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# Gender and slaughter in popular gastronomy

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## Abstract

Animal slaughter has lately become increasingly visible in popular food media. This article examines the gendered assumptions and assertions underpinning the killing of animals in popular gastronomy. In television cooking shows such as *The F Word* (2005–present), *Kiwi Kitchen* (2007–8) and *Jamie’s Great Italian Escape* (2005), both emotional concern for farmed animals and farmed animals themselves are feminized and denigrated, whilst slaughter and meat-eating are masculinized and celebrated. Conversely, in the recent cookbook-cum-memoir by Julie Powell, *Cleaving: A Story of Meat, Marriage and Obsession*, butchery and meat-eating are depicted as pathways to, and displays of, female empowerment. Both groups of gastronomy texts hold the domination of animals, demonstrated through the slaughter, butchery and consumption of non-human bodies, to be an integral component in the performance of gender.

## Keywords

feminism, gastronomy, gender, masculinity, meat, non-human animals, slaughter

In the first decade of the new millennium, animal slaughter no longer seems a taboo topic for meat-eating urbanites; indeed, in contemporary food media, killing animals is positively *en vogue*. Celebrity chefs slit chickens’ throats in front of live studio audiences (*Jamie’s Fowl Dinners*, 2008), journalists pen eloquent treatises on how to embrace slaughter as a loving and respectful act (Pollan, 2006), and gastronomes wax lyrical about the superior flavour of meat with a backstory (Bourette, 2008). Dubbed the ‘New Carnivore’ movement by media commentators (Hanes, 2008; Soller, 2009), these loosely connected gastronomic texts strive to present animals’ becoming meat as a humane, benevolent and wholly ‘natural’ process (Parry, forthcoming). In doing so, they soothe the anxiety that came to characterize the discourse surrounding meat production in the 1980s and 1990s, as spiralling food scares, well-publicized health risks, and increasing popular

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awareness of the environmental and ethical problems associated with industrial animal agriculture all combined to undermine the traditional prestige of animal flesh in western societies (Fiddes, 1991). They also counter the popular criticism that urban meat-eaters are fundamentally disconnected from the realities of meat production, wilfully ignorant as to the death and violence that made possible the meat on their plates.

There is more than a grain of truth to this assertion: throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, readily recognizable animal body parts in butchers' shops have morphed into anonymous plastic-wrapped bundles on supermarket shelves (Fiddes, 1991: 95; see also Adams, 1990; Cronon, 1991: 256; Vialles, 1994), rendering the living animal a wilfully forgotten 'absent referent' to the act of meat-eating (Adams, 1990: 40–42). The recent spate of slaughter on popular television cooking shows – so graphic that the term 'gastro-snuff' seems the most accurate description – consciously engages with this idea of the 'absent referent'. These programmes seek to reintegrate the animal into the discourse surrounding meat, not as a deterrent to flesh consumption, but as an incentive. Related publications in the print media similarly function as 'gastro-philosophical treatises' (Bourette, 2008: 36), supporting, substantiating and refining the ideologies championed by these onscreen narratives of slaughter.

This article analyses the gendered aspects of this new visibility of slaughter in popular gastronomy, examining how ideas of femininity and masculinity are played out in two distinct yet interrelated groups of New Carnivore texts. First, I will examine how gender is negotiated and performed (see Butler, 1999 [1990]) in contemporary cooking shows that prominently feature animal slaughter. Examples are drawn from several episodes of the British cooking/reality show *The F Word* (2005–), in which celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay purchases, raises and finally helps to slaughter seven turkeys and two pigs he has spent the previous run of the season caring for in his backyard.<sup>1</sup> I will also examine an episode from the fourth season of the programme, in which Ramsay has passed on the duty of animal killing to a secondary presenter on the show, 'food correspondent' Janet Street-Porter.<sup>2</sup> Part of an episode in the miniseries *Jamie's Great Escape* (2005), in which Jamie Oliver participates in a wild boar hunt and slaughters a lamb before preparing meals with the remains, will also be analysed.<sup>3</sup> Examples are also drawn from several episodes of *Kiwi Kitchen* (2007, 2008), including one in which chef Richard Till visits a New Zealand farm to discuss the slaughter of a sheep for the preparation of a meal of roast mutton,<sup>4</sup> and several others wherein Till 'celebrates' different meat products and cooking processes.<sup>5</sup> Considered as a group, these cooking programmes disparage farmed animals and emotional concern for farmed animals by belittling them as feminine; simultaneously, slaughter and meat-eating are presented as inherently masculine, and celebrated as such.

However, the New Carnivore ideology does not appeal solely to men. In the second part of this article, I analyse one prominent example of a woman-authored New Carnivore text: Julie Powell's gastro-memoir *Cleaving: A Story of Meat, Marriage and Obsession* (2009), a book that thoroughly blurs the boundaries

between cookbook, confessional and travelogue. In *Cleaving*, like the cooking shows outlined above, notions of normative gender are negotiated with reference to the slaughter and dismemberment of non-human animals. Rather than equating meat-eating and butchery with masculinity, however, *Cleaving* presents the performance of (certain forms of socially acceptable) violence towards animal bodies as a bold revision of traditional feminine gender norms, as well as performance of female empowerment.

### **The feminization of farmed animals in cooking shows**

According to sociologist Adrian Franklin (1999: 41), 'livestock' tend to exist in a somewhat liminal space: neither beloved companions (like pets) or respected strangers (like wild animals), farmed animals are instead conceptualized as stupid, slow-moving beasts that have, through the long process of domestication, been all but created solely for the purpose of serving human appetites. As feminist theorist Karen Davis (1995) points out, certain hierarchical assumptions about gender characteristics permeate these sorts of discourses denigrating farmed animals:

Animals summoning forth images of things that are 'natural, wild, and free' accord with the 'masculine' spirit of adventure and conquest idolized by our culture. Animals summoning forth images of things that are unnatural, tame, and confined represent a way of life that Western culture looks down upon . . . Not only men but women and animal protectionists exhibit a culturally conditioned indifference toward, and prejudice against, creatures whose lives appear too slavishly, too boringly, too stupidly female, too 'cowlike'. (Davis, 1995: 196)

Davis argues that farmed animals are commonly thought to exhibit a cluster of traits that patriarchal society has filed under 'feminine', and that the 'stupidly female' nature of these traits is a key factor in the degraded moral status of these animals.<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, the 'stupidly female' ways in which workers within the slaughter industry perceive farmed animals come to the fore most prominently when these animals fail to conform to the notion of feminine passivity. In her on-site interviews with British meat industry workers, sociologist Erika Cudworth found that animals who were not docile or easily manageable were frequently labeled 'cunts' or 'bitches', and observed that animals of either sex tend to be feminized metaphorically at the slaughterhouse by these sorts of insults (Cudworth, 2008; see also Lovenheim, 2002: 170). Bulls, too, can be the target of sexualized verbal abuse if they are perceived to commit gender transgressions. In the popular New Carnivore book *Portrait of a Burger as a Young Calf*, writer Peter Lovenheim observes workers vitriolically abusing 'mounts' (bulls who are 'mounted' sexually by other bulls for the purpose of sperm collection): 'Come on, you fucking cocksucker!', one man shouts as he kicks a 'mount' in the stomach (2002: 38). Lovenheim's own response to these 'mounts' toes the line between sympathetic concern and outright homophobia: reflecting that these animals have 'the lowest job in the world',

Lovenheim (2002: 38) derisively calls the 'mounts' 'prison bitches'. Here, even male animals who behave (or are forced to behave) in ways that transgress hegemonic, heterocentric gender norms of masculine aggression and virility are discursively feminized as 'bitches', and derogated accordingly.

Farmed animals are also feminized in the language used to describe their physical appearance. On *Kiwi Kitchen*, for example, Till marvels at the feminine contour of a deer's leg before butchering, roasting and consuming it: 'a very slender, delicate little leg they have too, if you look here, a lot of women would be very happy to have a leg like that'.<sup>7</sup> On *The F Word*, a pig breeder informs Ramsay that in selecting piglets to raise for meat, careful appraisal of their physical appearance is paramount: 'You don't want them too fat, but you want nice rounded bottoms'.<sup>8</sup> Chosen for their rounded buttocks, Ramsay names these 'girls' after female celebrities based on his own appraisal of their physical similarities: piglets Trinny and Susannah, named after popular style gurus Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, gain their monikers 'because one's got a fat arse and one's got small nipples'.<sup>9</sup> The pair are even entered into an agricultural show, where they are judged by 'criteria such as shape, mobility and teat alignment'<sup>10</sup>— a porcine beauty pageant where being a winner is no guarantee of survival. (Indeed, some 'best of breed' contests culminate in the slaughter of the finalists so that the interior physiology of the winning contestant may be judged as well (Cudworth, 2008: 39)).

## Womanish pity, childish sentiment

Just as livestock are held in contempt partly because of the gendered discourses surrounding their behaviour and physical traits, the derogative connotations of 'sentimentality' are similarly linked to the concept's feminization. In his 17th century philosophical treatise *Ethics*, for example, Spinoza dismissed opposition to animal slaughter as based upon 'superstition and womanish pity' (cited in Midgley, 1983: 10). Three and a half centuries later, the charge of 'sentimentality' continues to be highly feminized (Donovan, 1990: 350–2; Luke, 2007: 210–13). As philosopher Brian Luke (2007) argues:

A central Western patriarchal ideology is the elevation of the 'rational/cultural' male over the 'emotional/biological' female. Women's rage (labelled 'sentiment,' 'hysteria,' etc.) is thus divested of political significance by interpreting any female reaction against the established order not as a moral challenge to that order, but as a biosexual phenomenon to be ignored or subdued. (Luke, 2007: 211)

Emotional concern for animals thus becomes labelled as mere 'womanish sentiment', an irrational and inconsequential foible of the fairer sex. In his analysis of 'sentimentality' in modern literature, literary critic Philip Armstrong (2008: 165) makes a similar point, arguing that 'sentimental' narratives have tended to be 'associated with the least authoritative expressions of cultural life: femininity rather than masculinity, childishness rather than maturity, fancy and whimsy

rather than rationality or reason'. 'Sentimentality', then, tends to be constructed in western discourses as a naive, emotionally manipulative, feminine counterpoint to masculine instrumentalist rationality. The cooking shows examined in this article continue in this tradition, trivializing emotional concern for animals as both feminine and infantile, and sharply contrasting such 'sentimentalism' with the masculine, mature, 'realistic' attitude of instrumentalism espoused by the chefs and cuisine 'experts'.

An episode of the television cooking show miniseries *Jamie's Great Escape* (2005) provides a good example.<sup>11</sup> During the episode, Oliver visits a rural Italian family, sampling the local cuisine and lifestyle by hunting a pig and slaughtering a lamb. Gazing reflectively at the stripped carcass of his latest kill, Oliver justifies the animal's death partly by recourse to the inherently feminine and infantile nature of any objections to such killing: 'Not all things in life are pretty, are they? It's not all about teletubbies, is it?', he states. Here, compassion for animals is derided as both a feminine foible (like a stereotypically feminine affinity for 'pretty' things) and a childish indulgence (like watching a television show aimed at toddlers). Oliver himself, as the eponymous protagonist of the reality show-cum-cooking programme, is presented as having a mature and realistic attitude about the business of killing: he is able to look the messy and painful act of slaughter square in the face, thus distancing himself from the childish or womanish idea that animals should not be made to suffer for human gastronomic pleasure.

Gordon Ramsay adopts a similar attitude towards animal killing in *The F Word*, worrying that the relationship developing between his children and the pigs he is raising for slaughter is becoming inappropriately 'sentimental' and taking appropriate actions to ensure that 'they remember the reason that they're here is for food'.<sup>12</sup> Ramsay explains that his reason for raising animals for meat at his family home is that he doesn't want his children to grow up into 'softies':<sup>13</sup> by indoctrinating his children to renounce 'sentimental' emotional attachments to animals and become complicit in their slaughter, he is in effect purging them of their infantile and hyper-feminine 'softness', and teaching them to relate to animals in a more 'rational', economically motivated, and purportedly masculine manner.

## The machismo of slaughter

As many theorists have noted, animal killing is an act that retains a certain machismo in western societies (Adams, 1990; Fiddes, 1991; Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). The overwhelming majority of recreational hunters are male (Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007), and the writings of many hunting advocates are suffused with (hetero-)sexualized overtones (see Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). Upon attending a hunter safety training course, for example, ecofeminist theorist Marti Kheel was struck by use of highly sexualized language:

Bullets were called 'balls', firing was called 'discharge', and when a bullet hit an animal it was called 'penetration'. The power of the gun was referred to as 'penetration

power'. If a bullet was accidentally fired before the intended moment, it was labeled a 'premature discharge'... whoever first 'penetrates' an animal and draws the 'first blood' has the 'privilege' of 'finishing the animal off', and claiming the body of the animal as his own. (Kheel, 1995: 91–2)

Here, as elsewhere (see Luke, 2007: 83–92), hunting advocates discursively liken the 'possession' of animal bodies through penetrating them with bullets to the 'possession' of women (particularly virgin women from whom the man draws 'first blood') through penetrative heterosex.

The slaughter of domesticated animals, like the killing of their wild brethren, likewise retains a certain macho mystique. Although it is of course not unheard of for women to work on the kill floor, slaughter remains a largely male-dominated industry, exhibiting, according to Cudworth's (2008: 40) research, 'patriarchal closure in terms of both the gender segregation of employment and the masculinization of its work culture'. According to an interviewee in the study, 'people get into [the slaughter industry] cause it's macho like. It appeals to young men cause of the macho-thing. It's a really manly job' (2008: 41). Cudworth herself observes that the men she interviewed working on the kill floor seem 'something of a caricature of masculinity', muscular and bare-chested with large 'boning knives' hanging from their belts (boning being a slang term for heterosex) (2008: 41). The interviews suggest that for many slaughterhouse workers, 'despite the low status of butchering and slaughtering, killing and fragmenting animals may be a means of enhancing machismo' (Cudworth, 2008: 41). These sentiments are echoed in the words of Janet Street-Porter, a 'food correspondent' on *The F Word* who expresses reluctance to witness the slaughter of the two calves she has helped to raise. 'You know, I don't have to prove I'm macho, I'm *not* as macho as Gordon', she exclaims with exasperation.<sup>14</sup>

Street-Porter's comments reflect an acute awareness of Ramsay's carefully constructed macho persona (see Hollows, 2003: 230), and illustrate how a very specific notion of masculinity as violent, primal and brutal can become implicated in the slaughter of animals. Of course, 'masculinity' is a concept neither monolithic nor timeless; rather, it is historically and culturally variable, with many alternative understandings available to address the question of what, precisely, it means to 'be a man' (Kimmel, 1997: 224). However, social authority or power is rarely distributed evenly across this varied array of masculinities, and the term 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995) thus becomes useful as a flexible concept denoting the generally accepted 'norm' of masculinity endorsed, reinforced and replicated by those in a position of cultural authority. Hegemonic masculinity in western culture tends to be defined by what it is not, constructed in opposition to a range of 'others', both human (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997; Plummer, 2005) and, a growing body of literature suggests, non-human (Adams, 1990; Cudworth, 2008; Fiddes, 1991; Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). *The F Word* seems particularly preoccupied with defining masculinity in relation to both (human) female and animal 'others'. Perhaps in an effort to distance himself from the conventionally feminized



activity of food preparation, Ramsay's persona and mannerisms emphasize his aggressive, domineering personality, repudiating the stain of kitchen-bound domestic femininity by becoming a swaggering caricature of hegemonic hetero-masculinity. Ramsay thus can be seen to exemplify the assertion of gender theorist David Plummer (2005: 229) that, as part of a strategy to eschew any association with the anti-masculine 'other' he terms the 'hegemonemesis', men can be pressured 'to publicly embrace hegemonic masculinity and sometimes to pursue extreme and fundamentalist masculinities'.

However, the construction of masculinity in Ramsay's *The F Word* and in Jamie Oliver's various programmes is not as simple as just forcibly rejecting 'feminine' softness or concern for animals and swaggering around gripping a blood-splattered boning knife. Admittedly, in the first season of *The F Word*, Ramsay does retain his macho, aggressive persona during the build up to the act of slaughter, asking sarcastically as he carries a struggling turkey to the kill shed, 'Do I feel any remorse, do I feel slightly guilty? Do I *fuck!*'<sup>15</sup> In later seasons, however, he becomes more emotional about the ordeal, admitting to feeling 'guilty' about the upcoming slaughter of pigs Trinny and Susannah<sup>16</sup> and even choking back tears at their death.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Oliver freely admits to feeling 'horrible' about slaughtering chickens (*Jamie's Fowl Dinners*, 2008) – still, both chefs' masculine credentials appear to remain intact. This ambiguity reflects how simultaneously fluid and rigid concepts of masculinity can be. Several theorists have noted the tension displayed in Oliver's persona between competing models of 'caring', 'rough' or 'cheeky' masculinity (de Solier, 2005; Hollows, 2003; Moseley, 2001), and Ramsay's television persona likewise oscillates between staunchly disregarding 'sentimentality' and openly grieving at the death of a beloved animal. Emotional outbursts, concern for others, and a certain degree of 'softness' are perfectly permissible to the model of masculinity espoused by these celebrity gastronomes. Ramsay and Oliver's masculine credentials come not from their wholesale denial of these qualities, but from acknowledging and overcoming them, thus not allowing 'concern' to hypertrophy into 'sentimentality'. Emotion only becomes 'sentimental' or 'womanish', it seems, if it interferes with the slaughter of the animals in question. Killing is presented as a deeply emotional and cathartic experience, during which it is perfectly acceptable for even the most macho of men to feel guilty or even cry – just as long as he goes ahead with the slaughter anyway. In addition to reintegrating the animal 'absent referent' into the act of meat-eating, the theatre of slaughter presented in these programmes demonstrates how tensions between conflicting ideals of modern masculinity are explored and partially reconciled in popular media, negotiated in direct relation to both human and non-human 'others'.

## Meat and masculinities

The preoccupation with performing hegemonic masculinity through violence towards animals extends through to the dismemberment of the corpse.



According to *Kiwi Kitchen's* Richard Till, for instance, 'one of the joys of buying meat from the butcher [is] you get, sort of, the handyman experience of sawing through the bone';<sup>18</sup> in this paradigm, dismemberment becomes equated to the conventionally masculine skill of carpentry. In certain circumstances, even the cooking of the meat is a men-only domain: a wealth of literature exists to support the idea that cooking meat outdoors is one of the few forays men have made into the mundane, feminized realm of day-to-day food preparation (Neuhaus, 1999: 541; Sobal, 2005: 138; Villamayor et al., 1999), and *Kiwi Kitchen's* Richard Till himself recalls that, whilst growing up, the only time he ever saw men cooking was at a barbecue.<sup>19</sup> Till labels the barbecue 'the cornerstone of guy cooking', describing it as 'the simple, brutal application of heat to meat'.<sup>20</sup> This statement echoes Levi-Strauss's (1970) classic structuralist analysis of cooking methods: roasted meat remains close to a state of rawness, highlighting the connection between animal slaughter and meat consumption, and rendering more 'natural' the bond between meat-eating and masculine domination over nature (see also Fiddes, 1991). The 'brutality' of the barbecue is not simply a feature of men's cooking style; according to Till, it is indicative of 'a brutal simplicity that men bring to everything they do'.<sup>21</sup> It comes as no surprise that women are excluded from this realm: Till goes on to imagine 'the lady struggling with the lighter trying to have a barbecue but never really quite pulling it off because there's no guys around to take care of it for her'.<sup>22</sup> Whether intended partly in jest or not, the gender roles and stereotypes expressed in this celebration of flesh, dismemberment and masculinity are remarkably conservative and derogatory. Echoing Luke's (2007) analysis of hegemonic masculinity's 'brutal' relationship to non-humans almost word for word, Till's statements highlight how hegemonic masculinity is indeed defined in relation to 'others': both to human 'others' whose gender excludes them from representation in this celebration of macho barbecue culture, and to the animal 'other' whose dismembered body is roasting on the grill.

As Till's passion for barbecuing animal flesh demonstrates, the connection between meat and hegemonic masculinity in western culture is deep-rooted and pervasive (Adams, 1990; Armstrong and Potts, 2004; Fiddes, 1991; Sobal, 2005). Although farmed animals themselves are discursively feminized, once these animals are rendered into meat they cease to be a passive, subordinate creature and instead become a symbol of the dominance that has been asserted over them (Fiddes, 1991): thus, meat is seen as 'men's food' and contrasted with plant foods, historically seen as feminine and passive (Adams, 1990: 36–7). Animal flesh is associated with power, virility and strength (Twigg, 1983), meat is widely considered essential for the sustenance of healthy male bodies and meat-eating is intimately linked to the performance of normative masculinity (Potts and Parry, 2010).<sup>23</sup> In *Kiwi Kitchen*, for example, a special kind of 'meat hunger,' inherent to men, is emphasized almost to the point of caricature.<sup>24</sup> Till stresses his conformity to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity by indulging in aggressive fantasies centred around meat consumption: he announces that 'if there was one muttonbird left on a buffet table, it would be dangerous to get between me and it',<sup>25</sup> and boasts that he is 'prepared

to fight for the mince pies'.<sup>26</sup> Till's remarks, and those of Ramsay and Oliver on their respective television shows, clearly demonstrate how intimately the performance of gender is linked to meat consumption, and to attitudes to animals in a wider sense.

## Dominance and empowerment

Just as the cooking shows analysed above negotiate the tensions between conflicting models of masculinity partially by recourse to the animal 'other,' women-authored texts such as Julie Powell's *Cleaving: A Story of Meat, Marriage and Obsession* (2009) negotiate recent debates in feminist theory and praxis through the slaughter and fragmentation of non-humans. In the autobiographical *Cleaving*, writer Julie Powell tames her unruly predilection for rough extra-marital sex and salvages her sense of self-worth by learning how to butcher animals. Butchery is explicitly linked to female empowerment; as the back cover blurb promises: 'In this riveting memoir of love, marriage and meat, a voyage into the world of butchery becomes a metaphor for learning to stand on one's own two feet.'

In presenting women's participation in the slaughter, dismemberment and consumption of animal 'others' as a way to assert female power, *Cleaving* actively engages in feminist debates over the appropriate relationship between women and animals. The animal is a particularly contentious figure for many feminists: in trying to connect feminist politics to animal issues, feminists run the risk of reinforcing the damning historical positioning of women as 'closer' to animals and nature, thus providing ammunition for patriarchal oppression. 'Animals and nature', anthropologist Barabra Noske (1989: 110) contends, 'have become a threat, having issued woman with qualities which men take advantage of in order to assert dominance over women.' Thus, the perceivedly 'polluting legacy' (Noske, 1989: 110) of woman-animal continuity is sometimes forcefully repudiated in feminist discourses.<sup>27</sup> Women are fully human beings, and to be human (so the argument goes) means to be pre-eminent over animals (Birke, 1995: 36). A woman's status as a rational, cultural and human being, fully the equal of any man, in this paradigm becomes something that can be performed by dominating animals. Animal advocate and attorney Maria Comninou (1995: 142) has noted this trend of 'successful women adopting the standards of men with a vengeance'. She points out that women's participation in practices such as sport hunting and animal experimentation seems to be increasing, and wonders: 'Will animal exploitation become the ultimate symbol of equality with the white male?' (Comninou, 1995: 142).

Professional expertise in exploiting animals certainly functions as a symbol of equality in *Cleaving*. Powell's 'voyage into the world of butchery' is in large part concerned with subverting traditional gender stereotypes of what constitutes appropriate employment for women. Nevertheless, it is not insignificant or coincidental that Powell chooses butchery as her path to self-empowerment, instead of pursuing a career in other male-dominated areas (civil engineering, say, or

competitive motor sports). Butchery's status as a male-dominated profession is only part of what endears it to Powell; it is because butchery is also an *animal-dominating* profession that Powell seems to find it so empowering. For example, having fashioned a turkey's body into a tidy, boneless 'roulade', Powell (2009: 128) declares: 'I'm not a sculptor who's found the face that was already there in the marble. I'm a trainer who's broken a wild stallion, neutered it [sic] and rendered it [sic] safe for children to ride in circles around a dusty ring in summer camp.' Powell's analogy illustrates the inherently dominating, violent and exploitative nature of the work she is undertaking, as she likens butchery to 'breaking', mutilating and demeaning a wild animal. Even the alternative pathways she imagines towards self-empowerment involve exerting dominance over animals: 'Maybe I'll change my mind tomorrow, decide I'm really into, I don't know, dog racing', she muses (2009: 21). In mastering the 'art' of dismembering non-humans, Powell wields supreme power over other animals; she is in a sense excising the lingering connotations of animality that still inform certain discourses on women, by repeatedly performing violence upon animal bodies.

Control is central to dominance, and likewise to Powell's experience of butchering animals. While she acknowledges the destructiveness inherent in butchery, it is through exerting total control over herself and over the body of the dead animal that she achieves her goal of serenity and empowerment. 'The joy I take is not – well, not *only* – in the power I now have to hack and cut and destroy', she writes. 'It's about something else, something calm and ordered... I spend my days now breaking down meat, with control, gentleness, serenity. I've craved certainty in these last troubled years, and here I get my fix' (Powell, 2009: 7). In her carefully controlled and targeted violence towards animal bodies, Powell performs her humanity by dominating the prone bodies of non-human others. By transforming a natural (former-)subject into a cultural artefact, she imposes order on the natural world, and all that world represents, including the elements of her own personality that tend to get filed under animal/nature/body. Powell's butchery forcibly imposes a rational, instrumentalist order upon the natural jumble of an animal's body, whilst simultaneously instilling in herself the self-discipline needed to impose order and reason upon the irrational, over-emotional jumble of her own bodily impulses. Throughout the book, Powell intersperses lurid details of her illicit and emotionally destructive affair with a man known only as 'D' with paragraphs describing her rendering animal bodies down into tenderloins and skirt steaks. The suggestion that a connection exists between the two activities is not subtle – Powell has made sense of her tangled emotional life, *Cleaving* tells us, by cutting, fragmenting, and ordering the tangled flesh of non-humans (Powell, 2009: 43–8).

Indeed, in many ways Powell's butchery project is about taking her mind off one set of out-of-control carnal desires by engaging in another carnal pursuit with steady-handed control and precision. The entanglement of sex, butchery and meat in the book is remarkably graphic. While making sausages, for example, Powell (2009: 61) laments: 'at this moment, I think I'll never be able to eat sausage again, however delicious, without feeling in some little part of me that

I'd rather be engaging one way or another with D's penis'. In another passage, as her husband eats one of the pork chops she has butchered and cooked for him, his remarks are loaded with sexual innuendo: "'Jesus Christ', he whispers. 'Isn't this the best thing in the fucking world?'" (Powell, 2009: 37). The sexual undertones are made explicit on the next page, as Powell fantasizes about her own body inspiring such rapturous ecstasy in men; she imagines herself with her secret lover, with whom she feels like she herself is '[s]omeone to whom you'd murmur, as you slid inside her, and felt that answering clench, "isn't this the best thing in the fucking world?'" (Powell, 2009: 38). Significantly, at this stage in Powell's 'butchery voyage', the focus remains on how the various men in her life experience the carnal delights she has to offer, as the pleasurable taste of meat is conflated with a man's pleasure in heterosexual intercourse.

As Powell begins to take more authoritative control over her emotionally destructive sexual life, she explores her own pleasurable reactions to (gastronomical) carnal gratification. Whilst eating pig's heart bonbons with a female friend, she asks the reader, 'Have you ever had a food-related orgasm? They're much like the traditional variety – uncontrollable, accompanied by unseemly moans, somewhat embarrassing to experience in public places' (2009: 90). Powell depicts her own 'food-related orgasm' as an act of female empowerment:

Upon letting the pig-heart bonbons melt on our tongues, Jessica and I achieve simultaneous ones. 'Holy Christ . . .' 'Oh my *fuck!*' Jessica throws her head back. I growl and beat my open palms on the table top. Our eyes meet and it's magic. (Powell, 2009: 90)

Powell and her female friend's liberating moment of shared ecstasy, achieved *sans* men via the consumption of a non-human animal's heart, demonstrates both woman's ability to transcend the messy emotional and sexual entanglements with the men in their lives. Not only is butchering and consuming non-humans empowering, *Cleaving* tells us, it is explosively pleasurable as well.

In addition to appropriately channelling the unruly desires of the female body by dismembering the bodies of non-humans, *Cleaving* presents butchery as a means of subverting and challenging traditional gender stereotypes of women as inherently delicate or prim. Powell emphatically distances herself from the charge of gore-induced, womanish hysteria. When a 'boring sticklike' woman, either 'vegetarian or merely squeamish', is 'forced by whatever circumstance' into the 'unapologetic temple of meat' that is Fleisher's butchery (2009: 7), Powell revels in the opportunity to display her transgressive, blood-spattered feralness:

I realize with a certain savage glee how I must look to her, bloody and wild-haired under my wide-rimmed leather hat . . . I hold my hands up to her, turning them back to front so she gets a good look at the brown gunk under my nails, the stains and unidentifiable bits of goo stuck to my skin, the bloodstained leather band around my wrist. 'I'm a little messy right now.' I grin toothily just to provoke a shudder, then turn on my heel. (Powell, 2009: 8)

The idea that women relishing red meat is somehow revolutionary or subversive also circulates in wider culinary and lifestyle discourses. An article in the *New York Times* entitled 'Be Yourselves, Girls, Order the Rib-eye' (Salkin, 2007) reports that red meat is becoming an increasingly popular food for women eating out, especially on first dates. Although the article applauds the trend's potential to subvert gendered stereotypes of finicky, salad-eating women, it ironically ends up supporting the extremely regressive cliché that a woman's behaviour is primarily motivated by her desire to snag a husband. Still, the article contends that red meat consumption is an empowering act for women, 'an effective statement of self-acceptance' and 'a declarative statement, something along the lines of "I am woman, hear me chew"' (Salkin, 2007: 1).

*Cleaving* presents women participating in the process of butchery and relishing the taste of red meat as a means of subverting retrogressive gender roles and achieving self-empowerment; in short, as 'the ultimate symbol of equality with the white male' (Comninou, 1995: 142). Powell affirms her own status as truly human by butchering animals, demonstrating her equal competence in a traditionally male-dominated profession and asserting her right to consume high-status food products traditionally associated with men. In doing so, Powell's paradigm of femininity internalizes the accusations of 'womanish pity' that have long plagued discussions on women and animals. Powell seeks to forcibly reject these accusations by proving herself capable of dismembering and consuming animals just as effectively and with just as much relish as any man. Although the focus is on femininity rather than masculinity, the domination of animals remains just as central to the performance of gender in *Cleaving* as it is in the other New Carnivore cooking shows examined above.

## Summary

The New Carnivore texts examined here reveal how thickly entangled the notion of gender is with the figure of the non-human 'other'. Functioning as 'primers not so much on how to cook, but on how to live' (Ashley et al., 2004: 184), the lifestyle/cooking shows *The F Word* (2005–), *Jamie's Great Escape* (2005) and *Kivi Kitchen* (2007, 2008) valorize a particular form of masculinity that associates true masculinity with (controlled) aggressiveness and (appropriately targeted) brutality towards non-human animals. Similarly, *Cleaving: A Story of Meat, Marriage and Obsession* presents butchery as a means of shucking the oppressive stereotypes of docile, sentimental women, constructing instead a reactionary brand of femininity that embraces targeted brutality towards animal bodies. In both cases, gender is something that is 'done' (Butler, 1999[1990]), at least in part, by dominating non-human 'others'.

However, a very palpable anxiety pervades these 'gastro-philosophical treatises' (Bourette, 2008: 36) on gender and carnivory. Ramsay's and Oliver's ever-so-careful negotiation of emotion and reason during the process of slaughter, Till's over-the-top display of meat-loving machismo, and Powell's almost combative assertion of her bloodstained feminine empowerment all come across as somewhat neurotic

in their insistence that gender is something that should be performed by dominating other animals. These texts strive to convince us that meat-eating and the domination of animals are essential components to the performance of either hegemonic masculinity or empowered femininity. What they instead end up highlighting is how contested and labile the dispositions that characterize contemporary gender and sexual politics now are, and how ideas about gender are frequently mobilized to legitimize violence towards non-human animals.

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### Notes

1. *The F Word* 1.7, aired 8 December 2005; 2.1, aired 21 June 2006.
2. *The F Word* 4.10, aired 15 July 2008.
3. *Jamie's Great Italian Escape*, 'Le Marche', aired 9 November 2005.
4. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007), episode 1.
5. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007), episodes 3, 5 and 7; *Kiwi Kitchen Series Two* (2008), episodes 3 and 7.
6. Indeed, women have been considered near to the animal state throughout much of western history. According to historian Keith Thomas (1984: 43), '[o]ver many centuries theologians had debated, half frivolously, half seriously, whether or not the female sex had souls, a discussion which closely paralleled the debate about animals and was sometimes echoed at a popular level'.
7. *Kiwi Kitchen Series Two* (2008), episode 7.
8. *The F Word* 2.1, aired 21 June 2006.
9. *The F Word* 2.1, aired 21 June 2006.
10. *The F Word* 2.5, aired 19 July 2006.
11. *Jamie's Great Escape*, 'Le Marche', aired 9 November 2005.
12. *The F Word* 2.3, aired 5 July 2006.
13. *The F Word* 3.2, aired 15 May 2007.
14. *The F Word* 4.10, aired 15 July 2008.
15. *The F Word* 1.8, aired 1 December 2005.
16. *The F Word* 2.7, aired 2 August 2006.
17. *The F Word* 2.8, aired 9 August 2006.
18. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007), episode 1.
19. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007) episode 5.
20. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007) episode 5.
21. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007) episode 5.
22. *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007) episode 5.
23. I do not mean to suggest that the relationship between meat-eating and hegemonic masculinity is as straightforward or reductive as the simple equation meat = masculine. For example, Merriman's research, published in this issue, suggests that patriarchal privilege can mean that men are more likely than women to be perceived as autonomous agents fully capable of controlling and managing their own bodies and appetites. Thus, men's vegetarianism can be accepted much more readily (by peers and family members)



than women's vegetarianism, which is more likely to be pathologized as a health risk or trivialized as merely a smokescreen for weight control. Gordon Ramsay's television programmes seem to support Merriman's findings. Although on *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* (2004–), the chef shows no qualms about ridiculing a vegetarian man and tricking him into consuming a meaty slice of pizza ('La Lanterna', aired 24 May 2005), it is only with a vegetarian woman that Ramsay apparently feels authoritative enough to openly attempt to reform her dietary deviance; the chef chides the woman for neglecting her health, before paternally prescribing a bloody steak to 'help Hannah back on the road to recovery' (*The F Word* 4.10, aired 15 July 2008).

- 24 For a discussion of the remarkably widespread cultural notion of 'meat hunger' (see Fiddes, 1991: 13–14).
- 25 *Kiwi Kitchen Series One* (2007), episode 7.
- 26 *Kiwi Kitchen Series Two* (2008), episode 3.
- 27 For a discussion of the repudiation of animality in feminist discourses (see Adams and Donovan, 1995: 1–8).

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