegetarians.

Project Outputs:

- 'And All the Men We Saw Today' audio walk created by project artists-in-residence Joanna Young, Kip Johnson and Jamie McCarthy and presented at Healthy City Week, Bristol Food Connections and Bristol Walking Festival.
- A 50-minute film and the audio walk of 'And All the Men We Saw Today', by project artists <https://vimeo.com/243631216/fd0b9a572f>
- The Man Food workshop Toolbox - available to download at www.man-food.org
- Conference/workshops presentations and forthcoming publications including 'Why are some men ashamed to say they are vegetarian?'

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