|  |
| --- |
| **Community, culture and meat consumption: an ethnographic exploration of routes to sustainable diets through reduced meat consumption** |
| **Background/Objectives**Increasing meat consumption threatens both vulnerable global ecosystems and human health. Increasing demand for meat has seen exponential growth of animal agriculture, responsible for 14.5% of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Normalisation of meat-rich diets has resulted in increased prevalence of pertinent public health concerns, such as cardiovascular disease, atherosclerosis and antibiotic resistance. An understanding of the cultural role of meat would be central to identifying routes to sustainable diets.**Methods**An exploratory study of the cultural meanings of meat was undertaken in the form of a traditional ethnography. The researcher spent a year doing volunteer work with a network of food activists in Birmingham, UK, undertaking food-related activities such as cooking for community cafes and supporting urban farming. This overt participant observation saw the collection of a large diverse data set, consisting of audio recordings, photographs, artefacts and field notes taken in-situ.**Results**A post-qualitative analytical process was developed influenced by New Materialist social enquiry (Fox and Alldred, 2015), seeking meaning from ethnographic data via the deprivileging of human agency in thematic analysis. Codes were developed into broad exploratory themes that detail the cultural meanings of meat consumption to this diverse urban special-interest community of food activists. The analysis suggested complex social functions of meat beyond satiety and taste, describing the role of meat as a commodity of culture and an artefact of tradition in a multicultural nation. The nature of meat as a resource of both abundance and scarcity was related to socioeconomic influences, health literacy and environmental concern.**Discussion**In addition to developing insight into the complexities of meat consumption as an issue of planetary health, original methodological contributions came from the development of a unique analytical process informed by an emerging theoretical paradigm. The highly immersive nature of the ethnography lent to participant-led research design and an inversion of common researcher-participant relationships. This paper explores the thematic outcomes with a critical lens to determine what they might mean for policy, research and community development, in the pursuit of climate change mitigation and health promotion.**Keywords**Diet, Anthropocene, meat, materialism, ethnography,  |